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FUTURE FOCUS:
STRATEGIC PLAN OF THE
PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER
FOR THE ENVIRONMENT
2003-07

1: COMMISSIONER'S INTRODUCTION

WELCOME TO OUR SECOND STRATEGIC PLAN.

Our first plan, for 1997-2001, focused our efforts on urban and marine ecosystems, a variety of management systems, public participation in resource management and the concept of environmental sustainability (as distinct from managing environmental effects, or environmentalism). The latter is primarily a response to the need to protect nature, including people, from the ravages of human activities. In contrast, sustainability is a movement towards redesigning the ways we meet society's needs and wants within the capacity of the environment. This redesign is *the* challenge for the 21st century.

This new plan maintains our focus on environmental sustainability as a core component of sustainable development – the quest to meet environmental, social, cultural and economic goals in ways that can be continued into a distant future. We will expand our examination of some legislative and policy 'drivers' that have a major influence on environmental sustainability. We will also examine the capacities of agencies, and their performance, for reshaping these drivers.

This plan has been developed via a process of dialogue with some key thinkers and practitioners and several in-house working sessions.

All participants were asked to focus on three dimensions of the PCE:

- Where does the PCE 'fit' 16 years after the establishment of the office?
- How should we operate to maximise our contribution to environmental sustainability?
- What issues should we focus on over the next five years?

This plan endeavours to reflect the views of participants at our workshops. They gave us the clearest guidance on how we should work:

- as a catalyst for change
- helping to join up the 'silos' of many different institutions
- focusing on environmental sustainability (not sustainable development *per se*)
- promoting the value of Maori perspectives
- improving the dissemination of our findings
- following up more vigorously on the fate of our recommendations.

There was less clarity about the particular projects we should focus on, although a long list was offered. There were relatively few insights into our 'fit' – despite the view that the PCE is more relevant than ever. Key messages from this dialogue are spread throughout this plan.

In the end, our strategic focus represents a judgement call made by my team and myself on where we can make the most significant contribution to environmental sustainability. There may be some disquiet about our intent to delve into sustainability drivers and governance capacity matters. Nonetheless, we make no apologies. We are confident that this is an area where we can make a real difference.



Dr J Morgan Williams

Parliamentary Commissioner
for the Environment

OUR MISSION:

*TO PROVIDE
INDEPENDENT
SCRUTINY,
ADVOCACY
AND ADVICE
FOR A BETTER
ENVIRONMENT*

pce



2: OUR PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING THIS PLAN

This plan was constructed using the process in Figure 1.

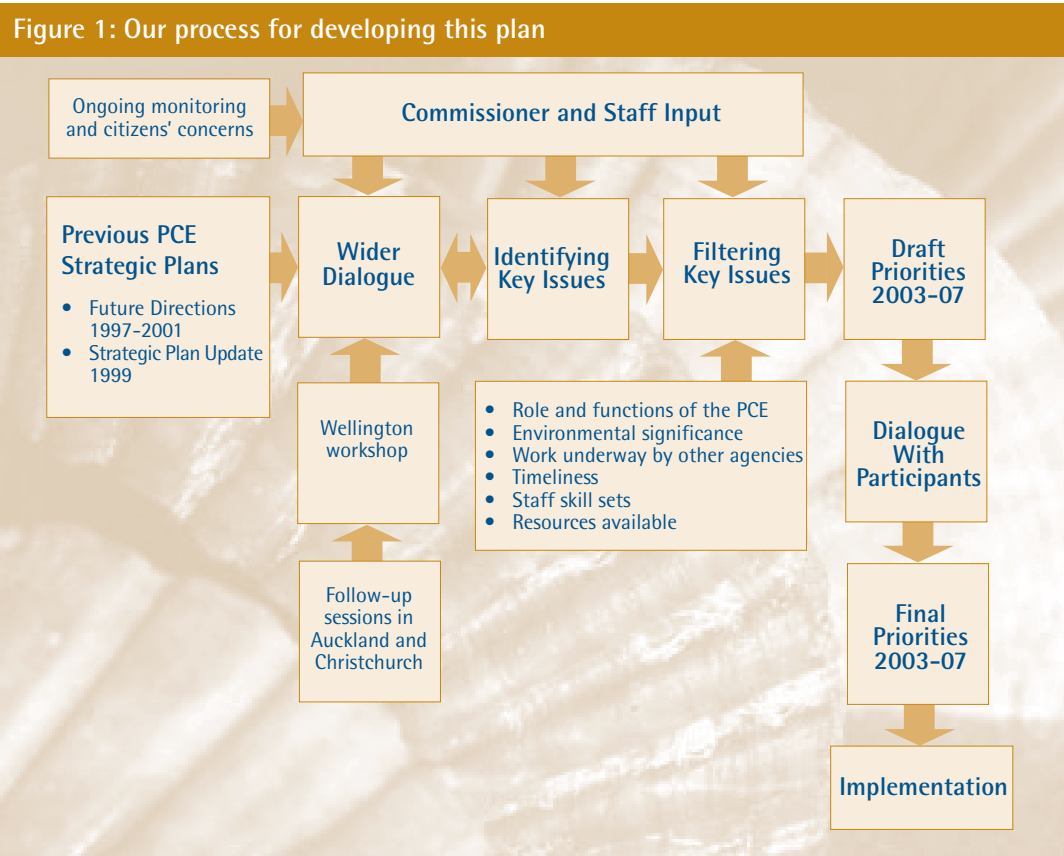
The previous strategic plan, created in 1997 and updated in 1999, set the direction for the PCE until 2002. The current plan has been built on that foundation.

From October to December 2002, we held a series of workshops with key thinkers and practitioners to inform and develop our future focus. The primary session was held over two days in Wellington. This was attended by approximately 70 representatives from local and central government, environmental NGOs, tangata whenua groups, business organisations and academic institutions. To provide some contrast and alternative perspectives, Environmental Commissioners (or their representatives) from Australia and Canada were also present. This session was supplemented by two shorter follow-up workshops in Auckland and

Christchurch.¹ During these sessions, participants were asked to consider where the PCE 'fits', how we should go about our work and what issues we should focus on. Key messages from these workshops are spread throughout this plan.

A series of in-house meetings was also held to reflect on issues and raise further matters for debate. Ongoing monitoring work, including citizens' concerns, helped inform these discussions.

The perspectives from participants and the PCE team were then synthesised to determine strategic priorities. To select the most pertinent areas for focus, issues were 'filtered' according to a set of criteria. Draft priorities were then distributed to workshop participants for additional feedback. This allowed some final amendments to be made before the plan was completed. Our strategic plan will be implemented over the next five years.



3: THE OFFICE OF THE PCE TODAY



OUR PURPOSE

We work for a healthy environment, highly valued by people and managed responsibly for the current and future benefit of all.

We do this by providing an independent check on:

- the capability of the New Zealand system of environmental management; and
- the performance of public authorities in maintaining and improving the quality of the environment.

WHERE WE FIT

OUR ROOTS

Our roots are in the 1980s reform of environmental administration in New Zealand. Prior to these reforms, the framework for environmental management in New Zealand was increasingly considered inadequate. For example, an OECD report² in 1981 emphasised the need for greater separation of conservation and development responsibilities between government agencies. To enhance environmental management, it was argued that a Commissioner was needed with a high level of independence.

Following widespread public consultation, the PCE was set up under the Environment Act 1986. This gave the Commissioner the status of a Parliamentary Officer. As a Parliamentary Commissioner, the PCE is independent of the government of the day. The relationship between Parliament, Government and Officers of Parliament is illustrated in Figure 2.³

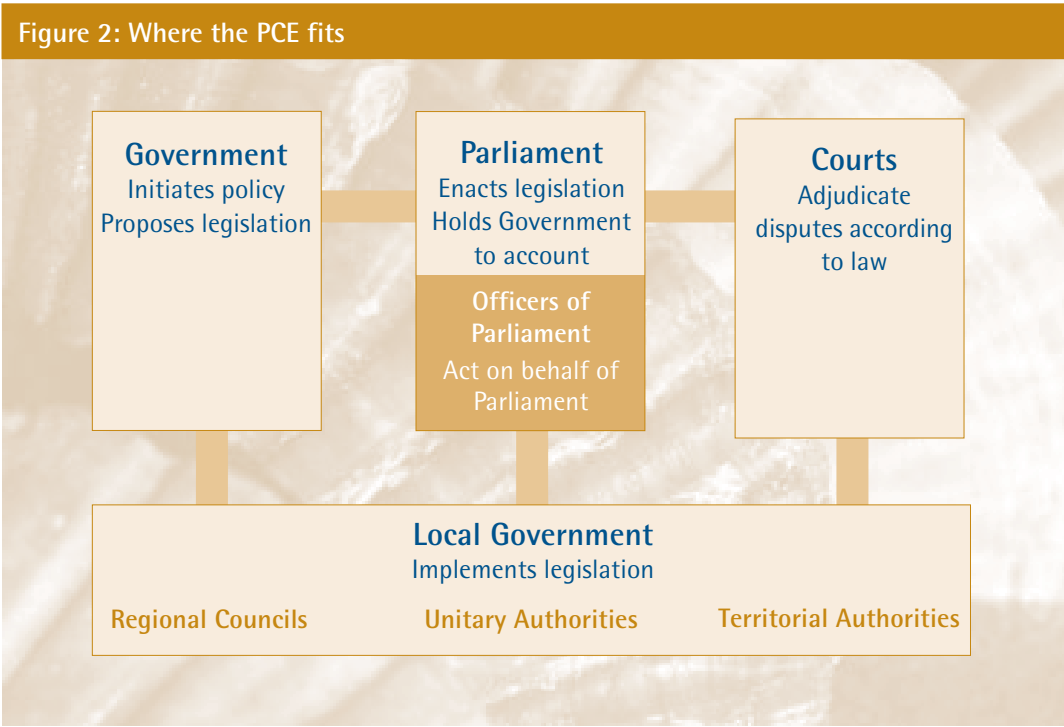
The principles of these reforms were subsequently endorsed by another OECD review in 1996.⁴

This stated that:

The establishment of the office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment in 1986 is a major institutional accomplishment, improving government accountability on environmental matters at all levels.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSIONERS AROUND THE WORLD

Following New Zealand's lead, a number of other countries, states or provinces have established similar Environmental Commissioners. These include Australia's Capital Territory, the province of Ontario, the Governments of Canada, Germany and the Netherlands and the European Commission in Brussels. A Commissioner for Ecologically Sustainable Development is also being established in Victoria, Australia. Not all of these Commissioners are independent of the Executive Government.



THE COMMISSIONER AND THE MINISTRY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

The PCE and the Ministry for the Environment (MfE) were both established by the Environment Act 1986. Although we share the same foundation, this legislation makes a clear distinction between our different powers, roles and functions.

The Ministry is a government department and part of the Executive Government. It is therefore accountable to the Minister for the Environment. As an Officer of Parliament, the PCE is accountable to Parliament through the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Unlike the Ministry, this means that the PCE is not directed by the Government of the day. In fact, it is the Commissioner's job to hold the Government to account for its actions that affect the environment. In a practical sense, the distinction between the PCE and MfE is that the Ministry is a policy adviser (a

part of the system of government agencies). The PCE is a policy reviewer outside this system (and reporting on it).

THE COMMISSIONER'S POWERS

The Commissioner has powers to investigate and report on any matter where the environment may be, or has been, adversely affected. The Commissioner has wide powers to obtain information and to protect the confidentiality of that information where appropriate. The Commissioner also has the power to report findings and to make recommendations. However, the Commissioner does not have the power to make any binding rulings and is unable to reverse decisions made by public authorities.

The independence, credibility, quality and timing of our investigations contribute to the acceptance and effectiveness of the Commissioner's advice.

THE TREATY OF WAITANGI AND THE PCE

We take full and balanced account of the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi, as required under the Environment Act 1986. This legislation also recognises other matters of importance for tangata whenua. Our investigations may have regard to any land, water, sites, fishing grounds, physical or cultural resources (or interests associated with such areas) that are part of the heritage of tangata whenua and that contribute to their well-being.



HOW WE RELATE WITH OTHERS

There is a potential for the work of the PCE to overlap with the roles of three other organisations – the Ministry for the Environment, the Ombudsmen and the Office of the Auditor-General. To manage this potential, regular contact is maintained with these agencies. Details of proposed investigations are shared with the Office of the Auditor-General to check for common interests. Joint investigations may also be undertaken. Citizens' concerns are transferred between the PCE and the Ombudsmen when appropriate.

The PCE's relationship with the Ministry for the Environment has been formalised via a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) since 1997. In late 2002 the Ministry began a review of its functions and work priorities. This review may have implications for the PCE's investigation priorities. If so, this will be addressed via discussions with the Ministry according to our MOU.

OUR ROLES

To fulfil our purpose we have five key roles. These are based on the Commissioner's functions in the Environment Act 1986 (see Appendix). The Commissioner has wide discretion to exercise these functions. However, priority must be given to directions from Parliament to inquire into environmental matters.

Our focus has evolved considerably since the office was first established.⁵ Today, the emphasis is placed on two primary roles with three supporting roles.

Table 1: Key roles of the PCE	
Primary	
ENVIRONMENTAL SYSTEMS GUARDIAN	The PCE may check the capability of an environmental management regime (including institutional arrangements, legislation, policies and the generation of necessary knowledge) to ensure that the quality of the environment is maintained or improved.
ENVIRONMENTAL OMBUDSMAN	To improve public authority accountability, the PCE may investigate citizens' concerns about the environmental management and planning performance of public agencies.
Supporting	
INFORMATION PROVIDER, FACILITATOR AND CATALYST	The PCE disseminates information to a wide variety of groups and individuals to stimulate high quality debate and action on environmental issues.
ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT AUDITOR	The PCE may evaluate the performance of public authorities to ensure they are meeting their environmental responsibilities.
ADVISER TO PARLIAMENTARY SELECT COMMITTEES	The PCE responds to requests from Select Committees to provide assistance and advice.

OUR RESOURCES

The PCE currently consists of 19 people including the Commissioner. Collectively, we make up approximately 17 full-time staff equivalents. The structure of the office is outlined below.

In 2002/03, our budget was \$1.99 million (inclusive of GST).



HOW WE DELIVER

WAYS WE CONTRIBUTE

Given that the Commissioner only has powers to recommend, and the environmental arena is complex, controversial and often hard to influence, how do we make a difference?

During the last five years we have focused on three aspects to increase the influence of our work:

What?

We look for clear gaps in knowledge and areas that other agencies are not focusing on. We investigate areas or issues where we have the capacity to contribute, in the context of our strategic framework. We seek a balance between being proactive and reactive as we consider emerging issues and concerns.

When?

We aim to be timely. We look at major concerns being expressed by communities and issues that will be important in the near to medium-term future. We also look for opportunities with a high potential for uptake of the Commissioner's recommendations. However, this does not restrict us from focusing on important but unpopular issues (in terms of desire for policy action).

How?

Much greater effort has been placed on scoping our investigations (see the steps we follow in Figure 4). We endeavour to focus on the most pertinent issues, ask the right questions and deliver information from the best possible sources. Our procedures for investigation have increasingly become part of our delivery. We talk to a wide cross-section of interested parties, use inclusive processes (such as focus groups) and may produce discussion documents before releasing final reports.

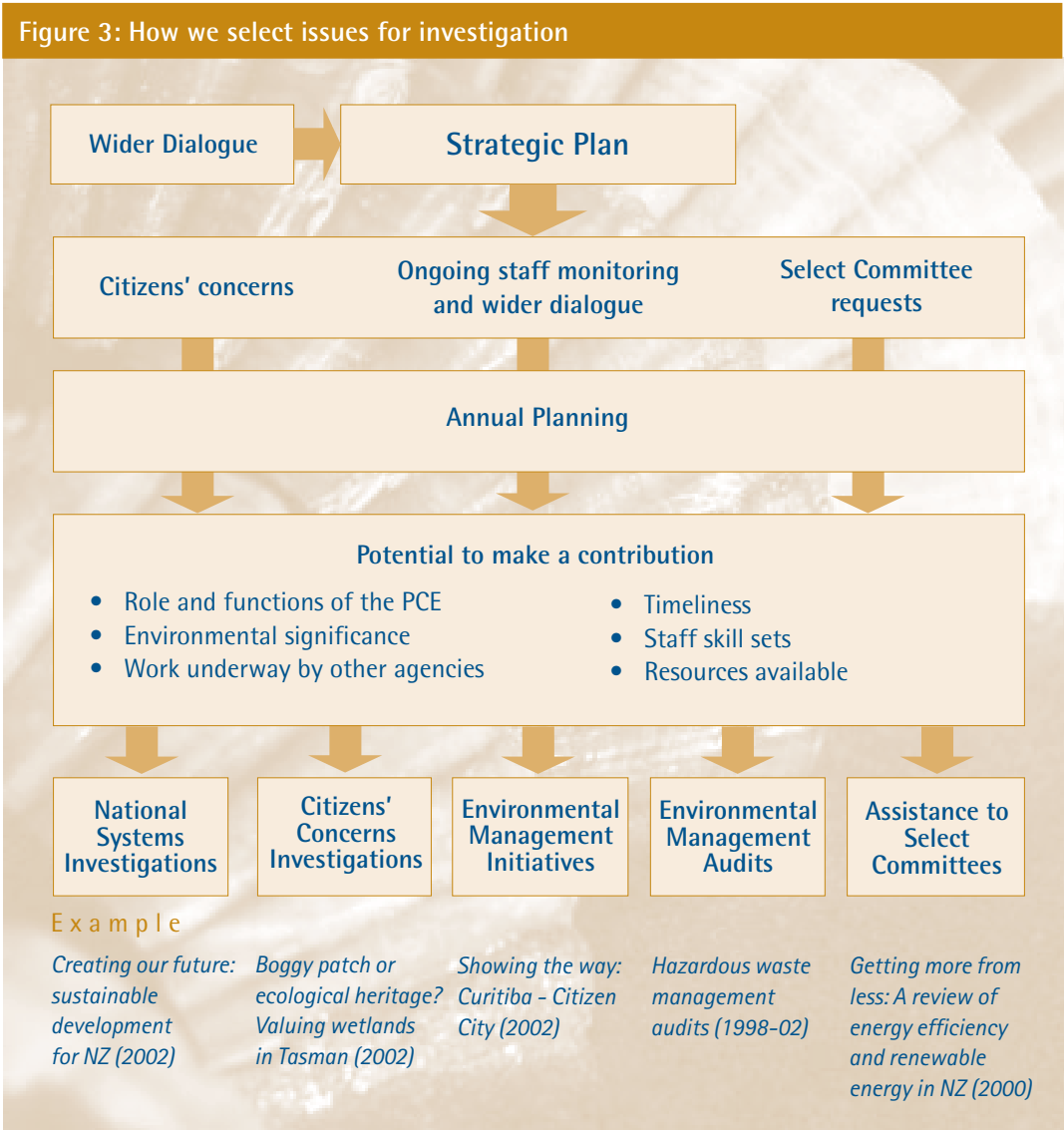
We take care to present and communicate findings to our target audiences. We focus our communication efforts on agencies and groups that have the capacity to amplify our findings to a wider audience – particularly practitioners who can turn them into effective results. In addition, we aim to communicate our findings more broadly through presentations to different groups and articles for the print media. All of our reports, newsletters, press releases and many of our presentations are placed on our website.

All of these approaches (with some adjustments discussed in 'Improving Our Delivery') will continue during the life of this plan.

OUR DELIVERY PROCESSES

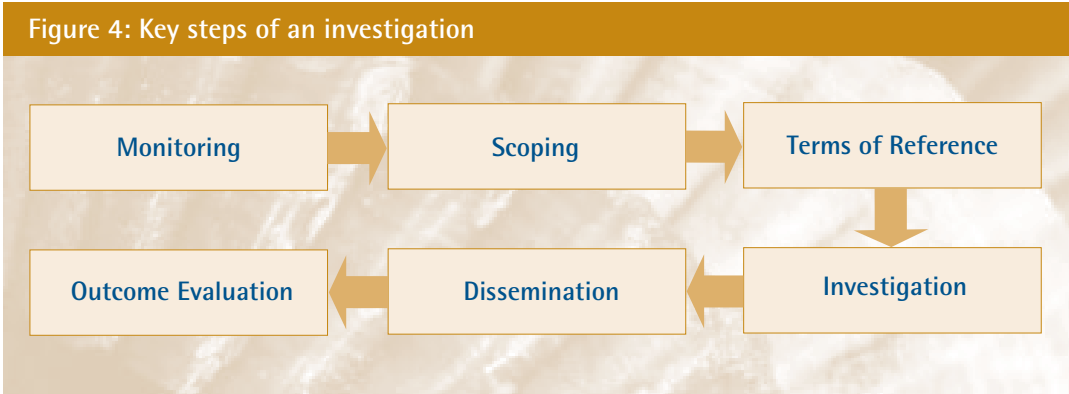
Investigations are categorised into five key groups (listed at the bottom of Figure 3). These correspond to the five roles identified above. We use the process identified on the following page to select issues for investigation.

Figure 3: How we select issues for investigation



The strategic plan provides the overarching framework for our work over a five-year period. On a day-to-day basis, staff monitor environmental issues, analyse citizens' concerns and occasionally assist the Commissioner and the Assistant Commissioner in responding to Select Committee requests. Potential areas for investigation are usually assessed at an annual planning session. All issues are screened to determine if we can make a significant contribution. If an investigation is launched, it follows the broad steps outlined in Figure 4.

Sometimes, however, a new environmental issue appears on the horizon that is significant enough to warrant immediate attention. These issues may fall outside our strategic framework. Nonetheless, sometimes the Commissioner will choose to investigate these issues (particularly for citizens' concerns) if they have significant environmental implications. We therefore need to retain an element of flexibility to address emerging issues. This flexibility is also required to respond to Parliamentary Select Committee requests.



We are constantly **monitoring** issues that may impact on the environment in New Zealand. We pay close attention to areas identified as strategic priorities and analyse information provided by citizens' concerns.

The Commissioner may then decide that an environmental issue is significant enough to warrant attention (taking into consideration strategic priorities and the potential to make a difference). The **scoping** phase begins and a team is formed to identify the critical environmental management issue(s), their significance, and the risks and opportunities for our involvement. Dialogue with key stakeholders is usually necessary to discuss these issues. We do not typically investigate an issue if there is already substantive work being done by other appropriate agencies (although we may provide a different angle).

If it is determined that we can make a contribution by investigating, **terms of reference** are formed. These determine the nature and extent of the investigation. They also identify the resources required in order to prepare a project plan and budget. The objective of this stage is to ensure that the Commissioner, his team and stakeholders are clear about what, how and why an issue is being investigated.

When the **investigation** begins, information is gathered and analysed. Team members conduct wider discussions with stakeholders during their analysis and writing. Internal and external peer reviewers are used for additional scrutiny. Sometimes a discussion document is released for public comment before a final document is published. The final report usually contains recommendations to public authorities.

During this process, we carefully consider how the final report will be **disseminated**. We operate a 'no surprises' policy, so that Ministers and relevant public authorities are informed about a report (and any recommendations) before it is released.

The Commissioner requests public authorities to respond to any recommendations six months after a report has been released. In addition, an **outcome evaluation** is often conducted two to three years after advice has been given. Responses from public authorities are used to assist in evaluating the effectiveness of the PCE. This work also feeds into the ongoing monitoring work of staff.

BUILDING ON PREVIOUS PRIORITIES

The first strategic plan set the direction for the PCE from 1997 onwards. It also signified a shift in direction from the approach taken by the previous Commissioner. Notably, more emphasis has been placed on looking at the systemic causes of environmental problems, rather than focusing on issues identified via complaints we receive. The Commissioner has increasingly focused on larger ‘systems’ investigations and audits in an environmental sustainability context.

The previous plan identified several significant areas for priority of investigation. These were based around two key ecosystems (the urban and marine environments) and three management systems. These are identified in the first column of Table 2. To ensure we could continue to add value to environmental management in New Zealand, a mid-term review was held in 1999. There was consensus among participants that the systems identified in 1997 were still relevant areas for investigation. Additional priorities were suggested in the areas of transport, biosecurity and waste management.

Table 2: Previous strategic areas and investigations	
PRIORITY AREA	KEY INVESTIGATIONS
1997 Plan	
Urban Environment	1998: The cities and their people: NZ's urban environment 2000: Ageing pipes and murky waters: urban water issues for the 21st century 2001: Managing change in paradise: sustainable development in peri-urban areas 2002: Showing the way: Curitiba – citizens' city
Marine Environment	1999: Setting course for a sustainable future: the management of NZ's marine environment
Conservation Management	2001: Weaving resilience into our working land: future roles for native plants on private land 2002: Boggy patch or ecological heritage? Valuing wetlands in Tasman
Public Participation	1998: Kaitiakitanga and local government: tangata whenua participation in environmental management 2000: Caught in the headlights: New Zealanders' reflections on possums, control options and GE 2002: He rangahau... Exploring the concept of a Treaty based environmental audit framework
Environmental Information and Education	1998: Information needs and the RMA 2002: Learning for sustainable living (underway)
1999 Update	
Transport	1998-1999: Assistance to Select Committees on transport
Biosecurity	1999: NZ under siege: a review of the management of biosecurity risks to the environment
Waste Management	1998: Hazardous waste management 1999-2002: Hazardous waste progress reports

Table 2 identifies some of the key investigations that emerged from the previous strategic plans.

Sometimes, however, the Commissioner conducts an investigation in an area beyond the strategic priorities. As noted above, this is because new environmental issues sometimes appear on the horizon, and/or an excellent opportunity may arise for us to make a difference. The report *Creating our future: sustainable development for New Zealand* (PCE, 2002) is a good example. In the lead up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in mid-2002, the Commissioner decided it was an opportune time to review New Zealand’s progress on sustain-

able development. This led to the production of the most requested report produced by the PCE during the history of the office.

Additional work we have completed over the last five years is summarised in Table 3 below. Some investigations, such as the tourism study, were instigated by the previous Commissioner. Other studies were prompted by citizens’ concerns, requests from Parliament (such as *Getting more from less* (PCE, 2000)) and a Royal Commission on Genetic Modification (*Key lessons from history* (PCE, 2001)). All these investigations either drew on other major studies from the strategic plan or expanded the focus on environmental sustainability issues.

Table 3: Additional work completed by the PCE 1997-2002		
National Systems Investigations	1997: 2000:	Environmental effects associated with tourism Getting more from less: A review of progress in energy efficiency and renewable energy initiatives in New Zealand
Citizens' Concerns Investigations	1998: 1999: 2000: 2001: 2002:	4 investigations. 30 smaller enquiries. Responded to 271 requests. 7 investigations. 32 smaller enquiries. Responded to 241 requests. 4 investigations. 6 smaller enquiries. Responded to 240 requests. 6 investigations. 5 smaller enquiries. Responded to 298 requests. 2 investigations. 13 smaller enquiries. Responded to 203 requests.
Environmental Management Initiatives	2001: 2002:	Key lessons from the history of science and technology Creating our future: sustainable development for New Zealand
Environmental Management Audits	1999: 2000:	Side agreements in the resource consent process Local government environmental management
Assistance to Select Committees	1997-2002: 1998: 1999: 2000: 2001: 2002:	Scrutiny of government agencies' annual Committees reports and estimates Local Government Amendment Bill, environmental effects of transport Energy Efficiency Bill, road transport, 2 petitions Walkway access across private lands, Industry NZ Bill Asbestos, local government and climate change Local Government Bill

We have evaluated the uptake of advice for many of these investigations, and assessed progress towards environmental outcomes that the Commissioner's recommendations seek. Some of the reports identified above were completed recently and are yet to be assessed. Nonetheless, summaries for many evaluations can be found in our annual reports. For example, *The cities and their people* (PCE, 1998) provided a 'wake-up call' to improve the management of urban areas. It was successful in raising awareness of urban sustainability issues across central and local government. Since then, central government agencies have improved efforts in policy development into urban sustainability. They have also recognised the need for indicators to measure progress in this area, a Ministerial portfolio for Urban Affairs has been established, and new research portfolios have been created by the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology.

As another example, *Getting more from less* (PCE, 2000) contributed to the work of a Parliamentary Select Committee to develop political agreement on legislation to strengthen the work of the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority (EECA). Since then, EECA has been given a strong mandate to implement the first comprehensive national energy efficiency and conservation strategy. Mandatory energy performance standards and labelling have also been introduced, and reviews have been

conducted of the electricity and gas markets.

In contrast, the tourism investigation in 1997 received no formal response from Government and the recommendations were not initially addressed. Despite this, the report achieved considerable support from major stakeholders, both within the tourism industry and beyond. The principal recommendation in the report, to develop a strategy for sustainable tourism, was eventually implemented in 2001. There have also been clear signs that the industry has moved from polite acknowledgement of environmental issues to a pro-active effort to advance a more sustainable sector.

It is always difficult to precisely assess the influence that our investigations and the Commissioner's advice have had on subsequent central and local government decisions and outcomes. Nonetheless, evaluations serve a very useful purpose. They are a means of following up on the advice given and can place further pressure on Ministers and agencies to respond to the Commissioner's recommendations. They also provide ongoing learning about methods to improve the uptake of the Commissioner's advice.



4: THE ENVIRONMENT WE WORK IN

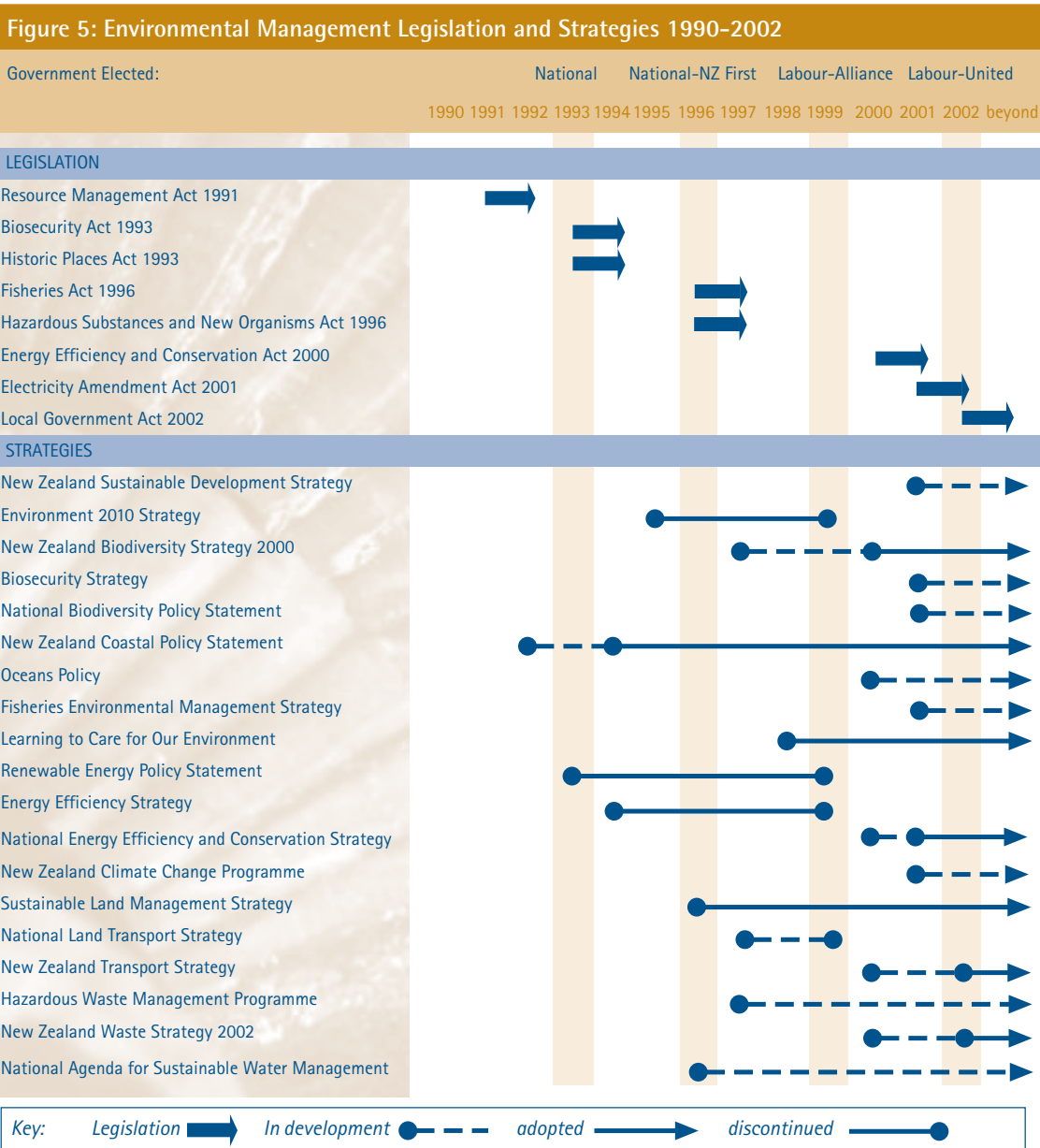
To determine our focus for the next five years, it is important to examine the shifting environmental, social and economic terrains of the world we work in. This section provides a brief overview of contemporary environmental issues for New Zealand. The first part summarises some key influences of environmental management in recent years. This is based on the PCE's (2002) review of progress on sustainable development since the 1992 Earth Summit,

with an additional focus on international influences.⁶ The second part looks to the future and identifies some environmental systems under considerable risk.

KEY INFLUENCES IN RECENT YEARS

LEGISLATIVE SHIFTS

Since the enactment of the Environment Act in 1986, there have been a series of environ-



mental statutes and strategies that have incorporated environmental sustainability dimensions. These are illustrated in Figure 5. A larger version can be found in *Creating our future*, pages 12–13.⁷

The Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) is New Zealand's leading piece of environmental legislation. However, the contribution that the RMA has made to the sustainable management of natural and physical resources is difficult to determine in the absence of any comprehensive evaluation of the environmental outcomes of this Act. It has helped raise awareness of environmental sustainability and the associated implications for resource use. This has been via an increased focus on community participation in consent processes. However this has had mixed benefits, particularly for tangata whenua.

There has been a notable shift in emphasis in environmental legislation and policy initiatives over the last 10 years. As the previous figure highlights, most of the initial focus was placed on legislation (with a few exceptions such as the Environment 2010 Strategy). The emphasis from the late 90s onwards shifted to a series of strategies with an environmental focus or component. This is indicative of a more broadly based and strategic approach to environmental management and sustainability matters. However, it remains to be seen how well all the strategies (both implemented and under development) will be integrated together.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local government's role in environmental management was strongly shaped by the local government reforms of 1989, the enactment of the RMA and the development of case law through the Environment Court.

All territorial and unitary authorities have now developed district plans under the RMA and regional councils have developed various regional plans. Many of these, however, have not been fully implemented. The implementation of the RMA, hampered by limited assistance by central government, totally dominated the environmental management agenda throughout the 1990's.

There has been variability in the plans developed and implemented by councils. This, in association with delays in Environment Court hearings, has generated major frustrations in many communities – and numerous complaints to the PCE. These frustrations have also fostered a widespread perception in many parts of New Zealand society that environmental management is a costly process that inhibits development and yields few positive benefits. This is a sad state of affairs given the enormous value that high environmental management standards have for New Zealand.

Meanwhile, the new Local Government Act 2002 has sustainable development at its heart. It states that local authorities:

...should take into account the social, economic, and cultural well-being of people and communities; and the need to maintain and enhance the quality of the environment; and the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations.

The Act introduces a Long-Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP) to set out a community's vision for the future, to provide for integrated decision-making and to coordinate council activities and resources over a 10-year period. It is envisaged that each LTCCP and plans prepared under the RMA will be consistent, with an alignment of goals.

THE BUSINESS SECTOR

The business sector is compelled to comply with environmental legislation such as the RMA, Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act 1996 and the Biosecurity Act 1993. The business sector has also responded to environmental sustainability through producing environmental components in annual reports, recycling 'waste' and improving energy efficiency. There has been growing involvement in local environmental business networks and the New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development.

COMMUNITIES

In communities throughout New Zealand environmental awareness and action has been growing. This has been assisted by the work of the traditional environmental NGOs (such as Ecologic, Greenpeace, the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society, and the World Wildlife Fund for Nature) and a number of new groups. There are now many landcare, coastcare, dunecare and associated groups that have the support of a variety of private and public (particularly regional council) interests. Groups inspired by Agenda 21 have also developed in a number of areas. Fostered by territorial authorities, these groups have initiated a range of environmental projects. They have increasingly gone beyond the traditional focus on indigenous flora and fauna (nature conservation matters) to become more involved in broader sustainability issues.

TANGATA WHENUA

The important relationships between the culture and traditions of tangata whenua and their environment is recognised in statutes such as the RMA, the Conservation Act 1987 and the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act 1996.⁸ These statutes

also recognise the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi, while the RMA gives regard to kaitiakitanga.

A number of ongoing factors influence the ability of agencies to effectively fulfil their obligations under these statutes. They include:

- capacities and resourcing, both amongst tangata whenua and within agencies
- consultation and participation issues
- difficulties for many non-Maori in understanding and valuing the spiritual dimensions and cultural identity inherent in the natural environment for Maori
- issues with the recognition and valuing of matauranga Maori or traditional environmental knowledge, and with cultural and intellectual property
- monitoring the implementation of Treaty principles at a local government level.

These factors also impact on opportunities for improved participation of iwi and hapu in environmental management.

Tangata whenua have been leaders in environmental matters in a range of areas. These include the establishment of iwi resource management units, iwi environmental management plans, taiapure and mataitai, the organic growers' organisation Te Waka Kai Ora, and extensive korero on issues such as genetically modified organisms, aquaculture and marine reserves. There are strong potentials with Treaty claims settlements, co-management models, and innovative environmental management partnership initiatives.

INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCES

The sustainability of the environment in New Zealand is affected by two major international influences: climate change and globalisation. Overseas consumers are demanding higher environmental standards, but we are also experiencing more movement of goods and people across our borders. This brings increased biosecurity risks, and potential tensions between our commitments made under multilateral environmental and free trade agreements. The essential point is that New Zealand's environmental 'futures' are dependent on the environmental health of the planet and the way we, as a tiny trading nation, relate to the rest of the world.

Despite ongoing efforts to diversify our wealth creation opportunities, New Zealand has a predominantly biological (land and ocean based) economy. In colloquial terms, we are in the business of pampering the palates and passions of the world's more prosperous citizens via our fine foods, wines, tourism experiences, fashion and films. These prosperous citizens bring with them broadly-based international views to environmental management matters in New Zealand. They expect high environmental qualities, in a 'paddock to plate' context, and in experiential terms. This dimension of New Zealand's global market competitiveness is well recognised by some of our leading exporters.

On the international environmental stage, New Zealand has actively contributed to the development of protocols and accords for environmental management. Examples of this are the Montreal Protocol on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer (1987) and the Kyoto Climate Change Protocol (1997) that New Zealand recently ratified. New Zealand has also been involved with the Mataatua



Declaration on Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights of Indigenous Peoples (1993). Hosted by the iwi of Mataatua, this represented the first international hui on this topic. Our embedding of environmental management into local government via the reforms of 1989 and the RMA in 1991 are examples of environmental management leadership that have received world-wide attention (despite some inevitable short comings).

A major international environmental initiative that has had relatively little impact in New Zealand is Agenda 21. This was one of the major outcomes of the Earth Summit in 1992. A few local authorities have developed local Agenda 21 plans, but most have focused on the implementation of the RMA (which contained only some elements of Agenda 21).

An emerging global environmental issue is the matter of environmental rights. These include rights to clean air, to access safe

water, and to participate in the management of the environment. Environmental rights are considered inherently less individual and more collective than traditional human rights. This is because environmental degradation tends to be cumulative – it may not seriously affect one individual at one point in time but it can, and often does, impact on collective interests over time. The big challenge for the RMA is to accommodate these critical dimensions when resource consents are issued to individuals (or legal entities), for specific sites in a framework (of district and regional plans) that appears inadequate for dealing with cumulative effects.

Environmental rights are now recognised internationally as vital components of the fundamental right to life. For example, the province of Ontario in Canada established an Environmental Bill of Rights in 1993. This empowered the development of an Environmental Registry, accessible via the internet, to allow the public to comment on new environmental laws, regulations, instruments and policies. Meanwhile, the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (1998) has been adopted by the European Union and 39 other countries (but not New Zealand). Its aim is to ensure that every person (in both current and future generations) can live in an environment adequate to their health and well-being.

No generation has a freehold lease on the earth, all we have is a life tenancy with a full repairing lease. No generation has paid its share of planetary repair.

– Margaret Thatcher addressing the British Royal Society, September 1988.

Most of the changes we must make are in our economic life. The system of taxes, subsidies, regulations and policies through which governments motivate the behaviour of individuals and corporations continues to incent unsustainable behaviour.

– Maurice Strong addressing the US Senate Committee on the Environment and Public Works, July 2002.

How often in contemporary times has the total uprooting of nature, technology, communities and entire civilizations been justified on the grounds that there is no alternative? Alternatives exist, but they are denied or excluded. Their inclusion simply requires a context of diversity.

– Vandana Shiva at the first Hopper Lecture in International Development, September 1993.

ENVIRONMENTAL SYSTEMS AT RISK

This section highlights some major environmental systems at risk. It discusses key systems, the drivers that place pressure on them and institutional responses that will influence future environmental sustainability.

While these descriptions of systems are largely biophysical, there is no intention for them to be considered as abstract from people and communities. People are an integral part of these systems: we generate most of the pressures and we are responsible for all of the responses.

SYSTEMS AT RISK

There are four major systems that will continue to be at high risk over the next five years (although these will not be uniformly distributed throughout New Zealand). They are:

INDIGENOUS ECOSYSTEMS

In the context of their crucial roles, both within and beyond the conservation estate, in sustaining:

- our indigenous biodiversity
- the distinctive character of local and regional landscapes
- the identity and well-being of communities including tangata whenua.

FRESH WATERS, RIVERS, STREAMS AND LAKES

- as habitats for indigenous and exotic species
- as sources of potable water, irrigation and hydropower
- for amenity, tourism and recreation

- as important taonga for tangata whenua with essential cultural and spiritual significance.

COASTAL SEAS

- as cherished areas to live beside and to enjoy for recreation
- as habitats for many of our most highly valued marine species
- as areas coming under increasing pressure from aquaculture developments
- as the rohe of Tangaroa, integral to the traditions, history and identity of tangata whenua, and a source of important kaimoana and other taonga.

URBAN ECOSYSTEMS

In the context of settlement patterns, and their underlying planning processes on:

- amenities
- air quality
- urban waters
- biosecurity risks by being a reservoir for potential weeds (in gardens) and as a new pest entry point (in the case of those areas with international ports).

DRIVERS OF ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS

Placing pressure on these at-risk systems, a variety of significant factors are driving environmental degradation. These include:

- *Biosecurity breaches* establishing new alien species.
- *Climate change* and its impacts on increasing climate variability.
- *Economic policies*, including those for taxation, trade and private sector investment that (unintentionally) provide incentives for unsustainable behaviours.
- *Inadequate understanding* (in some case a lack of basic knowledge) of economic/ environmental sustainability interactions.
- *Landuse practices* in agriculture and in urban and peri-urban subdivisions.
- *Limited understanding and acknowledgement of the different values* inherent in the natural environment for different people and groups, both Maori and non-Maori. These include cultural, spiritual and metaphysical values; communities and their traditions,

histories and identities; aesthetic values, and qualities of life.

- *Mobility practices* and patterns for transporting people and their products.
- *Persistent compounds* (chemical pollutants) used in agriculture, industry and homes as well as from road runoff.
- *Resource flows / efficiency of resource use*, particularly for energy and water.

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT RESPONSE SYSTEMS

There are a variety of institutions that will continue to have a major influence on capabilities to respond to environmental pressures and systems at risk. These include:

- *Research capacities and priorities* in the sciences of environmental sustainability.
- *The adequacy of the Resource Management Act 1991* as the centrepiece of New Zealand's environmental legislation.
- *The capacities of environmental agencies* within central and local government to apply current environmental legislation and to manage conflicts with other economic and social legislation.
- *The influence of the Local Government Act 2002*, which has sustainable development at its heart, in aligning the goals in Long Term Council Community Plans with RMA plans.
- *The structure of central government Ministry accountabilities* (including interconnectedness) to facilitate environmental sustainability.



This section outlines our priorities for work until 2007. We endeavoured to reflect as many views as possible from our dialogue with others to select priorities for action. Ultimately, however, they were chosen by the Commissioner and his team. Most areas consist of various potential elements that could warrant investigation. The actual focus of each project will therefore be defined by a detailed scoping study when a decision to investigate is made (following the processes outlined in Figure 4).

PRIORITY AREAS FOR INVESTIGATION

Priorities have been grouped into three broad areas – ecological systems, legislative and policy drivers, and agency performance and capacities. These categories align with the previous section that discussed environmental systems at risk.

They represent a drawing out of specific issues and areas that will have a significant influence on environmental sustainability in the next five to ten years.

In addition to these priority work areas, we are committed to ongoing work on:

- A regular audit of progress made by the Ministry for the Environment in developing and implementing a **hazardous waste** management plan and procedures. This commitment began in 2000.
- Regular reviews of aspects of New Zealand's **biosecurity** management. This commitment was made in the PCE's (2000) investigation into biosecurity risks to the environment.
- Examining the ability of the **Environment Act 1986** to provide a robust foundation for the PCE. This is in the context of changing expectations for environmental guardians, and the experiences of Environmental Commissioners established elsewhere in the world since the PCE came into existence almost 20 years ago.
- A further review of New Zealand's **sustainable development** progress in 2006-07, five years on from the release of *Creating our future: sustainable development for New Zealand* (PCE, 2002) and the World Summit on Sustainable Development.



RATIONALE FOR PRIORITY AREAS

ECOSYSTEMS

COASTAL SEAS

Our coastal seas, inclusive of estuaries, have enormous ecological and economic values and are a source of important kaimoana. Cherished for recreation, they are woven into the cultural fabric of communities throughout the country. However, as outlined in *Setting course for a sustainable future: the management of New Zealand's marine environment* (PCE, 2000) there is increasing competition for use of coastal space and waters (such as for aquaculture, recreation, and marine reserves). There are also ongoing tensions between the legislative responsibilities of various agencies, and a growing realisation of the impact that land-based activities are having on coastal waters and amenity qualities. Marine biosecurity is an increasing challenge. This is due to the growing number of shipping movements (for both overseas tourists and freight) from a changing mix of ports of origin. The regular flow of citizens' concerns related to coastal seas and the land-sea interface reinforces the need for further investigation into the management of this treasured ecosystem.

RURAL LOWLANDS

Our relatively limited lowland areas are occupied by most of New Zealand's urban settlements and more productive farming systems. These lowlands are also home to unique indigenous forests, grasslands and wetlands; most of which have now been removed or heavily modified. It is on rural lowlands that the environmental pressures from urbanisation and agriculture are coming into sharp focus. In particular, there are increasing demands for, and discharges

into, fresh water and significant impacts from peri-urban developments. In tension with these changes, there are also increasing expectations from visitors for the 'clean and green' image that is so heavily represented in New Zealand's tourism materials. It is essential to manage the impacts of farming systems and peri-urban developments to achieve environmental sustainability. Existing studies (such as *Managing change in paradise: sustainable development in peri-urban areas* (PCE, 2001)) have already indicated shortcomings in legislation and other mechanisms to sustain this valuable, but limited, ecosystem.

URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

New Zealand towns and cities are growing, shrinking, intensifying and changing in different regions of the country. The sustainability of settlements is critically dependent on spatial factors, landuse planning and mobility options. Shaping settlements is a very long-term business. Good community 'ownership' of strategic planning is therefore essential. Urban planning needs to focus on settlement shape, form, infrastructure, quality of public space, and air and water qualities. It is also crucial to manage the cumulative effects of many single and unconnected decisions. Recent planning and legislative approaches in New Zealand have proved inadequate in this regard. The Local Government Act 2002 has the potential to improve long-term management of urban environments in accordance with communities' aspirations, but implementation of this Act needs to be closely monitored.

LEGISLATION AND POLICY DRIVERS

CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION CAPACITIES

New Zealand has ratified the Kyoto Protocol on climate change. By doing so, we have acknowledged a major global problem and recognised the opportunities from taking a proactive stance in managing and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This is a positive and vital action to take. However, New Zealand must also be capable of adapting to the effects of climate change as it manifests itself here. Current global efforts to reduce greenhouse gases will not be sufficient to halt anticipated temperature rises over this century (although these efforts should help to slow any changes). Rising temperatures will continue to have an impact on New Zealand's maritime climate, which is already highly variable. This will place additional pressures on ecological, hydrological and infrastructure systems. For example, we may experience more extreme weather events and new species could establish in a warmer environment. These impacts will be associated with many social and economic consequences. Our capacity to adapt to climate change will therefore be just as important as our ability to reduce our contribution to global greenhouse gases. This capacity will need to form a central part of New Zealand's risk management.

ENERGY POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

The 2001 amendment to the Electricity Act 1992 requires the PCE to carry out regular environmental assessments of an Electricity Governance Organisation. The wide investigative powers of the Environment Act 1986 can also be applied to this task. Energy, in common with fresh water, is absolutely essential for sustaining societies and their economic systems. However, there are often significant environmental effects associated with the extraction, generation and use of energy sources. The New Zealand electricity sector, as a key component of the broader energy sector, will be an ongoing focus for our studies. We will contribute to the ongoing development of this sector by investigating opportunities for, and barriers to, improving its environmental sustainability. This will require us to examine how electricity is used as well as how it is provided in New Zealand.

ENVIRONMENTAL ECONOMIC INSTRUMENTS

During the course of two recent studies (*Creating our future: sustainable development*



for New Zealand (PCE, 2002), and *Weaving resilience into our working lands: future roles for native plants on private lands* (PCE, 2001)) we explored the influence of taxation systems on environmental sustainability. Worldwide, there is an increasing emphasis on using a broad range of economic incentives to encourage less environmentally damaging behaviours. The imposition of a carbon charge is one such example. London's traffic congestion charge is another. The proportion of tax revenue in New Zealand collected from so-called 'environmentally related levies' is about half the average for the OECD. Environmental taxes have some drawbacks that need to be addressed. Nonetheless, clever use of economic incentives is increasing elsewhere in the world (particularly in the European Union) as part of a package of policy instruments to

encourage environmental sustainability. There is a need for more investigation into their potential applicability in New Zealand.

MARINE AND COASTAL LEGISLATION

New Zealand has a plethora of marine and coastal legislation. There are 18 statutes and at least 13 international conventions with marine implications. In terms of fisheries, the Quota Management System introduced in 1986 and the Fisheries Acts 1983 and 1996 were groundbreaking pieces of legislation. However, their contribution to the environmental sustainability of marine ecosystems remains problematic. The Government's Oceans Policy initiative should have a significant influence on the management of the marine environment. During the life of this strategic plan, however, there is still a need to assess the environmental effectiveness of specific legislation and policies and their interactions.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ACT 1991

The RMA has been the centrepiece of New Zealand's environmental legislation for more than a decade. It has shaped the whole landscape of resource management and planning and been the focus of much controversy. It has greatly improved environmental awareness, but is it helping to guide New Zealand towards an environmentally sustainable future? There is sparse evidence that this is occurring, despite the best endeavours of local authorities and the Environment Court. It is therefore necessary to consider what else may be needed to ensure environmentally sustainable outcomes.



TRANSPORT STRATEGIES

New Zealand's transport sector used 41% of total consumer energy in 2000, compared with 39% in 1996. The environmental consequences of this rise in energy use (which is predominantly from private car travel) are significant in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, air quality, water quality and amenity impacts. Quality of life in cities is increasingly influenced by the shape and form of people's mobility patterns. Demands for mobility, if managed inappropriately, can partition cities and divide communities. Mobility in a rural context is much less divisive when it connects families and communities together. Nonetheless, there are often major landscape impacts from the cut and fill engineering that is driven by the quest to develop multi-lane highways.

AGENCY PERFORMANCE

LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAPACITIES

A number of PCE studies and numerous citizens' concerns have highlighted the variability among territorial, unitary and regional councils to effectively deliver on their environmental management responsibilities. This has largely been due to a variety of core capacity issues – in terms of revenue, councillor capabilities, staff resources, and access to research and information to base decisions on. These capacity matters need ongoing review because they are fundamental to effective decision-making and long-term environmental sustainability.

CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

ENVIRONMENTAL AGENCIES

A few central government agencies, including the Ministry for the Environment, the Department of Conservation and the Environmental Risk Management Authority, have core responsibilities to ensure environmental sustainability in New Zealand. However, the budgets of these agencies represent a very small percentage of total government expenditure and they have not traditionally been seen as 'pivotal' departments. In addition, they have seldom been headed by senior Ministers with high rank at the Cabinet table. Against this background it is desirable to assess their influence in shaping Government priorities, policies and legislation that have environmental consequences.

CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

SUSTAINABILITY LINKAGES

In *Creating our future: sustainable development for New Zealand* (PCE, 2002), the linkages between government strategies in the environmental, social and economic spheres were examined. There was evidence that these strategies were seldom connected, if at all, to encourage an integrated 'whole of Government' approach to sustainable development. It is essential for countries to make these sorts of inter-linkages to achieve long-term improvements in environmental sustainability. This is especially important to ensure that environmental sustainability is not undermined in the pursuit of short-term economic growth and social development objectives.

IMPROVING OUR DELIVERY

The proposed areas for priority make up a somewhat daunting list. Clearly it is beyond our resources, even over five years, to do substantive studies in all of these areas. We will therefore pursue a mix of broad studies and targeted investigations. Where opportunities exist, we will also make our contribution:

- in association with other agencies (such as the Office of the Auditor-General)
- through contracted pieces of work (such as 'think pieces')
- as commentaries linked to a particular event or Government initiative.

To improve the dissemination of our findings and recommendations, a proactive communication strategy will be developed. New staff resources will be recruited to prepare materials for wider audiences. These resources will be used to improve our capacity to bring our work to the attention of agencies and media interests.



WHERE TO FROM HERE?

This strategic plan will shape our work programme from 2004 and beyond. This year, we are already committed to the projects listed in Table 4.

In conjunction with ongoing information requests, citizens' concerns enquiries and assistance to Select Committees, these projects will absorb all current resources. Scoping of areas identified in this plan will therefore begin in late 2003.

2004 AND BEYOND

A potential investigation for 2004 will centre on the RMA. In particular, it will examine the ultimate potential of this legislation to efficiently manage cumulative effects. This study will be forward-looking to focus on improving long-term sustainability both within and beyond the confines of the RMA.

This investigation will not be undertaken until the current amendments to this legislation have been enacted.

The timing of other studies will depend on in-house resources and local and central government progress in several key areas. These include water management and allocation, mobility (transport) and Oceans Policy work.

Table 4: The year ahead – ongoing work in 2003	
National Systems Investigations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Intensive landuse futures – <i>reviewing developmental trends of more intensive agricultural systems, with a focus on environmental sustainability and water implications.</i>Learning for sustainable living – <i>a 'think piece' on education for sustainability in New Zealand.</i>
Citizens' Concerns Investigations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Abel Tasman National Park – <i>investigating the management of this coastal park in the context of rising tourist volumes.</i>Wastewater treatment emissions – <i>examining resource consent conditions and compliance at a treatment plant in Wellington.</i>
Environmental Management Initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Cruise ships: environmental impacts – <i>assessing the potential of environmental impacts associated with this growing tourist industry.</i>International land use models – <i>building on the investigation into peri-urban development, case studies to illustrate experiences abroad.</i>Science into environmental policy – <i>investigating the application of science into environmental policy and decision making, initially involving a discussion paper.</i>
Environmental Management Audits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Biosecurity audit – <i>a bi-annual review of New Zealand's biosecurity management, following on from the 2000 biosecurity investigation.</i>Electricity sector – <i>an environmental assessment of the electricity sector, as mandated by the Electricity Amendment Act 2001.</i>Hazardous waste update 3 – <i>a regular audit of MfE's progress in developing and implementing a hazardous waste management plan.</i>

APPENDIX: SECTION 16 OF THE ENVIRONMENT ACT 1986

16. Functions of the Commissioner

(1) The functions of the Commissioner shall be—

(a) With the objective of maintaining and improving the quality of the environment, to review from time to time the system of agencies and processes established by the Government to manage the allocation, use, and preservation of natural and physical resources, and to report the results of any such review to the House of Representatives and to such other bodies or persons as the Commissioner considers appropriate:

(b) Where the Commissioner considers it necessary, to investigate the effectiveness of environmental planning and environmental management carried out by public authorities, and advise them on any remedial action the Commissioner considers desirable:

(c) To—

(i) Investigate any matter in respect of which, in the Commissioner's opinion, the environment may be or has been adversely affected, whether through natural causes or as a result of the acts or omissions of any person or body, to an extent which the Commissioner considers warrants investigation; and

(ii) Advise, where necessary, the appropriate public authority and any other person or body the Commissioner thinks appropriate of the preventive measures or remedial action which the Commissioner considers should be taken; and

(iii) Report the results of the investigation to the House of Representatives:

(d) At the request of the House of Representatives or any select committee of the House of Representatives, to report to the House or committee on any petition, Bill, or other matter before the House or committee the subject-matter of which may have a significant effect on the environment:

(e) On the direction of the House of Representatives, to inquire into any matter that has had or may have a substantial and damaging effect on the environment, and to report the results of the inquiry to the House:

(f) To undertake and encourage the collection and dissemination of information relating to the environment:

(g) To encourage preventive measures and remedial actions for the protection of the environment.

(2) For the purposes of any inquiry held under subsection (1)(e) of this section, the Commissioner shall have the same powers as are conferred on Commissions of Inquiry by section 4 and sections 4B to 9 of the Commissions of Inquiry Act 1908; and those sections shall apply to all persons involved in any capacity in any such inquiry as if it were an inquiry conducted by a Commission under that Act.

(3) The Commissioner shall have, in relation to any such inquiry, and any report on the results of the inquiry, the same immunities and privileges as are possessed by a District Court Judge in the exercise of the Judge's civil jurisdiction.

GLOSSARY – NGA KUPU

hapu	family or district groups, communities
hui	gatherings, discussions, meetings
iwi	tribal groups
kaimoana	seafood
kaitiakitanga	the responsibilities, passed down from the ancestors, for tangata whenua to take care of the places, natural resources and other taonga in their rohe, and the mauri of those places, resources and taonga
korero	discussion, debate
mataitai	customary fisheries reserves
matauranga	traditional knowledge
mauri	essential life force, the spiritual power and distinctiveness that enable each thing to exist as itself
rohe	geographical territory of an iwi or hapu
taiapure	local fisheries reserves
Tangaroa	God of the sea
tangata whenua	people of the land, Maori people
taonga	valued resources, assets, prized possessions both material and non-material

ENDNOTES

- ¹ A separate report has also been produced which summarises perspectives of participants at these workshops. A copy can be obtained by visiting www.pce.govt.nz, or by contacting the PCE directly.
- ² Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)(1981), *Environmental Policies in New Zealand*. Paris, OECD.
- ³ A more detailed history of the PCE can be found at www.pce.govt.nz and in our strategic plan for 1997-2001.
- ⁴ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)(1996), *Environmental Performance Reviews: New Zealand*. Paris, OECD.
- ⁵ More background information can be found in our strategic plan for 1997-2001.
- ⁶ PCE (2002), *Creating our future: sustainable development for New Zealand*. Wellington, PCE.
- ⁷ *ibid.*
- ⁸ Please refer to the PCE's (2002) report *He rangahau... Exploring the concept of a Treaty based environmental audit framework* for further information. The section on *Legislation: Nga Ture* provides a summary of the differing provisions in each statute, and commentary on New Zealand's environmental management legislation and the Treaty principles.

KEY MESSAGES FROM OUR DIALOGUE WITH OTHERS

THE PCE’S MORE RELEVANT THAN EVER

Participants at our workshops strongly endorsed the importance of the PCE, with some people suggesting we are more relevant than ever. The independent nature of the office was highlighted as our most valuable quality, to allow us to be a 'conscience' for the environment.

JOIN THE SILOS

Participants emphasised the need to foster collaboration and coordination among government agencies to work towards environmentally sustainable outcomes. It was suggested that one of our current strengths is our ability to 'join the silos' of fragmented government departments.

PROMOTE THE VALUE OF MAORI PERSPECTIVES

Participants emphasised the importance of fostering good communication practices when dealing with cross-cultural issues. In particular, it was noted that we could promote the value and benefits of Maori perspectives by giving them greater voice.

BE BOLD, BUT NOT TOO BOLD

To be a strong conscience for the environment, there were many comments from participants that the Commissioner needs to be more bold. However, some people also cautioned that the Commissioner needs to maintain his credibility within Parliament and the wider community. To retain the legitimacy of the PCE, it was therefore suggested that the Commissioner should be careful not to become too bold.

BE A 'BIG PICTURE' WHISTLE BLOWER

There was approval among participants for the Commissioner's focus on systems. They noted that the Commissioner should 'be a big picture whistle blower' to challenge existing systems and stimulate debate. They also suggested that the Commissioner should push boundaries and foster understanding of systems thinking.

FOLLOW UP MORE RIGOROUSLY

Participants highlighted a need to follow up more rigorously on the implementation of the Commissioner's recommendations. They also commented that we should report more widely on these follow-ups to place greater pressure on Government.

AMPLIFY THE RIPPLES

Communication was one of the strongest themes of our workshops. Participants endorsed the Commissioner's choice of topics for investigations (and their content) but argued that the impact of our work could be improved. Nonetheless, some people noted a need to find a balance between analysing issues and 'selling' their messages. It was therefore suggested that we should 'amplify the ripples' as much as possible by communicating messages to the most influential players.

BE A PCE, NOT A PCSD

There was consensus among participants that the PCE should not become a Commissioner for Sustainable Development. Some people were concerned that environmental and conservation issues could be lost in the debate about what constituted sustainable development. Nonetheless, it was suggested that the PCE could continue to stand on a strong ecological sustainability foundation and actively engage in the sustainable development debate.

Participants at our workshops highlighted a range of potential issues for investigation. No conclusions were reached, however, about which of these should be given strategic priority. Areas that received a lot of attention included:

- *Economic systems* – re-designing for more sustainable outcomes
- *Education for sustainability* – ways to capture 'heads, hearts and hands'
- *Energy management* – including climate change capacities
- *Environmental indicators* – evaluating sustainability reporting for well-being
- *Environmental values and ethics* – including bridging communities and science
- *Public participation* – fostering community engagement
- *Sustainability 'filters'* – auditing processes in central government
- *Tangata whenua involvement* – improving participation and co-management
- *The marine environment* – including management of fisheries and the coast
- *The Resource Management Act (1991)* – its impact on environmental outcomes
- *Water management* – managing water use and water quality.

Some participants advocated the importance of retaining a focus on urban ecosystems. In addition, there was debate about the audit function of the Commissioner. Some people suggested that we could achieve better outcomes by auditing agencies under existing institutional structures, to improve their environmental performance.

Participants also cautioned that we should not become a 'dumping ground' for issues because other public agencies are not picking them up.