# [***Ending biodiversity loss is urgent***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:63WM-MBT1-DYTR-J215-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Across Aotearoa our plants and animals, the rivers we love, the seas that surround us, and our landscapes, from wild jagged ridgelines to sweeping forested valleys, are under threat from the twin crises of ***biodiversity*** ***loss*** and climate change.

Even in a good year we're just triaging a crisis. The Department of Conservation's budget to finance predator control covers only 500,000 out of 8.6 million hectares, a mere 6 per cent.

Winners and losers are painfully selected every year with only the top- priority areas, habitats of just a few of the species on the brink of extinction, getting control.

For those in the thick of it, it's heartbreaking. For the critters living there, it's life or death.

The changing climate makes it more difficult, with DOC's limited budget often spent on fire-fighting and storm repairs. Warmer summers are driving more "ratty" years, with subsequent stoat plagues.

Many of our plants and animals are already in danger - if they haven't gone already.

In some valley floors and around coastlines, less than 1 per cent of original plant and animal inhabitants remain, as we've ploughed fields, cloaked hillsides in pines, and grown our cities and towns.

That's why Te Mana o te Taiao, the Aotearoa New Zealand ***Biodiversity*** Strategy, has signalled that the way we've done things in the past cannot be the way of the future.

We need to act together, making strong and sensible decisions, and collectively investing in the work that must be done.

Addressing ***biodiversity*** ***loss*** is urgent, because even as our species are faced with major changes in climatic conditions, they're also being hit by an influx of foreign and invasive plants and animals, and the ongoing pressures of development, including rural and urban intensification.

Even as we know that stock in waterways and cows knee-deep in mud are bad for our environment, we are still having to fight for protection through the latest round of winter stocking regulations.

Even though we know coalmining is harming the climate, we're still having to take councils to court to stop new mines.

Only 5-10 per cent of wetlands remain across the country, but humping and hollowing to keep them drained is still going on from Southland to Northland.

We know our forests and tussock lands, wetlands and oceans are the carbon sinks of today and tomorrow. But clamouring for more and more space to be given over to development continues.

Some ***losses*** are more insidious.

Uprooted ferns and young seedlings in open beech forest are a sure indicator of feral pigs, and the five-finger branches strewn across tracks a sign of possums browsing overnight. Our forests, our carbon stores of the future, are being chewed to death.

With major investments in deer, goat, possum, pig and wallaby control we could be soaking up that surplus carbon we've been pumping into the atmosphere since the industrial age.

We could be protecting the carbon-storing seagrasses in our oceans and estuaries from being smothered by sedimentation coming down from poor farming and forestry practices.

We could be keeping carbon stored in wetlands and bogs across the country, and preventing disturbed peatlands from releasing methane.

That's why Te Mana o te Taiao also has regulatory tools within the strategy. We need urgent implementation of a sound National Policy Statement on Indigenous ***Biodiversity*** that will help landowners to manage and restore vital fragments of bush, wetlands, and tussock lands that are scattered across private land.

We need an ecosystem-based approach to protecting our oceans, and the regulatory means to back that up - from cameras on fishing boats, to enforcement of methods that stop seabirds and marine mammals from being caught in nets.

We need this to be a whole-of- government strategy, so that our emissions reductions plan prioritises nature protection.

We are inextricably entwined with our natural environment - from the air we breathe and the water we drink, to the food we gather or produce.

Te Mana o te Taiao's vision of a healthy and vigorous natural environment includes us. But to sustain people, we need nature to thrive too.

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CAPTION:

Only 5-10 per cent of wetlands remain, but hollowing to keep them drained continues, writes Kevin Hague. And despite harm caused by coalmining, councils in New Zealand are still trying to get new mines opened.

A stitchbird/hihi at Bushy Park Tarapuruhi, near Whanganui. It is one of New Zealand's rarest birds. IAIN McGREGOR/ STUFF

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