



PROACTIVE RELEASE COVERSHEET

Ministers	Hon Penny Simmonds Hon Tama Potaka	Portfolio	Environment Conservation
Name of package	Government Response to the Report of the Environment Committee on the Petition of Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society: Every Wetland Counts - Double the extent of our natural wetlands by 2050	Date to be published	02/12/2024

List of documents that have been proactively released

Date	Title	Author
17 October 2024	Cabinet paper: Government Response to the Report of the Environment Committee on the Petition of Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society: Every Wetland Counts - Double the extent of our natural wetlands by 2050	Ministry for the Environment & Department of Conservation
17 October 2024	LEG-24-MIN-0211 – Cabinet Legislation Committee Minute of Decision	Cabinet Office

Information redacted

NO

In-Confidence

Office of the Minister for the Environment

Office of the Minister of Conservation

LEG - Cabinet Legislation Committee

Government Response to the Report of the Environment Committee on the Petition of Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society: Every Wetland Counts - Double the extent of our natural wetlands by 2050

Proposal

- 1 This paper seeks Cabinet approval to table the Government's response to the Environment Committee's report on the petition of Royal Forest & Bird (Appendix 1) under Standing Order 256.

Relation to government priorities

- 2 This paper has relevance to coalition agreements to progress work to recognise carbon sequestration (including blue carbon)¹ and enable landowners to benefit from carbon-sequestration by wetlands on their property.²

Background

- 3 The Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society of New Zealand (Forest & Bird) presented their petition on 26 August 2022, in response to a perceived lack of legislative protection for wetlands (both inland and within the coastal marine area). The petitioner requested that the Government:
 - 1.1 double wetland extent by 2050,
 - 1.2 create a wetland protection & restoration plan,
 - 1.3 provide \$100m funding for wetland restoration,
 - 1.4 map coastal wetlands,
 - 1.5 include wetlands in the ETS, and
 - 1.6 stop the introduction of consenting paths for wetland destruction.
- 4 As the petition related to work overseen by both the Ministry for the Environment (the Ministry) and the Department of Conservation (DOC), the Committee invited both agencies to make a submission on the petition. Their joint submission was provided to the Committee on 30 September 2022. The Committee heard oral submissions from the petitioner, the Ministry, and DOC on 27 April 2023.

¹ The National & New Zealand First coalition agreement.

² The National & Act coalition agreement.

The Environment Committee findings

- 5 The Committee's final report (Appendix 2) was released on 1 September 2023, and had two recommendations to the Government:
 - 5.1 consider establishing a target for wetland restoration in Action Plans under Te Mana o Te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy and a future National Adaptation Plan, and
 - 5.2 prioritise work to enable carbon sequestration in wetlands to be appropriately recognised under the Emissions Trading Scheme with landholders receiving credits for this.
- 6 The Committee's report also summarises the submissions made by the petitioner and the agencies. We note that these submissions were based on information and legislation from 2022 or earlier.

Comment on the Environment Committee findings and recommendations

- 7 Overall, the Government response (Appendix 1) is brief, owing to the straightforward nature of the recommendations made. The response outlines the Government's reasons for accepting or rejecting each recommendation, thanks the Committee and petitioner, and acknowledges the importance of wetlands for biodiversity and climate change mitigation.

Recommendation 1 – consider establishing a target for wetland restoration (see para 5.1)

- 8 The Government response accepts the recommendation to consider establishing a target for wetland restoration under either the Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy (ANZBS, overseen by DOC) or a future National Adaptation Plan (NAP, overseen by the Ministry).
- 9 A restoration target could be within scope of any future review of the ANZBS and NAP, though Cabinet would determine the detail and scope of the review.
- 10 The ANZBS was released in 2020 and covers the 2020 to 2050 period, with no mandated timeframe for a review. Whether a wetland target should be established under the ANZBS would be considered as part of DOC's consultation and Cabinet processes.
- 11 The current (and first) NAP was released in 2022 and covers the 2022 to 2028 period. The Ministry is required to review the NAP following the next national climate change risk assessment, which is due by August 2026.
- 12 A recent report by the Climate Change Commission assessed progress on the implementation and effectiveness of the NAP. One of the challenges they identified was the need for integration of nature-based solutions, including wetlands. The Government's response to the Commission's report is due by February 2025 and could be an opportunity to examine the possible development of a target for wetland restoration under the NAP.

Recommendation 2 – include wetlands in the Emissions Trading Scheme (see para 5.2)

- 13 Though aspects of the second recommendation align with Government priorities, the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) is not necessarily the appropriate mechanism to

achieve these. One of the issues with including wetlands in the ETS is that they can be both a source and a sink of emissions. Wetlands can act as a source of carbon emissions when degraded (e.g. drained peatlands) but can be a net-sink if maintained or restored (e.g. re-wetted peatlands).

- 14 The draft Government response therefore proposes an alternative to the Committee's second recommendation, agreeing with the premise but stating:

14.1 We do not agree that work to recognise wetlands under the ETS should be prioritised. We note that the Government's ongoing work aligns with the premise of the Committee's recommendation but is not restricted to a single mechanism and tests a range of alternative options.

Timing of the government response

- 15 The Committee's report was received by the previous Government and the Government's response is now overdue. We propose to table a response in the House as soon as possible.

Financial Implications

- 16 There are no financial implications associated with this proposal.

Consultation

- 17 The Ministry for the Environment prepared this paper and the attached Government response in collaboration with the Department of Conservation.
- 18 The following agencies have been consulted on this paper: The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Ministry for Primary Industries, Te Arawhiti, and Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Communications and proactive release

- 19 The attached Government response will become publicly available following tabling in the House by 22 October 2024. We do not propose any additional communications.
- 20 We intend to proactively release this Cabinet paper within 30 working days of Cabinet making its decision.

Recommendations

The Minister for the Environment and the Minister of Conservation recommend that the Cabinet Legislation Committee:

- 1 **note** that on 1 September 2024 the Environment Committee presented its report to the House entitled “Petition of Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society: Every Wetland Counts: Double the extent of our natural wetlands by 2050”
- 2 **note** that the Environment Committee recommended that the Government:
 - 2.1 consider establishing a target for wetland restoration in Action Plans under the Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy Te Mana o Te Taiao and a future National Adaptation Plan, and
 - 2.2 prioritise work to enable carbon sequestration in wetlands to be appropriately recognised under the Emissions Trading Scheme with landholders receiving credits for this
- 3 **note** that the proposed Government response to the Committee’s report is attached at Appendix 1
- 4 **approve** the Government response
- 5 **invite** the Minister for the Environment and the Minister of Conservation to present the Government response to the House in accordance with Standing Order 252
- 6 **invite** the Minister for the Environment and the Minister of Conservation to write to the petitioner enclosing a copy of the Government response, after the response has been presented to the House.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Penny Simmonds

Minister for the Environment

Hon Tama Potaka

Minister of Conservation

**Appendix 1: Government response to Report of the Environment Committee on
Petition of Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society: Every Wetland Counts:
Double the extent of our natural wetlands by 2050**

Appendix 2: Report of the Environment Committee on the Petition of Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society



Cabinet Legislation Committee

Minute of Decision

This document contains information for the New Zealand Cabinet. It must be treated in confidence and handled in accordance with any security classification, or other endorsement. The information can only be released, including under the Official Information Act 1982, by persons with the appropriate authority.

Government Response to the Report of the Environment Committee on the Petition of Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society: Every Wetland Counts - Double the Extent of our Natural Wetlands by 2050

Portfolio **Conservation / Environment**

On 17 October 2024, the Cabinet Legislation Committee:

- 1 **noted** that on 1 September 2023 the Environment Committee presented its report to the House entitled “Petition of Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society: Every Wetland Counts: Double the extent of our natural wetlands by 2050;”
- 2 **noted** that the Environment Committee recommended that the Government:
 - 2.1 consider establishing a target for wetland restoration in Action Plans under the Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy Te Mana o Te Taiao and a future National Adaptation Plan,
 - 2.2 prioritise work to enable carbon sequestration in wetlands to be appropriately recognised under the Emissions Trading Scheme with landholders receiving credits for this;
- 3 **approved** the Government response, attached as Appendix 1 to the paper under LEG-24-SUB-0211;
- 4 **invited** the Minister for the Environment and the Minister of Conservation to present the Government response to the House in accordance with Standing Order 252;
- 5 **invited** the Minister for the Environment and the Minister of Conservation to write to the petitioner enclosing a copy of the Government response, after the response has been presented to the House.

Tom Kelly
Committee Secretary

Attendance: (See over)

Present:

Rt Hon Winston Peters
Hon Chris Bishop (Chair)
Hon Dr Shane Reti
Hon Simeon Brown
Hon Brooke van Velden
Hon Paul Goldsmith
Hon Mark Mitchell
Hon Tama Potaka
Hon Casey Costello
Hon Nicole McKee
Hon Penny Simmonds
Hon Andrew Bayly
Hon Scott Simpson, MP
Jamie Arbuckle, MP
Todd Stephenson, MP

Officials present from:

Officials Committee for LEG
Leader of the House's Office