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Media release

Minister launches new EDS report calling for conservation reform

A new book examining the urgent need for reform of the conservation management system is now available online. *Conserving Nature: Conservation Reform Issues Paper* by Dr Deidre Koolen-Bourke and Raewyn Peart was launched at last week's EDS Conference by Conservation Minister Hon Kiritapu Allan.

"This publication examines problems with the present panoply of laws that govern our conservation management system in Aotearoa New Zealand," said EDS Policy Director Raewyn Peart.

"It demonstrates that much of that framework is out of date, largely unworkable and needing a fundamental rethink. Some of that legislation dates as far back as the 1930s and 1950s.

"These laws are products of another era. It predates the growth of our tourism sector, the global biodiversity and climate change crises, as well as modern Treaty settlement legislation," said Raewyn Peart.

"The Conservation Act was a crucial and important piece of legislation. It established a central coordinating agency to operate as a voice for conservation, a kaitiaki of our most precious areas and species, and caretaker of public lands and resources for future generations," said lead researcher Dr Deidre Koolen-Bourke.

"However, when it was enacted in 1987, the Conservation Act was intended to be a starting point. It was acknowledged that there was more work to be done and that the legislation did not resolve many of the deeper issues that existed. But progress stalled on key issues like determining the future of stewardship land.

"A generation later we have a management and planning system that is insufficiently agile to deal with the increasing pressures on the conservation estate that struggles to respond to new technologies and uses, like drones or e-bikes. Many planning documents are now decades out of date because the process for their review is lengthy and highly contested.

"We have a very strong Treaty section, but the legislation contains no mechanisms or processes to guide decision-making or enable Treaty principles to be implemented in practice. This roadblock is an ongoing source of conflict and stress within the system," said Dr Koolen-Bourke.

The EDS report is especially critical of the Wildlife Act, describing it as "out of step with a modern conservation approach." Unlike most countries in the OECD, Aotearoa New Zealand lacks effective dedicated species protection legislation to ensure that threatened species are

formally listed and monitored and to require the development of recovery plans for them. Speaking at the EDS conference last week Dr Koolen-Bourke identified the Wildlife Act as the clear “low hanging fruit” for any law reform agenda.

Conserving Nature represents phase 1 of a 2-stage project funded by the Department of Conservation. Where phase 1 focused on identifying the issues that exist within the conservation system, phase 2 will shift to the development of constructive and workable options for reform. This work will be informed by interviews with regulators and stakeholders, international best practice and the advice and assistance of a panel of senior Māori advisors engaged to ensure Māori perspectives are fully integrated into the project.

It will also pivot to examine aspects of our current system that *are* working well and the synergies that exist to ensure positive aspects are strengthened and retained.

“The goal is to build resilience into our conservation system to ensure it is responsive to emerging pressures and able to provide robust protection of our precious flora and fauna. We need a modern system that not only protects but actively fosters restoration and connection, one that facilitates active partnership with iwi and communities and reflects our bicultural values and aspirations,” Dr Koolen-Bourke concluded.

The book is available [here](#) as a free PDF or as a limited number of hard copies with a small payment to cover postage.