

12 October 2007

Auckland Regional Council Submission on Bioprospecting

Background

The Auckland region contains significant natural areas and ecosystems including kauri and broadleaved forests, scrublands, estuaries, wetlands and a diversity of native flora and fauna, including threatened species. The Auckland Regional Policy Statement contains policies and objectives to preserve and protect a diverse and representative range of the region's heritage. The Auckland Regional Council (ARC) has a role in the protection and restoration of biological diversity and its natural heritage through its statutory and non statutory advocacy, and resource management role. The ARC is also the major landowner in the Auckland region with 25 regional parks covering approximately 40,000ha. It runs a significant programme of biodiversity conservation, species management, and ecosystem restoration on its network of regional parks, working closely with the community and iwi. The ARC supports and encourages research on species and mainland island conservation on regional parks in co-ordination with research agencies and Universities. The ARC issues permits for research and plant collection on regional parks. Plant collection includes collection by nurseries for ecological restoration, commercial production, and for traditional use. Over 60,000 native plants are grown by the ARC's Regional Botanic Gardens each year for revegetation projects on Regional Parks. The Botanic Gardens promote the protection of threatened plants through the establishment of a threatened plant garden and a seed bank of threatened plants from the region. The ARC also supports the traditional use and holding of knowledge on native plants through the establishment of pa harakeke and the collection of plants. The level of bioprospecting in the Auckland Region is unknown apart from our knowledge of permits for collection and research.

Comments on Questions

New Zealand's Biological Resources

1a) Do you think we need to have good information about bioprospecting activities in NZ, including the type and nature of such activities?

Yes we do need good information. NZ is a biodiversity hot spot - its biodiversity is unique and has high endemism on an international scale. NZ's flora and fauna are not protected well by legislation – e.g. there is very little legislation to protect species of native flora.

We need to understand what impacts bioprospecting may have on natural populations of species in particular threatened species. Need to protect indigenous flora and fauna and their habitats from exploitation.

1b) What are your experiences of bioprospecting in NZ? ...

ARC currently processes permits for biodiversity research and plant collection, including traditional use on Regional Parks. The level of bioprospecting is unknown.

2) NZ's current frameworks to access biological resources:

Do you think the existing access frameworks would benefit from operating within a more co-ordinated and comprehensive framework?

Yes they would benefit from a more co-ordinated system. At present there is no guidance or regulations to protect biological materials and species. ARC at present has a relatively robust permit system. Need to ensure however that any centralised system would not replace the scrutiny required at a local level. Need to ensure that any national developed focus is aware of regional responsibilities for land and biodiversity protection. Significant areas of NZ's lowland biodiversity also occur on private land. A framework would need to address collection of biological material on private land.

A comprehensive Bioprospecting framework for NZ:

3a) Do you think NZ should have a comprehensive policy framework to manage bioprospecting activity?

Yes, more guidance is needed.

3b) What are your views on the proposed vision and policy principles to guide NZ's bioprospecting policy?

The vision needs to address the need to protect NZ's unique indigenous biodiversity, ecosystems and flora and fauna. This is not expressed in the vision at present.

3ii) Policy scope:

Must not restrict non commercial research and collection of biological material for genuine ecological restoration, for traditional use, and also not restrict research on pest control for biodiversity protection.

Which kinds of biological resources should be accessed for bioprospecting?

Need to include all tiers of access – central, local government and private. Need to consult with private landowners and groups such as Federated Farmers, QEII National Trust, and NZ Landcare Trust.

Emphasis needs to be on indigenous biological material and providing a clear framework and protection for diversity, habitats, ecosystems, threatened species and natural genetic variability. The natural habitats and natural genetic variability of species need to be protected and safeguarded.

3ii) Non commercial activities?

Must ensure that non commercial research and collection activities for biodiversity conservation and traditional use are not restricted.

3ii) Administrative frameworks

National focus and co-ordination would be useful, however needs to ensure existing permitting structures already in place for conservation research and plant collection for restoration are retained.

5) International bioprospecting frameworks

Need to give effect to NZ's obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity and other international conventions, e.g. wetlands, plant and wildlife conservation, trade in endangered species.