

10 August 2017

Conference Communiqué

Day one from EDS Conference *Tipping Points*

It was freshwater policies at 10 paces on the first day of the Environmental Defence Society's *Tipping Points* conference yesterday, with both National and Labour releasing their policies.

New Labour Party leader Jacinda Ardern kicked things off in the morning by announcing a Labour government would impose royalties on the commercial consumption of water, with the proceeds going back to the regions.

It would bring in tougher water quality standards, make sure breaches of water-right conditions are prosecuted, provide farmers with young people off the dole to help plant riparian strips and, within its first 100 days in office, hold a roundtable meeting in Parliament of stakeholders to thrash out issues like the rate the royalty would be set at.

In the afternoon it was Environment Minister Nick Smith's turn. He released the final version of the National Policy Statement on freshwater, which will be gazetted today. It includes tougher water quality standards than previously proposed and the inclusion of the macro-invertebrate index.

The day started with Auckland Council environment and community committee chair Penny describing some of the numerous tipping points New Zealand is at, including damaging climate change, declining water quality, threats to the Waitakere Ranges from kauri dieback, damage to the marine environment and rising homelessness.

Deputy Secretary for the Environment Penny Nelson said the government's Natural Resources Sector was looking at ways to factor issues like climate change into the government's long-term planning.

The Prime Minister's chief science adviser, Professor Sir Peter Gluckman, said in a pre-recorded address that there were many scientific developments under way that might prove to be game-changers, but that the real tipping point he saw was the changing public attitudes towards environmental issues like water.

Victoria University's Professor Jonathan Boston said that successive governments had failed to adequately tackle "slow-onset" issues like climate change, declining water quality and biodiversity loss, and called for measures including better warning systems, measurement and political accountability for them. Pricing environmental externalities – even modestly – would make a big difference, he said.

Vivid Economics engagement manager Alex Kazaglis, whose team wrote the recent report on how New Zealand could get to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions, said that globally, tackling agricultural emissions was one of the lowest-cost options for reducing greenhouse gases. He also warned that while New Zealand's high level of biological emissions from agriculture might make it a "special case", there were plenty of other countries with special cases that would be higher in the queue than this country.

A discussion on terrestrial habitat loss saw Landcare Research principal scientists Dr Roger Pech outline differences around the country to biodiversity issues. His colleague, Dr Susan Walker, said the nation's native birds had retreated from the "warm" forests in the east because that was where the rats were, and warned that the problem would get worse as the climate warmed. Environmental entrepreneur Devon McLean said that technological revolutions, like digital lures and artificial intelligence, and genetic developments will revolutionise pest control.

Strategic planner Dr Rosie Bosworth, of Rethink, said traditional New Zealand farmers were almost as threatened as Maui's dolphins. She painted a picture of a world in which beef could be grown in a lab in six weeks, and the cells from one cow could produce enough food to feed a small country for a year, for \$2 a kilogram, and warned the country had about five years before "this hits our shores".

Steve Carden might be chief executive of Landcorp, farming 900,000 animals, but that hasn't stopped him changing his own diet to eat more plants and less meat. He said he is doing the same on Landcorp's farms, and said the state-owned farming company has to grow more plants and fewer animals.

Fonterra's director of social responsibility, Carolyn Mortland said that what was needed was "dead certainty" about the science (including environmental limits for water quality, greenhouse gases and biodiversity), strong leadership from government, business and the community, and collaboration.

The day closed with a political debate, in which New Zealand First's Denis O'Rourke said his party was not opposed to the use of 1080 poison to control pests in the short-term, but wanted it phased out, and environment minister Nick Smith said he "almost took bullets" in defence of the use of 1080.

Environmental Defence Society chief executive Gary Taylor had already outlined a shopping list of policies he would like to see, including a review of the resource management system, a moratorium on high-country tenure review, a price on water use and the implementation of the Kermadecs ocean sanctuary.

Conference presentations will be available on the EDS website (www.eds.org.nz) from 16 August.

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