Islands, Marine Biodiversity and Livelihoods: A Global Partnership
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E nga mana, e nga waka, e nga reo,
Tena kotou, tena kotou, tena kotou katoa

I come from a bi-cultural Pacific country where we have a multicultural society. My mihi, my welcome, in Maori, the language of our indigenous people, acknowledges those who have gone before us, acknowledges the people of this place, and acknowledges you, the participants at this gathering.

It is wonderful to be here this evening and it is a pleasure to co-host this occasion. The gatherings here in Curitiba have a most important focus – protecting and managing the world's biodiversity.

As an island nation which has evolved in isolation from the world's great land masses, and which has only recently been settled by humans, New Zealand understands the significance of indigenous biodiversity management.

Evolution through a long period of isolation after New Zealand split off from the other continents created unique flora and fauna over a period of 80 million years.

This also meant the plants and animals were especially vulnerable to new changes. New Zealand was one of the last large land areas on earth to be settled by humans. The human settlers, and the exotic species they brought with them, had a dramatic impact on our indigenous biodiversity

High percentages of New Zealand's indigenous species are endemic, they are found nowhere else on earth, a result of isolated evolution and the diversity of New Zealand's land and seascapes. This level of endemism is remarkable internationally. Other island nations also have remarkable levels of endemic biodiversity – Madagascar and new Caledonia to name just two.

The ecosystems in which these species live are also highly distinctive.

While biodiversity varies in natural cycles, nothing since the extinction of the dinosaurs, 65 million years ago, compares with the decline in indigenous biodiversity in New Zealand caused by the arrival of humans 700-800 years ago, escalating in impact over the past century.

Species losses are often the result of the pervasive loss of natural ecosystems and habitats. And these losses are often caused by invasive alien introduced species which have become pests and weeds. They damage habitats and important ecosystem processes, they compete with indigenous species for food, and they prey on indigenous species.

Our most damaging, introduced animal pests include Australian brush tailed possums, goats, deer, rats, stoats and [feral] cats. Many of our domesticated species have the potential to become pests and weeds in the wild. There is the possibility of further pests and weeds, and harmful marine organisms being brought into the country.
We may think we live in an island paradise, but we have changed our islands dramatically, often unintentionally. Our introductions of alien invasive species have had devastating effects. We have much work to do to stop the decline in our biodiversity and to restore it to a healthier state.

One of our primary activities is the control of alien invasive animals.

It is to tell you about our experience in that activity and how we are sharing that experience with others that I want to turn to now.

Initially the focus was on the impact of browsing animals – deer, goats and possums- on our forest lands and high mountain lands. The justification for this work was "soil and water conservation", protecting water supplies and preventing large scale soil movement. Now we recognise it also had major biodiversity benefits.

The role and impact of rats, mice, ferrets and stoats was not clearly understood in the early days. Now, with a solid research base, it is clear they have a major impact on our biodiversity. They compete directly for food with many of our native birds and insects. They eat native birds, eggs and insect species as a source of food. For birds and insects which have evolved without mammalian predators this has been, and continues to be, devastating.

Initially, developing control techniques for all of these animals was very difficult. But we now have methods that can be used over small and large areas. Developing control techniques for ferrets and stoats which are practical over large, isolated areas is still a significant challenge however.

While New Zealand is an island nation, we also have about 220 smaller offshore islands, either uninhabited or with low levels of human habitation. Many of them are the focus of our pest control work. When they are predator and pest free they are treated as havens or sanctuaries for our vulnerable native species. It is their isolation and surrounding water that protects them from re-invasions.

Our first island restoration programme was on 170 hectare Cuvier Island. Rehabilitation began in the 1960s when farm stock were fenced out of the remaining forest, and then completely removed from the island in 1981. Goats were removed in 1961; cats in 1964 and finally Pacific Rats were removed in 1993. A thirty year plus project.

However, that experience and our development of new techniques gave us confidence to tackle larger islands. In the 1980s we eradicated possums from Kapiti Island, an island of 190 hectares, and later rats. In the 1990s we eradicated mice from 204 hectare Mana Island. And most recently we have eradicated rats from the 11,000 hectare subantarctic Campbell Island.

We have now extended these concepts of pest management to what we call 'Mainland Islands'. These are areas on the mainland of New Zealand where protection is provided by fencing, geographical features and/or ongoing intensive pest control.

An example is Trounson Kauri Park - a 450 hectare forest surrounded by a 'sea' of farmland. It is the home to several threatened endemic species such as kiwi, kukupa or native pigeon (all birds), bats and large kauri snails. It also preserves a stand of kauri trees that has long been regarded as one of the best examples in the country.

In this forest we actively control predators such as possum, rats, stoats and feral cats. As a result of this focussed effort, there have been significant increases in the populations of kiwi, pigeons, fantails and other smaller forest birds.

So where does all this lead us. It leads us to conclude that:

- invasive alien species have significantly disrupted our indigenous biodiversity,
- invasive alien species can be controlled or eradicated,
- we can halt the decline our indigenous biodiversity and restore it ,
- we can improve forest condition,
- we can improve soil conservation and water management practices,
- we have expertise available that can assist countries facing similar problems.

The Cooperative Initiative on Invasive Alien Species on Islands ("the Cooperative Islands Initiative or CII") was launched by my predecessor in April 2002 at the sixth meeting of this convention at the Hague. It was a response to calls from small island developing states for cooperative actions to address the effects of invasive species on islands.

The aim of the Cooperative Islands Initiative is to reduce the impacts of Invasive Alien Species on island biodiversity and on the livelihoods and lifestyles of island people around the world.

Funding was initially provided by the New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID) and the Pacific Conservation and Development Trust to develop the first regional programme of the Cooperative Islands Initiative focussed on the Pacific.

The New Zealand Department of Conservation has made its expertise available to both the initiative, and directly to countries to assist in invasive species control programmes.

The Pacific Invasives Initiative is a partnership involving seven organisations: the IUCN Invasive Species Support Group (ISSP), NZAID, the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), the Secretariat for the Pacific Community (SPC), Conservation International (CI), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and Birdlife International (BI).

A small coordinating team was established in June 2004 with an initial focus of building the partnership, identify projects and securing further funds. In addition to on-going support from NZAID, funding has also been secured through CI's Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund to design and implement "Demonstration Projects in the Polynesia-Micronesia "Biodiversity Hotspot".

Several Demonstration Projects have now been initiated. They are being undertaken across the Pacific region and are focused on a range of invasive species from mosquitoes to mynahs, and from ants to feral pigs. An experimental project is being designed to test the efficacy and assess the value of controlling six invasive mammals within one reserve concurrently – an innovative move towards integrated pest management.

These projects are being designed and operated with inputs and support from all the partners, and will be implemented by appropriate agencies in collaboration with local communities and other stakeholders.

Issues in the Pacific are being addressed with these pilot projects while concurrently re-assessing the techniques in this environment. There will be a need to take these to a larger scale over the next few years. This will allow us to address not only the impacts of invasive species on biodiversity, but also to address their impacts on local societies and economies. In Tokelau, following invasion of two of the country's three atolls by yellow crazy ants, traditional lifestyles have been seriously disrupted.

Losses of island biodiversity due to invasive species are a major contributor to biodiversity declines globally, as we know only too well in New Zealand. I invite you to join the Co-operative Initiative on Invasive Alien Species on Islands and join us in taking the Initiative to the wider island community of the world.

At present, and moving into the future, the New Zealand government, through NZAID, has committed $1.05 million over three years to the initiative.

The challenge I would offer to you tonight is to take this programme to island nations with whom you have a special relationship; to pledge funding and expertise as New Zealand has in the Pacific to support them to improve their capacity to fight alien invasive species and protect their indigenous biodiversity. The impacts of invasive alien species on island biodiversity are wide ranging – they affect birds, reptiles, mammals and plants to name but a few. But they also impact on the lifestyle, sustainability and welfare of island communities in the longer term.

Ten kotou, tena kotou, tena kotou katoa.