

Hon James Shaw

Minister of Climate Change

Associate Minister for the Environment (Biodiversity)



25 January 2022

Rt. Hon. Simon Upton
Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment

By email: C/O anna.hooper@pce.parliament.nz

Dear Simon,

Thank you for your letter of 17 December 2021 to the Minister for the Environment, Hon. David Parker, the Minister of Finance, Hon. Grant Robertson, and myself. I am responding on behalf of Hon. Parker and Hon. Robertson, as Associate Minister for the Environment with delegated responsibilities for amendments to the Environmental Reporting Act 2015 (ERA).

I appreciate your commitment to improving the environmental monitoring and reporting system. I also understand your concerns regarding the length of time it has taken between the release of *Focusing Aotearoa New Zealand's environmental reporting system* in November 2019, and the drafting of the discussion document needed as part of the ERA amendment process.

I support your recommendations and consider that further work is needed to ensure that we engage with iwi and Māori in an appropriate and meaningful way, and that we explore the full range of available options. In addition, there are opportunities to align with the Resource Management (RM) Reform, which will require monitoring to utilise standardised methods and data management for nationally important matters such as environmental limits. The RM Reform and ERA amendments occurring simultaneously also provides an opportunity to co-ordinate legislative requirements to improve data collection and the reporting system.

Like many other government agencies, COVID-19 has had an impact on the progress of the Ministry for the Environment (the Ministry)'s priorities. The global pandemic has caused delays in legislative processes due to resourcing, the 2021 national lockdown, and de-prioritisation of some legislation to allow for the urgent progression of COVID-19 related policy and law.

Since the release of your November 2019 review, officials have been working to implement your recommendations where possible, prior to the legislative changes that will cement these improvements in reporting. The Ministry has established a science advisory panel, with proposals to make this a mandatory requirement under the ERA, piloted core indicators for sea level rise, and trialled new working arrangements with Statistics New Zealand (Stats NZ).

As you are aware, the consultation on the proposed amendments to the ERA will commence in February. I have shared a draft version of the consultation document: *Te whakawhanake i te pūnaha rīpoata taiao o Aotearoa - Improving Aotearoa New Zealand's environmental reporting system* with you. I look forward to receiving your feedback and submission.

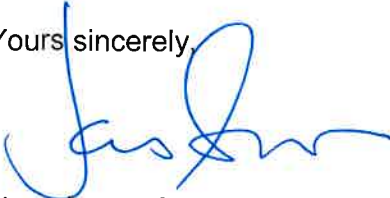
I am closely monitoring the timeframes needed to enact the proposed amendments to the ERA and remain confident that the ERA will be amended during this Parliamentary term. Cabinet agreed to my recommendation that this occurs.

I agree that authoritative environmental information and long-term investment is needed to measure the effectiveness of policies and assess the health of our environment. The Ministry commissioned a preliminary cost benefit analysis of the ERA proposals over the first 12 years of implementation. A full cost benefit analysis of all amendments to the ERA that I will be recommending to Cabinet will set out the estimated costs of the proposals, any changes recommended by our Treaty partners, and any other improvements to the ERA that come from the consultation process. This will provide a sound basis for an investment case to the Government for a long-term commitment to funding these amendments and other identified improvements to New Zealand's environmental monitoring and reporting system.

The Government set three goals for this Parliamentary term, and these were outlined in Hon. Robertson's Budget 2021 speech: to keep New Zealanders safe from COVID-19; to accelerate our recovery and rebuild; and to tackle our foundational challenges, in particular, housing affordability, climate change and child wellbeing. While this approach is targeted, it is favourable that Budget 2021 has funded targets and limits as part of the RM Reform, as it will result in improved environmental information that can be used in the longer-term.

Several other initiatives are underway that will improve the environmental monitoring and reporting system. For example, the Ministry is working on an Environment and Climate Research Strategy, the first Long-term Insights Briefing, the RM Reform; and connecting to other government initiatives like Stats NZ-led work on Ngā Tūtohu Aotearoa – Indicators Aotearoa New Zealand, Treasury's update on the Living Standard Framework Dashboard, local government initiatives such as Land Air Water Aotearoa (LAWA), National Environmental Monitoring Standards (NEMS), and environmental data management systems (EDMSs). Collaboration across the system will be vital to making significant improvements.

Thank you for your ongoing advice and oversight to decision makers.

Yours sincerely,


Hon. James Shaw

Associate Minister for the Environment (Biodiversity)

CC Hon. Grant Robertson
Minister of Finance

Hon. David Parker
Minister for the Environment