

PCE Report DoC on Stewardship Land Released

Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, Dr Jan Wright, released her latest report, [*Investigating the future of conservation: The case of stewardship land*](#) ("the report"), on 21 August. The report addresses 'stewardship land' – a category of land that makes up about one-third of the land managed by the Department of Conservation – and the issues surrounding its use and classification.

There are two ways in which stewardship land differs from other land in the conservation estate. First, stewardship land is the only category of land that can be sold or swapped for areas of private land. The report focuses on the swapping of stewardship land in particular, rather than outright disposal. The Commissioner concludes that in her opinion, the current law and policy guidance is inadequate to safely account for potential conservation losses for anything other than 'minor' non-controversial exchanges. Her concern is that currently the system does not provide the transparency and certainty needed to be confident that large scale land swaps mean a "good deal for conservation".

The formal recommendations to the Minister of Conservation to address this, as interim measures, are that the Minister seek advice from the New Zealand Conservation Authority on the principles and processes that should be used, and that the Minister take direct responsibility for land swap proposals for land of "significant conservation value" in the meantime.

The second manner in which stewardship land differs from other public lands administered by DoC, is that it need only be managed so that its "natural and historic resources are protected", whereas other categories of conservation land have more specific management criteria. The Commissioner considers that this provides a low level of protection and recommends that DoC prepare a national strategy to identify areas of stewardship land of significant conservation value, and reclassify them accordingly.

A video of Dr Wright summarising the report can be found [here](#).

If you have any questions regarding the report, the processes to acquire stewardship land, or conservation land generally, please contact Stephen Christensen, Mark Christensen or Maree Baker-Galloway.