

Hon Dr Nick Smith

Minister for the Environment



15 March 2016

Speech

Kermadec Ocean Sanctuary Bill: First reading speech

Mr Speaker, I move that the Kermadec Ocean Sanctuary Bill be now read a first time.

I nominate the Local Government and Environment Select Committee to consider the Bill. At the appropriate time I intend to move that the Bill be reported to the House by 2 August 2016.

This Bill delivers on the proposal announced by Prime Minister John Key at the United Nations last September to create a fully protected marine area around New Zealand's most northern territory of the Kermadec Islands.

The Bill is anchored in the philosophical view that humankind needs to put some limit on its development and have the wisdom to set aside areas for nature.

New Zealand was a global conservation pioneer when Tuwharetoa Chief Te Heu Heu in 1887, with the support of our parliamentary forebears, created the Tongariro National Park. It was the fourth such park in the world and since then Governments have progressively protected about 30 per cent of our land in public parks, reserves and sanctuaries.

The new frontier for conservation is the marine environment. It makes up 71 per cent of the globe and is facing the stresses of overfishing, pollution, increased pressures for resources and climate change.

This Bill is part of this Government's ambition to be a world leader in the management and protection of our ocean environment. We started out in 2009 by addressing the obvious anomaly of having no environmental regulatory system in our huge EEZ and set up the EPA to undertake this role. We have got on with protecting specific areas creating 11 new marine reserves. We have a discussion paper out on comprehensive reform of our

system of marine protected areas. Our Government has been pulling out all stops diplomatically with the US in trying to secure support for a huge MPA in Antarctica's Ross Sea. We also successfully sponsored a UN resolution last year on strengthening ocean protection in the high seas beyond national jurisdictions. This Kermadec Sanctuary is the most significant of these initiatives.

The 620,000 square kilometres is twice the land area of New Zealand or about the size of France. This amounts to 15 per cent of New Zealand's EEZ and has New Zealand as one of the few countries overachieving the global 10% target for biodiversity protection. This area is 35 times the area of the total of all our existing marine reserves and fifty times the size of our largest National Park in Fiordland. It is not just the size that makes it significant but its outstanding geological and biological diversity.

It contains the longest arc of underwater volcanoes anywhere in the world and it descends to a depth of over 10 kilometres, deeper than Mount Everest is tall. The depths of the ocean combined with the underwater volcanic activity makes for an extreme environment of pressure, temperature and acidity where unique forms of life exist that are almost as fascinating as studying life on another planet.

The marine life includes over 6 million seabirds of 39 different species, 35 different species of whales and dolphins, three species of sea turtle - all of which are endangered, and over 150 species of fish.

The Kermadecs also have a rich history. It was a crucial stopover point for the migratory waka that made the long and treacherous journey between the Pacific and New Zealand. It is the only part of New Zealand that got caught up in the horrific global slave trade of the 19th century with the atrocious deaths of 160 Pacific slaves destined for South America on Raoul Island in 1863.

The recognition of the area for its natural values gained momentum in the 1930s with a nature reserve gazetted in 1939 and the territorial sea protected in 1990.

The details of this Bill prohibit all fishing, all mining, any disturbance of the seabed, dumping and any harmful vibrations from the likes of seismic surveys. The intent is to protect the area to the fullest extent possible but consistent with our legal obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The Pew Trust has noted that we are setting the gold standard internationally for MPAs with this Bill.

The Bill provides for scientific research as such areas are invaluable in benchmarking the broader state of oceans. The Environment Protection Authority will be responsible for regulating such work while DOC will be responsible for its day to day management of with the support of key partners like the Navy.

The Bill provides for a new Conservation Board to be responsible for developing a conservation management strategy for the total area i.e. the new

sanctuary in the EEZ, the marine reserve in the territorial sea, and the nature reserve on the land.

The Board is proposed to include a representative from Ngāti Kuri and Te Aupouri, the two iwi with a statutory acknowledgement, as well as a third member to be appointed by the Minister of Maori Development noting other iwi also have an interest and connection with these islands. Four members are to be appointed for their skills, knowledge and experience to support the work of protecting the Kermadecs.

Let me address the three criticisms of this sanctuary proposal. The Greens assert that it is contradictory of the government to be promoting the sanctuary while also supporting development of our fishing, aquaculture, oil, gas and mineral resources at sea. This misunderstands our Bluegreen approach of providing for areas of economic development and protection both at sea as on land. It is about balance and ensuring New Zealand is both economically and environmentally successful.

The other criticism from the opposite end of New Zealand politics, ACT, is that somehow this protection is meaningless because the 20 odd tonne of fish caught each year might well be caught in other parts of our EEZ or in international waters. On this basis, you would not create any protected areas. I challenge Act to visit long established marine reserves like Leigh, observe the stunning marine life, the size of the crayfish, and snapper because they are living proof that MPAs work.

The criticism by New Zealand First that New Zealand does not have the capacity to ensure these protections are complied with underestimates the modern satellite technology, the capacity of our Navy and the increased cooperation in the Pacific on maritime surveillance.

I want to conclude by generously acknowledging those who have long advocated for this protection – Ngāti Kuri and Te Aupouri, the Kermadecs Initiative partners – the Pew Trust and its tireless advocate Bronwen Golder, WWF-New Zealand and the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society. I also want to acknowledge those hardy workers and volunteers from the former wildlife service and DOC, including those who have died doing this work, for their contributions to this special part of New Zealand.

This sanctuary initiative is about New Zealand raising the bar on ocean protection globally, and working with our partners in the Pacific like the Forum Countries, the US, UK and Chile on building a network of marine protected areas in our region.

This is a bill about securing a better future for our oceans and I commend it to the House.

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