

CONSERVATION

Our vision

Conservation is the preservation of New Zealand's unique environment, as a good thing in and of itself. It is also essential to New Zealand's identity, the basis of our clean green image, and the foundation of the economy. From the establishment of the very first national park at Tongariro in 1887 to the network of parks and marine reserves that exist today, New Zealanders have placed high value on the wild landscapes and beautiful mountains and lakes that define our country.

Labour led the world in 1987 by establishing the Department of Conservation (DOC) as an agency dedicated to the protection of our natural environment, as well as to providing opportunities for Kiwis to enjoy the great outdoors. Labour holds the values and aspirations supporting conservation and biodiversity protection it always has.

We not only value investing in DOC as our frontline conservation agency, but also value the contribution communities make to the conservation effort. And we value investing in facilities that support Kiwis to get out and enjoy the natural world.

Our natural environment is central to New Zealand's sense of identity, and our conservation estate¹ is a major contributor to the economy. Public conservation land provides essential and valuable ecosystem services such as clean water, flood and erosion control, and carbon sequestration – as well as opportunities for healthy recreation.

The health of our economy depends on New Zealand preserving and enhancing our land, air, water and indigenous wildlife. Major export earners (tourism, dairy, horticulture, forestry, meat, wool, fisheries, and film) now leverage an internationally competitive premium from the country's 'clean green/100% pure' sustainable branding. Conservation needs to be integrated into our economic future as 'Brand New Zealand, clean, green and clever'.

New Zealand's public conservation estate and our unique plants, animals and landscapes therefore not only have very significant intrinsic, cultural and social value, but they are also a key part of the country's economic infrastructure that must be actively maintained and enhanced.

Labour will continue to encourage private sector investment into conservation projects. Businesses are increasingly switching on to the commercial benefits of conservation initiatives. The government needs to work with such businesses to deliver greater conservation gains than we could achieve alone. However, our focus will always lie with achieving conservation outcomes rather than financial gain.

¹ Conservation estate, public conservation estate, and public conservation land are interchangeable terms.

Biodiversity – Protecting and Enhancing our Natural Heritage

Most of our native plants, animals, birds and insects are found only in New Zealand, i.e. they are 'endemic' and unique. However, humans, along with introduced animals, have eliminated many of New Zealand's indigenous species. At least 2000 more indigenous species continue to be threatened with extinction.

The maintenance and enhancement of our remaining indigenous biodiversity is crucial not only to the health of New Zealand's environment but to our economic future.

New Zealand has expertise in species protection and recovery. More species are on a path to recovery because of better pest control techniques and the creation of predator-free offshore island sanctuaries. Kiwi sanctuaries have also been created on the mainland.

Biodiversity on public and private land

Labour aims that in 10 years' time New Zealand's wildlife population will be stabilised and increasing, with species coming off the endangered list regularly.

The New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy (NZBS) for halting the decline of our indigenous biodiversity has been in place since 2001. But we must constantly refine our efforts to ensure they are focused in the right places. This includes protecting and restoring threatened habitats such as wetlands.

Labour will review the success or otherwise of the New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy in its first ten years and action the results of the review.

Labour will change the name of the NZBS to the New Zealand Nature Protection Strategy so that its purpose is more immediately clear.

National has drafted a National Policy Statement (NPS) on Biodiversity under the Resource Management Act 1991, but has not yet gazetted it. National's NPS is likely to be inadequate in terms of biodiversity protection required on private land, especially in the face of intensifying agriculture. This will put our clean, green brand at risk.

In our review of the NZBS, Labour will include the need for any changes to the biodiversity NPS to align it with the New Zealand Nature Protection Strategy.

Labour will make any necessary changes to the NPS on Biodiversity to make it truly effective and to align it with the New Zealand Nature Protection Strategy.

Pest and weed control

Pests – whether already here, or still to arrive despite biosecurity measures – continue to pose a significant challenge to our most critically-threatened species. Without active pest control, making headway in the protection and enhancement of our native plant and animal life is impossible.

Effective pest control not only protects biodiversity, but prevents the collapse of forest canopy and the resulting erosion of hillsides. Carbon stores are also protected, and this enhances New Zealand's ability to respond to global carbon accounting.

There are a range of tools available for controlling pests. DOC and other pest control agencies need to better explain to the public why tools such as aerial 1080 are the best available option in particular situations – at least until new and alternative tools are developed.

Labour will continue to resource weed and integrated pest control on public conservation land to protect threatened species, ecosystems and significant landscapes.

Labour will support the use of aerial 1080 as an effective tool for landscape-scale pest control (especially of possums, rats and stoats), while new and improved alternative tools are developed.

Labour will explore enhanced opportunities for collaboration and partnerships with private and community sector investment in pest and weed control on public and private land.

Sanctuaries and mainland islands

Dedicated sanctuaries continue to prove the most effective incubators for rejuvenating populations of threatened native birds and other wildlife.

Labour will promote predator-free island sanctuaries, and be vigilant in protecting them from re-infestation. An island sanctuary could be as large as Rakiura/Stewart Island.

The development of ‘mainland islands’, possibly including large peninsula areas such as the Coromandel, Mahia, Banks and Otago peninsulas, can assist with eradication or intensive control of predators on a landscape scale.

Labour will promote ‘mainland islands’ with a view to eradication or intensive control of predators on a landscape-scale as technology and techniques allow.

Labour will examine the feasibility of turning large peninsula areas into mainland islands.

Creating sanctuaries supports the rejuvenation of our most precious wildlife. Sanctuaries can also create educational and economic benefits for a region. Success stories – such as Kapiti Island, Tiritiri Matangi Island and the Waitakeres “Ark in the Park” – are safe havens for some of our rarest species and within reach of our two largest urban centres. They attract thousands of tourists and visitors each year.

Labour will promote recreational and tourism opportunities alongside species recovery work and predator free sanctuaries.

Additions to conservation estate

The public conservation estate includes about a third of New Zealand’s land area. Much of this is steep, mountainous terrain. The last Labour government focused on redressing this imbalance. Valuable ecosystems – from lowland forests and wetlands, to tussock grasslands and coastal areas – were given priority for protection.

Labour will continue to make additions to the conservation estate with priority for under-represented ecosystems and natural features, such as North Island lowland forests, wetlands, and iconic areas needing protection from development pressures.

Labour will continue to make additions to land held for public conservation through dedicated funds (e.g. the Nature Heritage Fund) and other means (e.g. any remaining tenure review processes).

Labour will ensure that the management of any additions to public conservation land is adequately funded.

There is concern that under National developers can swap degraded land with DOC in exchange for access to pristine land, say for a skifield.

Labour will ensure that inappropriate swaps of public conservation land cannot take place.

Reviewing status of stewardship land

When DOC was established in 1987, it inherited land from predecessor agencies. Some of this land had not been adequately defined and classified in law, and so as a holding position it was passed to DOC as 'stewardship land'.

There has still been no systematic classification of stewardship land into conservation land categories (e.g. reserve, sanctuary, conservation area) – or a systematic identification of land that does not warrant DOC administration. The 'limbo' status of stewardship land can cause practical problems, for example, as to whether hydro or mining development is appropriate for an area of stewardship land.

Labour will begin a systematic classification of stewardship land, or its removal from DOC administration where appropriate.

Protecting wild rivers

Many of our wild rivers have been lost to hydro development. The landscape and biodiversity values of wild rivers have become scarcer. And National has undermined the value of water conservation orders, especially by overriding them in Canterbury. This is the opposite of Labour's view – if anything, water conservation orders need to be strengthened and expanded.

Labour does not believe we should keep damming our remaining wild and scenic rivers. Alternative means of renewable electricity generation are now available. We need to take stock of all the costs – including the environmental costs – of damming them. This can be done in a number of ways.

Labour will strengthen the National Policy Statement for Renewable Electricity Generation 2011 by encouraging renewable generation with low environmental impacts, with a particular view to protecting rivers from being dammed.

Labour will restore the primacy of water conservation orders in Canterbury, i.e. to where they were before National overrode them.

Labour will investigate the strengthening and expansion of the water conservation order mechanism.

This protection of wild rivers is complemented by Labour's views on water management. See our **Water** policy.

Making the Mokihinui into national park

The Mokihinui is an outstanding wild river and flows through stewardship land. This area is of such conservation quality that it would justify being added to the adjacent Kahurangi National Park. However, SOE Meridian Energy wants to dam the Mokihinui for hydro power.

Labour will save the Mokihinui River from being dammed. This will include moving to have the area added to Kahurangi National Park.

Labour will ask the New Zealand Conservation Authority to formally investigate adding the Mokihinui river area to Kahurangi National Park.

Labour will in the meantime direct Meridian Energy not to proceed with its hydro dam proposal and/or decline to make the area available to Meridian Energy.

New Chums beach

New Chums beach in the Coromandel is one of the finest beaches in the world but is threatened by development. It can be protected by the public purchase of adjacent land, or covenanting of it, to prevent development. This will require agreement among the various parties involved.

Labour is determined that New Chums beach will be saved for the enjoyment of present and future generations. We are also determined that its untouched beauty will continue to be part of New Zealand's 'clean green/100% pure' sustainable branding to the world.

Labour will explore means by which to save New Chums beach for the enjoyment of present and future generations and as part of our sustainable branding to the world.

Promoting Conservation by DOC and the Whole Community

DOC is our frontline conservation agency. It manages about a third of the country's land for conservation purposes, as well as marine reserves and marine mammal sanctuaries, and carries out pest control work. DOC is responsible for protecting our most critically endangered species, and operates recovery programmes for our rarest species including kiwi, kokako and takahe.

DOC also manages historic sites and buildings, and runs an extensive 'outdoors infrastructure' of huts, tracks and visitor facilities.

DOC should promote conservation nationally, and advocate strongly for it publicly and at all levels of government. This role has been weakened under National.

DOC should also be ensuring that tourist operators, energy companies, farmers and other users of public conservation land do so fairly, sustainably and in a way that protects our heritage.

Labour is committed to DOC being able to carry out all these public service roles effectively. Its work should be founded on the best ecological science and practical conservation management experience.

Labour will ensure that DOC plays a leading role in maintaining New Zealand's biodiversity and an independent statutory role in advocating for the conservation of natural and historic resources.

Community-led conservation

Private, volunteer and community-led conservation initiatives are essential to the overall drive to protect New Zealand's natural heritage and promote our clean, green image.

Many ordinary New Zealanders have cared for forest and wetland biodiversity on private as well as public land. We must support their enthusiasm and hard work, which has produced some dramatic results.

Labour believes we can do even better, by exploring innovative new ways to engage the community in conservation.

Labour will explore new ways of connecting and enabling in conservation, in order to grow grassroots education and participation in conservation projects at a community level.

Labour will retain contestable funds to support and encourage community-led conservation work.

Enhancing stakeholder involvement

There are many conservation stakeholders – or potential conservation stakeholders – including iwi, local government, community organisations, and private sector businesses. Local conservation boards and the New Zealand Conservation Authority provide valuable community input into conservation planning and management.

But we need to think even smarter on conservation – and that includes more collaboration between conservation stakeholders and DOC.

OWN OUR FUTURE



Working closely with stakeholders will deliver greater conservation gains than the government could ever achieve alone. There will be benefits to stakeholders as well. Businesses, for example, are increasingly appreciating the commercial benefits of conservation initiatives.

Labour will actively pursue iwi, local government, community and corporate partnerships for conservation projects, including, for example, community education and involvement in practical conservation projects such as the development of 'mainland island' sanctuaries.

DOC has an important role in the Treaty of Waitangi settlement process. DOC deals with the mechanisms of the settlement process, but should also be focused on collaborative conservation outcomes. Free and unfettered access for New Zealanders to conservation areas will be protected.

Labour will review DOC's role in the Treaty settlement process, with a view to it being more focused on collaborative conservation outcomes. The important role of iwi as enduring stewards of the land will be recognised.

Helping private landowners

DOC will continue to lend its expertise to identify and protect indigenous ecosystems on private land. Alongside funding for restoration and recovery work, help is available for private landowners who want to legally protect valuable conservation areas.

Hundreds of thousands of hectares have been protected with the support of targeted funding.

Labour will encourage private landowners to protect conservation values on their land, support them with specific funds and conservation trusts, and promote exemption for legally-protected conservation areas from rating by local authorities.

These initiatives will be complementary to an effective National Policy Statement on Biodiversity.

Environmental education and conservation skills

The future of our natural landscapes, native plants and animals and unique marine life lies in our hands and the hands of those who will come after us. We benefit greatly from looking after these natural assets.

Labour will seek to educate the public about the wider social and economic benefits that result from keeping the public conservation estate unspoilt.

We must encourage future generations to value conservation, engage with nature, and understand environmental sustainability by initiatives such as the last Labour government's Enviro-Schools programme.

Labour will reinstate the Enviro-Schools programme.

Our young people are the skill base for frontline conservation work in the future.

Labour will build the available pool of conservation rangers, planners and biodiversity specialists by developing a conservation apprenticeship programme.

This programme will be targeted at school-leavers who are contemplating working in the conservation sector. Its aim will be to provide a strong grounding in practical conservation management. On successfully completing the programme, some graduates may seek work through DOC while others may go on to employment in local government or community-led conservation work.

Outdoor Recreation – Helping Kiwis enjoy our Heritage

Kiwis have a long and proud history of getting out into the great outdoors and exploring the wonderful natural heritage our country has to offer. Access to this heritage is of great cultural and social importance.

The network of huts and tracks across public conservation land was significantly upgraded by the last Labour government, and forms the backbone of our ‘outdoors infrastructure’. There are new lodges in place of old huts, more places to go to, tracks repaired, and new ones to explore either by foot or bike.

This network is a significant asset. Not only is it valued by Kiwis, but our tourism sector depends on it. Kiwis expect their government to protect the quality of outdoor recreational experiences – including walking, tramping, skiing, climbing, angling, swimming, rafting, boating and mountain biking.

That does not mean only putting resources into ‘front country’ facilities or huts on the Great Walks, where many of the users are international visitors. The existing network of ‘back country’ huts and tracks is vital as well and should remain. A bivvy in the right place, for example, can save lives.

Labour will continue to upgrade the outdoors infrastructure of huts, tracks and other visitor facilities, including those in the back country.

Labour will promote the development of new outdoor recreational opportunities, for example, walking and cycling trails on former railways land.

Te Araroa

New Zealand benefits from a national walkway, Te Araroa, ‘the long pathway’ connecting Cape Reinga to the Bluff through public walkways and tracks. The last Labour government made a considerable contribution towards the walkway, especially by freeing up access through former pastoral lease land in the South Island. Te Araroa is now close to completion, but some gaps remain.

Labour will facilitate the filling of the final gaps in Te Araroa, ‘the long pathway’ from North Cape to Bluff, so that its final completion can be celebrated.

Walking Access Commission

Labour established the Walking Access Commission in 2008 to create 'free, certain, enduring and practical' public access for outdoor recreation, including around lakes, along rivers, and to public resources (which include trout, salmon and game birds). This is not only for the benefit of Kiwis but for overseas visitors as well.

Initiatives the Walking Access Commission has taken include a public access mapping system to clearly identify publicly-owned land across New Zealand that people can legally access. The Commission also promotes an Outdoor Access Code to encourage responsible behaviour in the outdoors, and provides contestable funding to support access-enhancing projects.

Labour will strongly support the work of the Walking Access Commission.

Labour will support the Walking Access Commission having a dispute arbitration role on access issues.

Commercial use of public outdoor resources

Labour supports tourism businesses based on public conservation land and public resources. However, conservation values must not be compromised by commercial use. Reasonable public recreational access to the land and resources must continue.

Fish and Game New Zealand manages recreational access to sports fish (including trout and salmon) and game birds. These public resources can be found both inside and outside the public conservation estate. They attract commercial interest for professional fishing and hunting guiding. Inside the conservation estate, such commercial arrangements are managed by DOC.

Labour would make Fish and Game (through its regional councils) the approval authority for any such commercial arrangements outside the conservation estate. This would be similar to DOC management of tourism activity on public conservation land (where public access continues to be protected).

Labour will make Fish and Game New Zealand the approval authority for any commercial concessions to take sports fish and game birds outside the public conservation estate.

Any disputes about a public right to access sports fish and game birds over private land could be dealt with by the Walking Access Commission.

Camping grounds

With land development around our coastline, opportunities available for the traditional Kiwi summer camping holiday have decreased. Public camping grounds operate on DOC land. New camping grounds were opened by the last Labour government, and others were upgraded.

Labour will continue to develop new camping grounds as opportunities arise.

Management of game animals

Many Kiwis share in a long-held tradition of recreational hunting for deer, pigs and other introduced game mammals. Hunters help keep these animal numbers down on public conservation land. Labour recognises this valuable contribution to the protection of our indigenous biodiversity.

DOC currently manages game mammals. National proposes to establish a Game Animal Council and to split the management of these animals (chamois, deer, thar and wild pigs) between DOC and the Game Animal Council. The Council would manage 'herds of special interest' within defined areas of conservation land.

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment points out that the proposed Game Animal Council could effectively halt 1080 operations for possums, rats and stoats, if it thought game animals may be at risk. Labour takes the Commissioner's advice seriously.

It is problematic having a management system with two organisations in charge. DOC should be responsible for the management of the conservation estate. Hunters have conservation values and support our wilderness areas, which they know well. Greater co-ordination with hunting interests is desirable.

Labour will establish the proposed Game Animal Council as an advisory body that encourages hunters to work collaboratively with DOC in supporting both conservation and hunting interests.

Marine Conservation – Protecting Our Sea Life

New Zealanders have always shared a special connection with the sea. Our rich marine and coastal ecosystems provide food and recreation. However, these ecosystems have a history of being impacted by over-fishing, soil erosion, over-development, urban and pastoral run-off, careless waste disposal and sewage pollution.

Fish stocks are now managed within a framework of sustainability. Marine reserves are now recognised not just for their scientific benefits but for their public use and enjoyment. Threatened species, such as the Maui and Hector's dolphins, are also being protected within designated marine sanctuaries, and other strong measures have been put in place to halt their decline.

Ten years from now, Labour wants New Zealand to be known for its world-leading approach to marine conservation. We want a network of marine protected areas to support the rejuvenation of our marine life. We want a reputation for being excellent guardians of the 40% of the world's albatross species endemic to New Zealand. We want our trading partners to continue buying our seafood because they know they are buying a sustainable, quality product.

Marine protected areas

Many different groups have a high level of interest in our marine areas. These include commercial fishers, recreational fishers, other recreational users, iwi, conservationists, and scientists investigating marine species and habitats. With so many stakeholders, forging agreement on which areas should be protected remains a challenge.

In the past, protection has been fragmented and ad hoc. Now a range of protective options are available such as marine reserves (which are no take areas), mataitai reserves and taiapure, and trawling and dredging bans. Communities deserve a say in where and what marine protection is proposed.

The last Labour government began a new collaborative process for marine protection right around New Zealand through the marine protected areas (MPA) strategy. Protection around the sub-Antarctic islands and on the West Coast of the South Island has been agreed, but elsewhere National has under-resourced the process and let it languish. The MPA process needs to be revitalised, with a single lead government agency.

Labour will revitalise the MPA process, especially the regional stakeholder forums that are central to it, and promote DOC as the lead government agency for MPA planning.

Labour will ensure that DOC has the necessary technical capability to facilitate and implement increased marine protection.

Labour will continue to establish a network of marine reserves and other protected areas for the protection of marine biodiversity.

Labour aims to have 30 percent of our marine area in some form of protection by 2020 – both in the territorial sea (out to 12 nautical miles) and the exclusive economic zone or EEZ (a further 200 nautical miles).

Protection will include: an ecologically representative network of marine reserves; mataitai reserves and taiapure which are protected according to the wishes of local iwi and communities; other (often large) areas in which there are specific constraints on fishing methods; and the Kermadec world sanctuary area.

Labour wants New Zealand to be a world leader in protecting threatened species, and this extends to the sea. We will be vigilant over species that are under threat and take specific action as necessary.

Labour will monitor the effectiveness of existing marine mammal sanctuaries and support the development of further protective measures or sanctuaries as necessary.

Kermadec world sanctuary area

The Kermadec Islands are a part of New Zealand 1000 km to the northeast, and straddle tropical and temperate climates. The Kermadec marine region is one of the most diverse and stunning in the world. It contains underwater volcanoes and the second-deepest ocean trench on the planet (over 10 km deep in places). It has remarkable marine biodiversity, including giant squid, the deep diving sperm whale, and millions of seabirds.

There is already a marine reserve around the Kermadec Islands, with complementary world heritage status proposed for the Islands themselves. The marine reserve protects some of the marine habitats of the area (out to the territorial sea boundary). But a much higher level of protection in the EEZ around the Kermadecs is justified.

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The Kermadecs provides the opportunity for a marine reserve of ecosystem-scale, which would be one of the few on the planet. New Zealand could become a world leader in creating such an EEZ marine reserve. While this is not yet possible under our marine reserve legislation, we could do it by a special Act of Parliament (as Labour did in 2005 to create eight marine reserves in Fiordland).

Labour will create a world sanctuary area in the EEZ around the Kermadec Islands by way of giving this area marine reserve status.

Unsustainable marine activities

New Zealand is a special place for seabirds. Nearly a quarter of the world's seabird species breed here, and 40% of albatross species are endemic to New Zealand. Species such as albatross, petrel and shearwaters, as well as the unique New Zealand sea lion, remain at risk from commercial fishing methods.

Labour will work collaboratively with the fishing industry to achieve reductions in fisheries by-catch of seabirds and marine mammals, including by the use of mandatory targets and mitigation measures.

Other unsustainable fishing practices must be addressed. Means of doing so will include the use of spatial tools.

Labour will implement a phase-out of destructive and unsustainable fishing methods (such as bottom trawling, dredging and set netting).

Labour will prohibit the practice of shark finning, requiring that all sharks caught in New Zealand and on New Zealand flagged vessels be landed whole with fins intact.

See 'Oceans' in Labour's **Environment** policy for protecting the marine environment against risks such as oil spills.

Whales

Labour strongly backs international efforts to ensure the world's whale populations continue to be protected from commercial exploitation. Some populations are beginning to recover, but more needs to be done.

Labour will work through international organisations to achieve stronger protection for whales, to end 'scientific' whaling and to advance the South Pacific Whale Sanctuary.

Marine legislation reform

Most of New Zealand's marine protection legislation has been on the statute books for many years and is in need of updating. This includes the Wildlife Act 1953, Marine Reserves Act 1971, Marine Mammals Protection Act 1978, and the Fisheries Act 1996. We need a genuinely sustainable approach to the management of our seas and sea life. That will include a stronger precautionary approach in the Fisheries Act.

Labour will revise our marine protection legislation to ensure consistency, optimal delivery of protection objectives, and genuine sustainability.

A Bill to modernise the Marine Reserves Act has been before Parliament since 2002. The Bill would broaden the purpose of marine reserves from scientific study to the conservation of marine biodiversity, and enable them to be created in the EEZ. The Bill would also change the concurrence procedure for creating marine reserves (from both the Ministers of Conservation and Fisheries to only the former).

In the past, there have been concerns that DOC has been both the promoter of marine reserves and (through the Minister of Conservation) the ultimate decision maker. A revitalised MPA process will see communities themselves – through regional stakeholder forums – promoting the creation of marine reserves. They will do that together with other types of MPAs (such as mataitai reserves, which are approved by the Minister of Fisheries).

DOC's role in marine reserve creation will become that of a facilitator, and the tension of its dual role will be resolved. Marine reserves, and other types of MPA, will be created on the recommendation of regional stakeholder forums.

Labour will amend the Marine Reserves Bill to reflect the collaborative way of achieving marine protection through the MPA strategy.

Antarctica

New Zealand has a special relationship with Antarctica. Labour has long advocated for its preservation in a pristine state, and for it to be administered for peaceful scientific purposes through the Antarctic Treaty system.

Labour will recommit to the Antarctic Treaty system, and act as an international advocate for the protection of the Antarctic ecosystem from mineral or other inappropriate exploitation.

Labour will advocate for appropriate marine protection around Antarctica, including in the Ross Sea.

Mining on high value conservation land

Mining on high value conservation land had long been controversial before Parliament (in 1997) enacted Schedule 4 of the Crown Minerals Act 1991 (CMA). This prohibits mining activity for Crown owned minerals on land described in Schedule 4. Areas can be added to, or taken out of, Schedule 4 by order in council.

The high conservation value of Schedule 4 land prevails over potential mining value. However, certain low impact activities are allowed. These include prospecting and exploration to determine what minerals are present, mining of petroleum or gas by drilling from outside the area.

By order in council in 2008, the Labour government added 745,381 hectares of conservation land (including two national parks) and 24 marine reserves (521,713 hectares) to Schedule 4.

In 2010 Labour opposed National's plan to take some areas out of Schedule 4. So did the public. National backed down.

Labour believes that Schedule 4 should be simplified and strengthened. This would provide greater certainty for all interests.

Labour will make automatic the closure of areas coming within the generic protected categories listed in Schedule 4 (e.g. national parks and marine reserves).

This means an order in council (and the processes leading up to it) would no longer be required to include newly created protected areas in Schedule 4. For example, under automatic closure, Rakiura National Park would not have waited from 2002 to 2008 to be included in Schedule 4.

Labour will make it clear that land may be added to Schedule 4 by Order in Council, but may not be taken out of the Schedule by that means.

Automatic closure would substantially remove the need for orders in council to add areas to Schedule 4. Areas would be included as a direct result of the will of Parliament. It would be wrong to allow Ministers of the day to reverse that without going back to Parliament.

Labour will consider asking Parliament to amend Schedule 4 to add ecological areas, world heritage areas, and marine mammal sanctuaries to the generic protected categories, and to extend southwards the described area of the Coromandel. This would further lessen the need for orders in council to be used.

Mining on other conservation land

Mining on Schedule 4 land would be in the wrong place. But mining can be accommodated elsewhere on the conservation estate. For public conservation land not in Schedule 4, it is for the Minister of Conservation to approve such mining access or not. National proposes to amend the CMA to provide for the Ministers of Energy and Conservation to jointly make access decisions.

It is inappropriate for the Minister of Energy to participate in access decisions because he or she represents a different set of interests. Also, decision-making by the Minister of Conservation alone has worked well in practice, with mining access often being granted.

Labour will not amend the CMA to provide for joint Ministerial approval (rather than only the Minister of Conservation, or other land-holding Minister) for mining access to Crown land.

At present the legal tests for access to public conservation land are different for mining activities (section 61(2) of the CMA) from other concessions for activities on public conservation land (section 17U of the Conservation Act 1987). There is no good reason for this other than the provisions being enacted at different times. The tests should be aligned on the basis of the later enacted and more comprehensive section 17U. This will provide for public input into mining access decision-making.

Labour will align the access arrangement legal tests for mining activities with the legal tests for other concessions on public conservation land.

South Island high country

Kiwis value clean air, clean water, open spaces and our remarkable natural landscapes. The South Island high country has all of these values.

Large areas of former high country pastoral lease land have been added to the public conservation estate through tenure review. This has preserved natural values and made this land accessible to ordinary Kiwis. There are now 11 conservation parks in the South Island high country, all created through the actions of the last Labour government.

Labour believes the benefits of tenure review have now been substantially achieved. Labour will therefore stop the process. Additional pastoral lease land required for the conservation estate (for example, completing high country parks) will be acquired by direct purchase instead.

Labour will stop tenure review; and will acquire land required to complete the high country parks network by direct purchase.

Public access between privately-held blocks of land in the high country and existing or new public conservation land is often unclear. This can prevent people enjoying the full range of walking experiences our natural landscape has to offer.

Labour will identify public rights of access through high country land by identifying unformed legal roads and marginal strips alongside waterways.

Mackenzie basin

“Greening” of lower altitude tussock landscapes is occurring in parts of the Mackenzie basin, and increasing dairying pressure and irrigation is raising water extraction and quality issues. The drylands character of the basin is changing. Labour is committed to protecting low-altitude habitats and landscapes in the Mackenzie basin.

Labour’s policy of stopping tenure review will provide an opportunity for forward thinking on the future of the basin.

Labour wants to see the current collaborative community and stakeholder process continue in the Mackenzie basin. However, we will make clear that this is a unique part of New Zealand – and that there are some fundamental conservation principles to be included in any plan for protection, management and development of the Mackenzie basin.

Labour will promote a collaborative process to agree a plan for protection, management and development of the Mackenzie basin.

Labour will protect the Mackenzie basin from inappropriate water use and irrigation.

Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park overlooks the Mackenzie basin. The Park is a world heritage area in recognition of its outstanding natural values. Land to the southeast is also of national park quality, and adding this to the Park would expand its size by 50%. The addition would come from existing conservation land, including lower altitude land provided by finalised tenure reviews.

Labour will ask the New Zealand Conservation Authority to formally investigate making an addition to the southeast of Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park.

Further south – and to the east of Lake Pukaki – there is scope also for the creation of a low-altitude drylands conservation park.

Labour will explore the creation of a drylands conservation park in the Mackenzie basin.

For more detail (including on high country rents), see Labour’s **South Island High Country** policy.