

Rivers need 'National Park' protection status

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Fish & Game NZ says a report due for release today throws weight behind the growing call for greater protection of the country's finite and dwindling number of outstanding rivers, so important to New Zealand's international brand.

Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment (PCE) Dr Jan Wright will today release her investigation into the conflict between hydroelectric power schemes and the irreversible environmental damage caused to wild and scenic rivers. (You can read the report as well as a supporting video [here](#))



Bryce Johnson, Fish & Game NZ chief executive, says it's encouraging that Dr Wright's report recognises Fish & Game as the major applicant for Water Conservation Orders (WCOs), which is the only means of protecting the outstanding qualities of a water body and preventing the adverse impacts of development such as damming.

"A WCO is the equivalent of National Park status on a river - anglers and hunters through Fish & Game have been responsible for securing 12 of the 15 WCOs in the country (more information [here](#)) and these benefit all New Zealanders as they provide for other biodiversity, recreational and cultural values," says Mr Johnson.

"The question has to be asked though, why has the onus fallen on the likes of Fish & Game and environmental NGOs to undertake the protection on behalf of the public, particularly when our wild and scenic rivers and water quality are so important to New Zealand '100% Pure', 'clean green' brand?"

Mr Johnson says too often decisions on the fate of rivers and the associated freshwater resource favour agricultural and energy development over the environment, ignoring the economic benefits of tourism as well as the recreational and ecological values of leaving waterways in their natural state.

"In the case of this report, which focuses on hydroelectric development of wild and scenic rivers, the PCE rightly points out the Government's National Policy Statement on Freshwater Management does not explicitly recognise the value of preserving wild and scenic rivers. Instead, preference is given to dams and storage lakes which, Dr Wright says, 'have the greatest impacts and cause irreversible damage'."

It is a common misconception that hydro-electric power generation is renewable and sustainable - "While the water might be 'renewable', that's not the case when you consider New Zealand is fast running out of rivers where it exists in its natural state, so we're talking about a finite river resource here," says Mr Johnson.

Given that Fish & Game has led the charge to safeguard rivers of national importance through applications for WCOs, Mr Johnson says the organisation supports the PCE's call to

broaden the protection of wild and scenic rivers.

"The WCO process is rigorous and we would be extremely concerned if any suggested 'streamlining' would dilute their status. If anything, Fish & Game would like the legislation strengthened so the protection mechanisms afforded are not able to be readily changed and watered down as we've seen done through the ECan Act.

We would also like to see WCO legislation strengthened to set conditions on adjoining land use which impacts on water quality."

Similarly, Fish & Game has reservations about creating an inventory of rivers for protection: *"This creates the danger of 'picking winners'," says Mr Johnson.*

"What happens to those rivers left off the list - does it become a development free-for-all? As far as Fish & Game and anglers are concerned we need to preserve all that's left because New Zealand has lost far too many rivers to private industry development already."

Mr Johnson says overall Fish & Game is pleased the PCE has recognised the imbalance of government policy promoting hydro development over the protection of our special rivers -

"These rivers are one of New Zealand's key points of difference from other countries in an increasingly over-exploited world".