

Forest & Bird backs PCE call for greater environmental scrutiny

Forest & Bird (BirdLife in New Zealand) are backing the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment's call for more robust and independent environmental reporting. Without more transparent reports, several native animals, fish and plants could become extinct in coming years, Forest & Bird Conservation Advocate Quentin Duthie says. "Dozens of our native birds, frogs, bats, freshwater fish and plants are critically threatened. If we don't improve our data on how these species are doing and the threats to them, we will find we're too late to be able to save them." Forest & Bird agrees with the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment (PCE) that New Zealand cannot continue to trade on being clean and green unless we adequately measure our environmental performance, then change our ways where they are damaging the environment. An example of the often poor environmental reporting was a major statistical error that Forest & Bird discovered in the 2009 Dairying and Clean Streams Accord report. Dairying was polluting more and breaking the law more than the statistics in this report showed. The PCE report notes that the OECD has called on New Zealand to require clear environmental reporting since 1981, yet little progress has been made. The report compares our once-a-decade State of the Environment report with other countries' much more robust and much more frequent reporting requirements. "New Zealand has been left behind, and we have to catch up fast," Mr Duthie says. Forest & Bird says we need at least a five-yearly summary report. "We also agree with the Commissioner that primary data should be publicly available online so we could spot bad trends between summary reports. "New Zealanders will welcome this report. The only people who have something to be afraid of are the industries who continue to pollute or abuse our environment," Mr Duthie says. "Environmental reporting will show that mining on our highest-value public conservation land, and increased pressure on our wild rivers for hydro dams and irrigation are making an already massive conservation challenge even worse. These Government policies must change. "The National Party campaigned on stronger and more independent environmental reporting, and we congratulate the Government for already having taken steps towards better environmental reporting. The PCE's report highlights the urgency and importance of taking the next step of passing a law to require independent and robust environmental reporting."