

Background Paper to the OSNZ Conservation Policy

At its meeting in May 1983 the following Conservation Statement was adopted by Council. This followed considerable debate at Council meetings over the past few years. However, the adoption of the statement was opposed by Dr Ben D. Bell and P. D. Gaze, who felt the Society should be taking a more active role in conservation matters, and they asked that these details be published.

The Conservation Statement adopted by Council is:

Historically, the OSNZ has not been active in conservation issues. When established it made it clear to its sister organisation, the Forest and Bird Protection Society, that it had no intention of taking over any of that Society's functions. The societies would be complementary not competitive. When the Constitution was prepared and adopted it was specifically written in that the OSNZ would not become involved in conservation issues. The original Constitution did not provide authority to provide factual information on habitats or bird populations in areas where environmental issues were at stake. The new Constitution amended this because the original version prevented the supply of factual information often requested by other organisations.

However, it was never intended the Society become actively involved in Conservation issues. The role was spelt out in the Policy Statement, published in *Notornis* 20: 298-299 (1973), and was reiterated in a Policy Statement published in *OSNZ News* 29, December 1983. There is no reason why this statement should not be accepted today.

The OSNZ was formed to study birds and this continues to be its primary objective. A secondary objective that, importantly, is linked to bird studies is to foster and support the wider knowledge and enjoyment of birds. Other societies have the primary role of conservation, notably The Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society and various local conservation organisations. If a member's main interest is conservation, their efforts should be put into one of these other societies. All members of OSNZ are sympathetic to conservation issues and often wear two hats but their primary reason for belonging to OSNZ is to study birds.

All the societies involved in conservation issues have full-time staff, either paid or voluntary, whereas OSNZ depends largely on amateur effort, from council level, through regional representatives, and to scheme organisers. We have one part-time executive officer. It is difficult to find enough people for all the voluntary positions we need at present - we lack

several RRs and have few people willing to organise and direct national schemes. Many of those actively involved with the society do not want to be involved in the conservation issues. They have more than enough to do with their present functions which is the study of birds.

It is alarming that when some members want their executives and RRs to become involved in specific issues, notably conservation issues, they seem to want to push others into doing what they themselves want done. If these people do feel strongly about conservation issues, they should be active themselves in existing groups established specially for this, i.e. not push others in to do their work for them.

Threats to habitats are best handled by specialist groups which individuals can join and actively support. As a society, Birds New Zealand is small, and many of its members already support and are members of other organisations, notably the Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society. Further involvement of the OSNZ would put the society under stresses which have become apparent in other scientific societies and could at some time expose it to takeover bids by conservation interests. Neither would be good for the primary objective of bird study.

The OSNZ under its current constitution can and does provide factual information on matters of environmental concern. The Society has a Memorandum of Understanding with The Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society, signed on 29 May 2015, that specifically covers the use and sharing of information between the Societies. The leadership of both Societies meet regularly to discuss issues of common interest. This approach, rather than a direct involvement in conservation (and sometimes political) issues, has given Birds New Zealand considerable standing and independence as a source of unbiased and sound information. It therefore has a much higher standing and influence than its membership could otherwise expect. This independent position must be preserved so that the society will always be regarded as a reliable authority and can continue with its primary objective to study birds.

Endorsed by Council on 23 February 2019.