

THE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT REFORM – WILL IT FIT THE BILL?

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He notes that many environmentalists have taken the Brundtland Report as a message to lower growth in the "overdeveloped" world and to think of ways to change the unequal division of wealth around the globe. But on the other hand, others, usually non-environmentalists, have taken the term "sustainable growth" to mean that the poorest countries will increase their material wealth while the wealthiest countries will not have to make any sacrifices.

The implications of increasing the world's middle class were dramatically shown by a 1983 study by N Keyfitz entitled "World Resources and the Middle Class". The world middle class is considered to be in the order of 800 million people at present. Most of those consume at rates 8-10 times higher than people in the developing world. This means that 800 million people have a global resources impact equivalent to 6.6 billion people in the developing nations. An expanded middle class of 1.6 billion would have a resources impact equal to that of 12.8 billion people in the developing world.

Sustaining What?

Another question that has been vexing those interested in the notion of sustainability is: exactly what are we trying to sustain when we talk of sustainable development? Is it the environment, jobs, economic progress? Is it all of them at once, or are these goals inevitably in conflict?

For example, sufficient work has now been carried out by scientists to allow us to predict the effects of logging of native forests on native species such as kaka. In Western Southland continued development – that is, logging – will obviously jeopardise the sustainability of kaka. On the other hand, the Ministry of Forestry continues to claim that the logging regime they have been operating in the Western Southland forests is sustainable because no more timber will be taken out than will be allowed to regrow. Meanwhile, people in the timber town of Tuatapere will argue that their community viability is at risk if logging is halted. The fact that there might not be any community left in a decade because of the high rate of cut is not an argument they wish to discuss – their concerns are more with the here and now.

Sustainability – For Whom?

Humans being humans, it is perhaps understandable that they have chosen to measure sustainable development in terms of the impact it will have on them. However, there are possibly 20 million other species on the planet, many of which have suffered because of human belief that nature must be "mastered." In the past 2000 years *Homo sapiens* has exterminated 3 percent of the Earth's mammal species. In the last 150 years extinctions have increased 50-fold. At this rate it will not be long before many of the remaining 4062 mammal species are gone. All over the world, plant and animal species are disappearing at the rate of 20,000 a year.

What is called for, argue some environmentalists, is a completely new way of looking at the world. The Brundtland Commission also agrees that humans are going to have to adopt a new ethical approach – one in which other species are valued for their own sake, in which rainforests are not mea-

THE INTRODUCTION of this Bill serves as a milestone for resource management in New Zealand, and is intended as the first comprehensive and integrated review of the laws governing the management of our natural resources. Town and country planning, water and soil management, land, water, air and noise pollution, waste disposal, hazardous substances control, coastal management, mining, and geothermal consent laws are all dealt with in the new Resource Management Bill.

The new Bill promotes the concept of sustainable management as its purpose. However, its specific wording will not necessarily ensure that the management of New Zealand's natural and physical resources are indeed sustainable! The Bill appears more concerned with balancing destruction and protection of the environment, rather than providing a clear ecological perspective to ensure New Zealand's development is sustainable.

Mining

Under the new Resource Management Bill the Minister of Energy has sole responsibility for the granting of mineral and energy licences. The mining companies can use the courts to force their way onto private land or public conservation land against the wishes of the landowners. While mineral management programmes are now required, these will not necessarily be consistent with the sustainability objectives of the law.

Heritage Protection Orders

Areas or places of significance for their natural, scientific, historical or cultural importance can now be protected through heritage orders. These orders have stop-work notices, and enforce protection with compensation. This will give designated heritage sites better protection to survive against uncaring landowners, although the compensation provisions will ensure it is limited to small sites.

Pollution and Hazardous Substances

All discharge of contaminants to land, air and water must have a consent. The Bill also promotes the best practicable option (BPO) approach to minimise pollution. A Hazards Control Commission will be established with responsibilities to include monitoring, enforcement and advice to the Minister on regulations for

standards and controls in the management of hazardous substances. This is a good step forward.

Coastal Management

Coastal management now becomes a shared responsibility between regional government and the Minister of Conservation. The Minister of Conservation will prepare national coastal policies. Coastal management plans are to be prepared by regional government and DoC, and require the approval of the Minister of Conservation.

Water Management

The Bill carries over existing water classifications, minimum flows and levels, and places them under regional resource management plans. National water conservation orders remain, but local orders have been lost.

Summary

Overall the new resource management law is a major step forward when compared to the existing system, especially regarding the protection of our coasts. The main drawbacks in the Resource Management Bill are:

- A muddled definition of sustainability which provides a let out for continued non-sustainable development.
- Loss of the Conservation Minister's veto over mining in national parks, nature reserves and other specially protected areas.
- Exemption of mining and mineral development from key principles of environmental protection.
- Lack of energy management or planning means no control on the forces behind the Greenhouse Effect or energy drain off from our unique geothermal systems.
- Loss of public comment rights on mining during a transition period before old district schemes expire.
- Loss of local water conservation notices to multiple-use water plans where development usually takes precedence.
- A tradeable water right system that could lead to reduced water flows in rivers and high local water pollution.
- National standards that are not binding on regional and local councils and can be overturned by these councils.
- A massive devolution of responsibility to local authorities without adequate safeguards to ensure high standards are set and enforced for environmental management.