

Parliamentary Comm Kaitiaki Taiao a Te W

(PCE, n.d.) - Te

History

Establishment

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment was set up under the Environment Act 1986. Its roots lay in the 1980s reform of this country's environmental administration following a 1981 OECD report, *Environmental Policies in New Zealand*. This report recommended changes including strengthening the environmental advice to government, and establishing an environmental body with a separate audit and oversight function.

Widespread public consultation took place on the changes which were foreshadowed in the New Zealand Labour Party's 1984 election manifesto. This was a time of growing awareness of humanity's impact on the Earth's ability to sustain life.

New Zealand had had a Commission for the Environment, a government agency under the Minister for the Environment, since 1972. Until 1986, its job had included auditing the environmental impacts of proposed Crown developments. In setting up the office of the PCE and giving the Commissioner statutory independence, this audit role was retained and strengthened.

The Commissioner's brief was to review and report directly to Parliament on the whole public sector system of environmental management. This ability to critically examine the policy decisions of executive government was unique in the world for almost a decade after the PCE's establishment.

Also set up in the 1980s were the Ministry for the Environment (again under the Environment Act 1986), and the Department of Conservation under the Conservation Act 1987. The Resource Management Act in 1991 continued the reforms.

Commissioners

Much of the history around the establishment of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment is outlined in David Young's book *Keeper of the Long View*, which was published in March 2007 as part of 20th anniversary celebrations.

The first person appointed as Commissioner was Helen Hughes, who served from 1987 to 1996.

The second Commissioner, Dr J. Morgan Williams, was appointed in 1996 and took office in January 1997. Dr Williams served 10 years in the position and retired in March 2007.

The current Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment is Dr Jan Wright.