



A review of the funding and prioritisation of environmental research in New Zealand

Media release

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, Simon Upton, is urging the Government to reconsider the way it funds environmental research in New Zealand.

“New Zealanders are entitled to know that the environmental research they fund is focused on addressing the most important challenges we face,” he explains.

“But the way public funds are currently invested in environmental research is fragmented, making it hard to respond to long-term environmental problems such as climate change, freshwater quality and biodiversity loss.

“It is time to ensure that we are funding environmental research in a way that accommodates the long game that many of its researchers have to play,” the Commissioner says in a report released today.

The report, *A review of the funding and prioritisation of environmental research in New Zealand*, asks what gets funded and why.

It outlines how the current funding allocation system for environmental research is disconnected from government priorities, and proposes replacing it, in part, with a funding system solely focused on environmental research.

“No single agency is responsible for ensuring that our investment in environmental research spans the range of knowledge gaps that need to be filled.

“There should be a strong link between the priorities the Government articulates and where the funding is allocated,” the Commissioner says.

The Commissioner is calling for an environmental research strategy for New Zealand to be developed by the Ministry for the Environment.

Dedicated, long-term funding for environmental research would be ringfenced – similar to money set aside for the Health Research Council of New Zealand – and explicitly linked to the proposed environmental research strategy.

The Commissioner proposes two models for disbursing the research funds, one of which would involve the establishment of a dedicated Environmental Research Council.

Under both options, funds would be allocated by people with strong experience in what environmental research entails, and mātauranga Māori would be integrated in a way that allows both mātauranga and science to prosper.

In the 2018/19 financial year, total investment in environmental research ranged from between \$427 million and \$516 million.

“Whatever estimate you choose, it is not a small sum so we need to be sure that it is being spent on the things that matter.”

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