



ENVIRONMENT

Introduction

United**Future** recognises and supports the principle that people form an integral part of the ecosystem and, therefore, that they have a right to sustainably operate in and utilise the ecosystem. As a consequence, the basic needs and activities of people are the foundation upon which our environmental policy is based.

In our view, people must not be excluded from participating fully in the environment by laws that have an undue emphasis on preservation and prevention of change. United**Future** supports an environmental policy that embraces and protects the complex inter-relationship between people and the natural environment, and recognises the unique ability of people to deliberately influence and modify the environment by technological means. We acknowledge that the ability to modify and utilise the natural environment brings with it attendant responsibilities that must be understood and accepted, but these responsibilities must be addressed in a balanced commonsense manner. Attempting to somehow isolate people from the natural environment as though they don't have any real right to be there is not, from our viewpoint, the best way forward.

Sustainable use

United**Future** does not advocate an open-slather approach to environmental management. The environment is our basic life support system and must remain in good health. We understand that if people want to use the environment for outdoor recreation, economic development, or to simply admire and appreciate it, then it must be used in ways that do not cause permanent widespread damage or compromise the needs of future generations to meet their own needs – i.e. in ways that are sustainable.

Sharing the environment

The huge variety of outdoor user groups, ranging from conservationists to recreational groups, and from tourists to the outdoor-sports fraternity, must be recognised, fostered and respected. The law must explicitly acknowledge that all outdoor user organisations have equal rights to practice their individual pursuits and promote their own interests. It is important to ensure that the imposition of laws and regulations do not favour one type of group over another – all are to be regarded as equal stakeholders.

Decisions to be based on empirical evidence

We believe that when environmental decisions are made, they should be based on robust scientific data – both in terms of identifying a “problem”, and in terms of projecting what the actual outcome of a particular policy or remedy might be. We are concerned at the ideological, knee-jerk claims that appear to dominate current environmental debate, often with little evidence to support them. United**Future** believes that if this trend continues New Zealanders may be shut out from interacting with and enjoying the environmental diversity and recreational opportunities that this country has to offer.

Education is the best tool for protecting the environment.

United**Future** believes that balanced environmental education programmes in schools, as well as programmes targeting the general public, are a good method for ensuring quality environmental outcomes. If people act in an environmentally responsible manner of their own accord, there will be less need for cumbersome red tape and more emphasis on personal responsibility. Shutting people off from the environment through over-protection will lead to long-term apathy and a greater disregard for the environment.

Regulatory framework (overview)

- Seek greater use of multi-stakeholder decision-making processes and voluntary agreements over all aspects of environmental management (including on the Conservation estate);
- Remove the powers of the Minister of Conservation to block any development or activity that has been through the Environment Court and has subsequently received a resource consent;
- Continue to push for the establishment of National Environmental Standards on key environmental factors such as water quality that will protect the environment as well as giving local councils, businesses and individuals certainty as to what is required on a consistent nationwide basis;
- Establish a 'Friends of the Court' system for Environment Court hearings. A 'friend of the court' provides independent and objective advice to assist the court in making a decision. This makes it easier for community groups and NGOs, relieving them of the cost of court proceedings and having to employ expert consultants.

Land Management

- Promote the planting of native trees and bush along or close by all inland waterways where practical, in order to limit soil erosion, reduce agricultural runoff and generally improve rural water quality;
- Encourage landowners to return non-viable farming land to native regenerative forest, possibly with assistance from the QEII National Trust;
- Conduct an assessment as to the environmental impact of particular activities on specific land and soil types, and use the RMA to zone and manage accordingly (e.g. certain pumice soils in the central North Island and certain alluvial flood plains in the South Island are not suitable for dairying);
- Boost funding for Crown Research Institutes to conduct research into the health, wellbeing and productivity of New Zealand soils, and to develop new techniques for remedying any deterioration that has occurred over time;

Pollution Reduction

- Provide additional funding to Regional Councils for a program to clean up all of New Zealand's lakes and rivers that are suffering from accumulated pollution such as agricultural runoff;
- Promote initiatives to reduce the use of dependent pesticides;
- Implement a well-funded programme to rapidly clean up contaminated sites around New Zealand;
- Assist poorer communities and local authorities with the improvement (or provision) of wastewater and sewerage treatment scheme facilities by expanding the Sanitary Works Subsidy Scheme and increasing the maximum financial assistance rate to 80% of total cost.

Resource Management Act

- Continue to ensure that the Resource Management Act is a balanced piece of enabling legislation by requiring a biennial review of its operation with regard to the costs, delays and uncertainty faced by users;
- Require the Ministry for the Environment to monitor and benchmark Regional Authorities' administration of the Resource Management Act;

Genetic Modification

- Proceed with caution on all aspects of genetic modification technology using the Environmental Risk Management Authority's (ERMA) robust case-by-case assessment regime