



Eugenie Sage
Minister of Conservation
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

28 March 2018

Dear Eugenie

I am writing to you to request information regarding actions your Department is undertaking in response to climate change issues highlighted in *Our atmosphere and climate 2017*, published by the Ministry for the Environment and Statistics New Zealand under the Environmental Reporting Act 2015.

This request is made in relation to my role under this Act. As set out in Section 18, I have a broad role to comment on national state of the environment reports, which includes discussing implications of environmental reports and recommending responses to the findings contained within those reports.

The *Our atmosphere and climate 2017* report contained information on current and potential future impacts of climate change on New Zealand's natural environment and biodiversity, and notes that the country can expect to face "*possibly costly decisions around how we manage the effects of a changing climate for our unique and celebrated native biodiversity.*"

Specific examples that relate to conservation were included in the report.

Like many other reptiles, the sex of tuatara is determined by the temperatures the developing eggs are exposed to. *Our Atmosphere and Climate 2017* notes that the sex ratio of hatchlings of the North Brother Island Tuatara is becoming more male-dominated due to increasingly warmer temperatures. The report also notes this trend, if it continues, could lead to the species' extinction. Given this situation, could you please provide answers to the following questions:

1. *What plans or actions are in place to address this threat to North Brother Island Tuatara?*
2. *Is climate-change induced change in hatchling sex-ratios a threat to other tuatara species, and if so, plans or actions are in place to address this threat?*
3. *How many other reptiles face similar or other threats from climate change, and what plans or actions are in place to address these threats?*

Common wasp densities in forests in the Nelson region have been shown to be higher in years with a warm, dry, spring than in years with a cool, wet spring. *Our Atmosphere and Climate 2017* notes that there is a risk that increasing temperatures will result in increased densities and impacts of this pest species. In light of this, could you please provide answers to the following questions:

1. *What work is underway or planned to manage the changing threats from vespulid (common and German) wasps due to climate change?*
2. *What work is underway on the potential impacts of climate change on other existing pests, including Myrtle Rust?*
3. *Further, what work is underway or planned to address the risk of establishment of new pests due to climate change?*

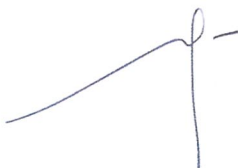
More broadly, the report raises questions about the threats climate change poses to other species and ecosystems, and the appropriate policy responses. In this light, could you please provide information on the following:

4. *What other threats has the Department identified for native species and ecosystems from climate change?*
5. *How are these threats being incorporated into the Department's strategic approach to dealing with the risks that climate change poses to New Zealand's native biodiversity and ecosystems?*
6. *What targets or goals, if any, has the Department set for managing biodiversity in the face of climate change impacts?*
7. *What policies or plans is the Department recommending to achieve any targets or goals?*
8. *What work has the Department done or is planning to do with other government agencies to address issues where greenhouse gas reductions require co-ordinated actions from multiple stakeholders?*
9. *What gaps has the Department identified in scientific understanding or management systems for dealing with the effects of Climate Change on biodiversity?*

I note that the Department of Conservation's recent *Briefing for Incoming Ministers* (BIM) also highlights the challenge climate change poses for native biodiversity in New Zealand. The BIM also notes that the department is "*increasingly factoring the impacts of climate change into [its] strategic planning.*" This is encouraging, and I look forward to hearing about the specific issues and responses the Department is focussed on.

I would also welcome a meeting to discuss these issues with you following the reception of a reply to this letter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a long horizontal stroke followed by a vertical line and a small loop at the top.

Simon Upton
Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment

CC: Sarah Dowie, MP; Clayton Mitchell, MP; David Seymour, MP