

# Statement of Intent

## 2011-2014

Presented to the House of Representatives pursuant to  
section 39 of the Public Finance Act 1989



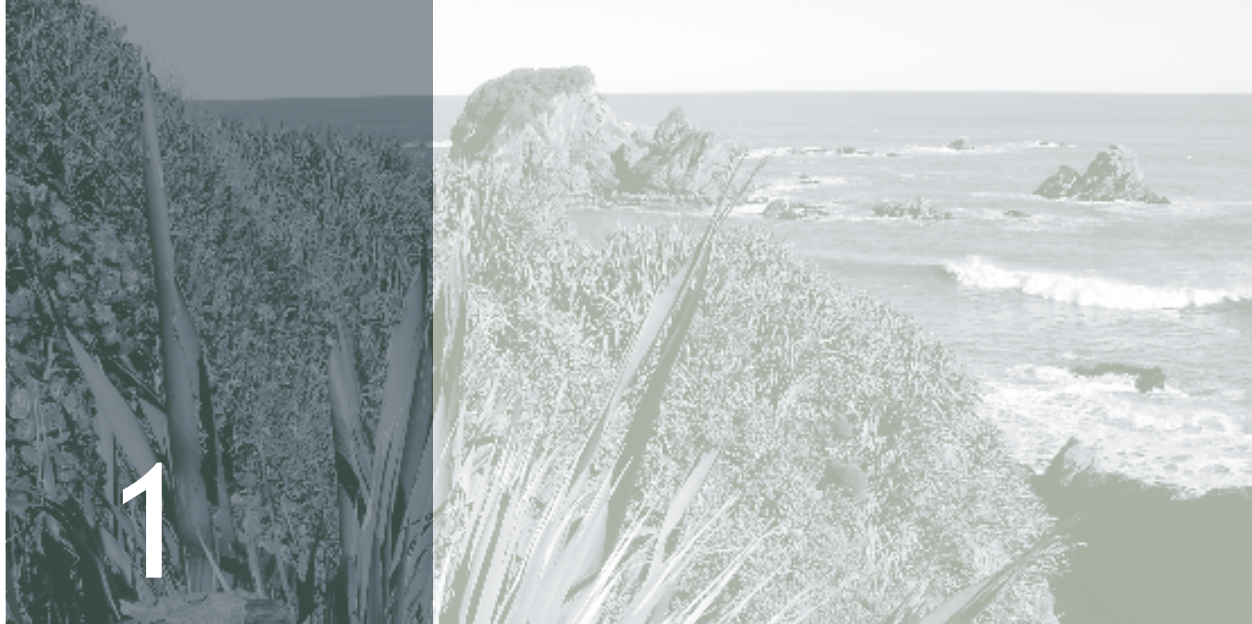
Parliamentary Commissioner  
for the **Environment**  
Te Kaitiaki Taiao a Te Whare Pāremata

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## Commissioner's Introduction

As I enter the last year of my five year term I appreciate more than ever the opportunities provided by this challenging and rewarding role. Early in my term I said in a speech that one of my aims was to help people understand the importance of getting beyond perceptions about the environment -- to carefully and systematically prioritise our environmental challenges. This remains a testing ambition.

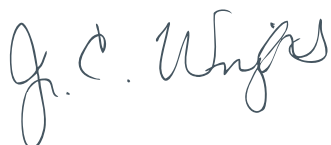
There is no limit to the number and variety of investigations I might undertake. A significant proportion of my work continues to build on previous reports while new areas of interest continue to emerge. For instance, my report on mining on conservation land has led to an interest in the broader issue of commercial use of the Department of Conservation estate.

Reports presented to the House of Representatives in the last year included the potential large scale use of lignite and a strategic look at biofuels. As I write this, staff are intensively working on the next report – an investigation into the use of the controversial pest control toxin 1080. During the year I have also provided advice on a range of policy issues and bills including the restructuring of the electricity industry, air pollution, and Emissions Trading Scheme regulations. Central to my role is continuing to engage with and offer advice to all MPs. Indeed this year I have begun an email newsletter directed to MPs to keep them informed of the work of the office.

Looking to the future there may be changes ahead for the nature of the work in the office. In November, when introducing legislation to establish the new Environmental Protection Authority, the Minister for the Environment indicated that, within the context of environmental agencies, the role of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment is the overall systems auditor. He has also indicated that this is likely to include responsibility for state of the environment reporting at the national level.

These changes would bring both challenges and opportunities. If Parliament determines that I am to gain these functions, I will endeavour to bring the same rigour and commitment that I strive for in all my work. It is of critical importance to me is that the work my office produces is seen as independent, accurate, and practical.

In preparing this Statement of Intent, I have consulted the Speaker of the House of Representatives in his capacity as the "Responsible Minister" for Vote Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. C. Wright". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Dr Jan Wright

**Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment**



# 2

## About the Commissioner

The Environment Act 1986 established the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment as an Officer of Parliament and laid out the Commissioner's functions and powers. The Commissioner is appointed for a five-year term by the Governor-General on the recommendation of the House of Representatives.

The Commissioner has seven statutory functions under the Environment Act to investigate environmental issues, processes and public agencies. As an Officer of Parliament, the Commissioner has a unique opportunity to provide Parliament with independent advice in its consideration of any matters that may have an impact on the quality of the environment. The Commissioner also communicates her advice to a wider public audience.

### 2.1 Statutory functions

The functions of the Commissioner in section 16(1) of the Environment Act 1986 are:

- a) review the system of agencies and processes established by the government to manage the allocation, use, and preservation of natural and physical resources, and report to the House of Representatives
- b) investigate the effectiveness of environmental planning and environmental management carried out by public authorities, and advise them on remedial action
- c) investigate any matter where the environment may be or has been adversely affected, advise on preventive measures or remedial action, and report to the House of Representatives
- d) at the request of the House of Representatives or any select committee, report on any petition, bill, or other matter which may have a significant effect on the environment
- e) on the direction of the House of Representatives, inquire into any matter that has had or may have a substantial and damaging effect on the environment and report to the House
- f) undertake and encourage the collection and dissemination of information relating to the environment
- g) encourage preventive measures and remedial actions for the protection of the environment.

## 2.2 Mission and values

### Mission

**To maintain or improve the quality of the environment by providing robust independent advice that influences decisions**

### Values

Excellence	The questions we raise and the solutions we propose are based on sound science and reasoned argument. We are accountable to the people of New Zealand and deliver value for the funding we receive.
Determination	We bravely and constructively question the status quo. We persist in communicating the results of our work in different ways to maximise its usefulness.
Generosity of spirit	We work together in an open collegial way, sharing our expertise, listening carefully and not rushing to judgment. We actively acknowledge decisions and actions that benefit the environment.
Innovation	Our independence empowers us to think freely and creatively. We strive to get beyond describing problems to proposing solutions.
Effectiveness	Others trust and respond to our advice. Our work has a lasting and tangible impact on the New Zealand environment.



# 3

## Operating Intentions

### 3.1 Strategic direction

The functions of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment are broad and there are many environmental issues worthy of consideration. Prioritisation is thus a key part of strategic planning.

Several criteria are used for prioritising potential projects. For instance, environmental problems are not equally important; an environmental impact that is irreversible and cumulative is worse than one which is not.

Potential work is scoped to see whether there is an opportunity to add value, since it is important to avoid duplicating the work of others. The independence of the Commissioner is a basis for adding value that is not available to government agencies. An investigation that can lead to practical recommendations or provide clarity on difficult or contested topics is likely to be ranked ahead of one that does not.

One prerequisite for being able to add value is the capability of staff to undertake analysis that provides a firm basis for advice. Staff work collaboratively in teams on issues where their combined skills can be used for maximum effect.

Another prerequisite for adding value is timeliness. Advice is most valuable when it is given at a time when it can be incorporated into decision making. This means that the work programme is not set in concrete and that reprioritisation and reframing of projects sometimes occurs.

With a potential role in reporting on the state of the environment at the national level, a new criterion for prioritising projects has been added. For the short term at least, ideas are tested as to whether they can usefully contribute to our knowledge or understanding of issues that are likely to arise in the reporting context, in addition to the primary aim of the project.

Various news and information sources are used to keep staff updated on environmental issues. The Commissioner from time to time presents her work to interested groups (often as a conference speaker), and also visits different parts of the country to gain a better understanding of local issues.

Responding to public concerns and inquiries remains an important activity in the office. Sometimes concerns expressed by members of the public can highlight an issue and play a role in triggering an investigation.

## 3.2 Nature of outputs

A variety of outputs result from the work programme. The outputs include:

- Reports of investigations and reviews that are tabled in Parliament. Under standing orders, each of these is referred to a Select Committee which subsequently reports to the House.
- Presentations to Select Committees on investigations and other matters.
- Provision of advice and/or briefing of MPs on investigations and other matters.
- Advice and submissions on Bills and Inquiries to Select Committees.
- Submissions on proposed regulations.
- Responding to calls for public submissions on environmental matters where appropriate.
- Update reports on responses to recommendations made by the Commissioner.
- Support for inter-Parliamentary delegations.
- Presentations on environmental issues to a wide variety of groups.
- Responses to concerns and enquiries from members of the public.
- Ongoing development of the website [www.pce.parliament.nz](http://www.pce.parliament.nz)
- Engagement with the media.
- A regular email newsletter informing MPs of the work of the office.

The most significant investment of time occurs when undertaking investigations, although working in teams is one way to reduce the length of time taken. However the detailed understanding that results from report writing becomes the building block for further work, such as briefings to MPs and Select Committees, submissions to public consultations, and presentations to conferences and interested parties. The nature of this process, where the original report continues to be promoted also allows for the work to evolve according to changing conditions.

Conversely a submission may trigger a more in depth investigation, such as occurred with the issue of mining on conservation land which developed into a full investigation. However important work is also undertaken which is not presented in report form – such as the range of activities on the topic of climate change, which includes being an adviser and submitter to Select Committees, presenting to inter-Parliamentary delegations and participating in public consultation. Where submissions are made outside the Parliamentary process copies of advice are sent to the relevant party spokespeople. It should be noted that interaction with Parliament is guided by a Code of Practice.

### 3.3 Areas of focus

**Climate change** is the most important environmental issue facing the world and will remain an area where the office will be active. Connections to climate change policies will continue to feature in reports and advice. Climate change remains an area where the dissemination of information is especially appreciated.

**Electricity** has an obvious connection to climate change because thermal power plants emit carbon dioxide. And all new power plants, renewable or not, have environmental impacts. How and where electricity is generated will remain a topic of ongoing interest.

**Water** management remains one of New Zealand's greatest environmental challenges. Understanding the science of water quality is vital for managing this hugely complex issue. Work is underway on the extent to which pressures on water quality can be mitigated and on how we might best measure and report on water quality.

**Biodiversity** is a new focus of attention, with a report on the use of 1080 due to be completed before the end of this financial year. As a result the office is building its expertise in this area. How biodiversity might be best measured and reported on will also be considered.

**Transport fuel** has been an active area in the past and is likely to continue to be so. Proposals to turn low-grade Southland lignite coal deposits into diesel and other products illustrate the tension between energy security and our international commitment to tackling climate change, and highlight problems with the Emissions Trading Scheme. Work done on a strategy for developing biofuels is also pertinent here and could be extended.

**Mining** especially on conservation land, will remain an issue that is monitored. The investigation of this subject last year has generated a wider interest in the commercial use of conservation land. Seabed mining may be another focus.

**Environmental agencies and processes** are expected to undergo more change. The Environmental Protection Authority will be created as a Crown Entity in July this year, and monitoring its evolution as it gains more functions and powers will be important. Further amendments to the Resource Management Act are likely. It is probable that the introduction of an Environmental Reporting Bill will have significant implications for the work of the office.

# 4

## Performance

In accordance with the Public Finance Act 1989, performance is measured along three dimensions:

- Impact.
- Cost-effectiveness.
- Organisational health.

### 4.1 Impact

The main goal of the Commissioner is to provide advice that is taken up by Parliament or other decision makers. For the advice to be well regarded it must be timely, soundly based and well communicated. Impact is tempered by the fact that to create real change usually requires action on behalf of the Executive, and such action can take considerable time to work its way through the policy process.

The key indicator as to whether the Commissioner is having an impact relates to the uptake of her recommendations from reports tabled in the House, and submissions made to Select Committees (Table 1). It is important that the advice is acknowledged (responded to) and ideally recommendations are either adopted in their entirety or at least in part. Responses to investigations and advice are monitored by examining how the issues raised develop over time. These findings are reported in summary form through the Annual Report and in more detail through update reports. These evaluations often inform, and sometimes generate, future work. For example, activity continues on issues raised by reports that were published more than two years ago.

**Table 1 Performance measures and targets for assessing impact**

Measure	Target
Proportion of recommendations:	
• responded to	100%
• adopted or partially adopted	65%
Evaluate outcomes from reports and advice	100%

## 4.2 Cost-effectiveness

Value for money is a guiding principle that is incorporated into day-to-day operations as well as the wider work of the office. The Commissioner actively engages with MPs on her reports and continually strives to present material in a way that is useful and relevant.

Cost-effectiveness also means ensuring each dollar is spent wisely and this approach is incorporated into everyday operations. The procurement policy for example, states that a “value for money” approach should be taken when procuring goods or services. Consideration is also given to environmental issues such as the use of energy efficient products and technologies where relevant.

The office is also participating in the ‘All of Government’ procurement process which has resulted in reduced expenditure on a number of items such as costs of photocopying and stationery supplies. It is hoped that as the ‘All of Government’ process expands over time further savings will be possible.

A culture of actively pursuing continuous improvement means continually reviewing the way things are done and looking for ways to improve. For example, producing reports which are well presented, and which communicate the issues clearly, is an ongoing priority. With this in mind, the office now has the capability to lay out reports internally, reducing the costs associated with printing, and streamlining the production process. Similarly illustrations such as figures and maps are now developed ‘in-house’, allowing greater fine tuning of the way in which material is presented.

The performance measures used to assess cost-effectiveness are in Table 2.

**Table 2 Performance measures and targets for assessing value for money**

Measure	Target
Remuneration increases consistent with public sector expectations	100%
Supplier contracts consistent with procurement policy	100%

### 4.3 Organisational health

The Commissioner's staff must have the right skills in order for the Commissioner to deliver advice that is of high quality. That means retaining top performing staff and attracting high calibre applicants. It also means the office is recognised as a workplace in which achievement, challenge and results are expected and delivered.

The measures with which organisational health is evaluated are in Table 3.

**Table 3 Performance measures and targets for assessing organisational health**

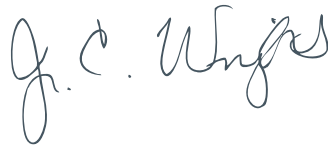
Measure	Target
Performance management plans in place and annual performance reviews undertaken	100%
Personal development plans in place and uptake of budgeted training and development activities	100%
Annual unplanned staff turnover	Equal or better than public service average as reported by the State Services in their most recent <i>Human Resource Capability Survey of Public Service Departments</i>

# Chief Executive's Statement of Responsibility

## Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment

In signing this statement, I acknowledge that I am responsible for the information contained in the *Information Supporting the Estimates* relating to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, Vote: Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment.

The information has been prepared in accordance with the Public Finance Act 1989. It is also consistent with the proposed appropriations set out in the Appropriation (2011/2012 Estimates) Bill, and with existing appropriations and financial authorities.



Dr Jan Wright  
Chief Executive  
Parliamentary Commissioner  
for the Environment

Date: 31 March 2011



Sarah Clark  
Chief Financial Officer

Date: 31 March 2011