Forest & Bird
TE REO O TE TAIAO | Giving Nature a Voice

Questions for candidates, 2020

Oceans

New Zealand has a problem with mis-reporting in fisheries. Despite being legally required to accurately report catching seabirds and marine mammals, fishers are more likely to report catching seabirds and marine mammals if there is an observer onboard.

- Will you ensure all commercial fishing boats have cameras?

Less than 0.4% of New Zealand's marine environment is in marine reserves. Internationally, 30% is recognised as the amount of the marine environment that should be protected in representative no-take marine protected areas.

- What will you do to increase the amount of marine protected areas in New Zealand?

Most of New Zealand seabirds are at increased risk of extinction because of fishing. Mainland hoiho (yellow eyed penguins) and Antipodean albatrosses are running out of time. Maui dolphin is almost extinct. The fishing industry still catches seals, seabirds and dolphins.

- Will you commit to a goal of zero bycatch of protected species including dolphins, seabirds and seals?

The Hauraki Gulf is ailing. Shellfish are dying, the water has sedimentation from development, snapper are just hanging in and crayfish are functionally extinct.

- What is your plan for restoring the Hauraki Gulf?

Climate

Nature in New Zealand is vulnerable to climate change – more floods, droughts, sea-level rise and increased pests from warming temperatures all threaten nature. Nature can help us become more resilient to climate change by offering erosion and flood protection, improving water quality and protection from coastal storm surges. However our climate change response can also harm nature through inappropriate hydro development (including pumped hydro), badly placed forestry and wind farms, and inappropriate water storage and irrigation.

- What will you do to ensure that nature is protected in New Zealand's climate change response?

Agriculture produces roughly half New Zealand's emissions but is subsidised by being exempt from paying for costs of its emissions under the emissions trading scheme. Current estimates suggest that emissions pricing is affordable at around 1 cent per kilo of milk solids and 1 cent per kilo of beef but would encourage farmers to farm smarter.

- What is your timetable for pricing agricultural emissions?

Much of our dairy sector uses coal to process milk products and urea fertiliser is fossil fuel-based.

- How would you address the climate change implications of using fossil fuels to grow and process food?

Freshwater

Nitrogen and phosphorus pollute water by causing the growth of algae that eat up all the oxygen in water and turn water toxic. High levels of nitrates in ground water are toxic to people. Fourteen of the 19 experts on the Government's freshwater Science and Technical Advisory Group have called for 'bottom lines' for Dissolved Inorganic Nitrogen (of 1.0 mg/l) and Dissolved Reactive Phosphorus. Many catchments already have bottom lines for nitrogen that are more stringent than the proposed 1.0mg/l bottom line.

- What bottom lines will you put into place for nitrogen and phosphorus if you become the Government?
- Will you commit to the safe bottom line of 1.0mg/l for dissolved inorganic nitrogen?

The Government has introduced a limit on the use of nitrogen fertiliser to 190 kg per hectare per year, with a review of this cap promised in 2023. Leading freshwater ecologist Russell Death has described this as a 'Band Aid' solution that will have little effect, given it is cattle urine not fertiliser driving much of the nitrate increase, and others have called for a ban on synthetic fertiliser altogether, given it is refined from fossil fuels

- What would your Government do to address other sources of nitrogen pollution from agriculture?

Groundwater in Canterbury is so polluted with nitrates from farming that the Regional Council has produced a set of risk maps for the public and the District Health Board distributes a pamphlet on the risk of 'Blue Baby Syndrome' to new parents. Some parts of Canterbury also have high rates of waterborne disease spread in groundwater from farm stock to people.

- What would your government do to address the risk of nitrates in groundwater?
- Who should pay the cost of polluted drinking water: those who caused the pollution; district councils and health services or the people who risk getting sick?

New Zealand has lots of issues with managing water quantity: issues with minimum flows, the allocation of water use and pollution rights, and iwi interests in water, have not been resolved. These issues only grow as climate change increasingly changes the availability of fresh water.

- What would your government do to address water use rights and responsibility?

- Will you ensure that those who commercially use, sell and trade water pay a resource rental?
- How will your govt resolve the matter of iwi rights to freshwater under the Treaty of Waitangi?

Land

Public conservation is meant to be protected, but apart from National Parks and some reserves, most of it can still be mined.

- Will you commit to ending mining on public conservation land?

Thirteen out of fourteen types of habitats in New Zealand on land are declining. 90% of our wetlands have gone and more are still disappearing. Lowland ecosystems are badly depleted – some with less than 1% of original forest cover remaining.

- What actions will your Government take to protect nature on private land?
- Do you support the draft National Policy Statement on Indigenous Biodiversity?

National Parks are the cornerstone of our protected land areas, and are refuges for many of our 4000 threatened plants and animals. Yet management of these parks is coming under threat through the invasion of exotic plants and animals; poor management of tourism; and the need for more investment for pest control.

- Would your government ensure that the Department of Conservation has the mandate and funding to suppress or eradicate pest animals, especially where they are desecrating our herbfields, forests and birds. Including tahr, goats, and deer?
- What will your government do to uphold the principles of the National Parks Act and ensure they are preserved in perpetuity?

Economic transformation

Research from Oxford University shows that green stimulus delivers more jobs, faster and with greater economic benefits than building traditional infrastructure. As we recover from COVID we have the opportunity to fix a number of problems facing New Zealand. Nature in New Zealand is in crisis with most lowland waterways polluted, 4000 species are in trouble and problems with pests and weeds throughout the country.

- What is your party's plan to ensure the COVID recovery is a recovery for people and planet?