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Press release for immediate use

Straterra welcomes PCE report on mining on conservation land

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment's report brings a welcome dose of sanity to the mining debate, Straterra CEO Chris Baker said today.

"Dr Jan Wright is to be commended for presenting mining as an activity that should be and can be environmentally responsible," Mr Baker said. "The resource sector has long argued this is the case. If it were not, proposals to mine would not be approved."

The report, "Making difficult decisions: mining the conservation estate", was tabled in Parliament today. Its genesis followed the Government's decision on 20 July 2010 to keep land listed on Schedule 4 of the Crown Minerals Act 1991 off-limits to mining.

"Dr Wright says in her report: 'the greatest threat to New Zealand's unique biodiversity is not mining but introduced pests ... provided conservation takes precedence, some mining operations could well provide a net conservation benefit'," Mr Baker said. "The resource sector agrees."

"Many companies already have as a goal to achieve a net positive impact on the environment from their activities, and the industry already works in this area with the Department of Conservation. This is the reality of mining today in New Zealand."

Activities by mining companies on conservation land include planting native trees and shrubs, pest control to benefit native species, and treatment and recycling of freshwater.

"The recommendations for public input into decision-making on access, for significant projects, are appropriate," Mr Baker said. "Mining companies put considerable time and effort into local communities; we refer to this as developing our social licence to operate."

"The economics of mining, management of environmental effects including after mine closure, and support for communities are viewed by the industry as a package. For this reason, we think it does make sense for the Ministers of Conservation and of Energy and Resources to have joint decision-making powers on access applications."

"As matters stand, more than 90 percent of applications for access to conservation land for mining are approved, with appropriate conditions. As a result pest control and other conservation activities are carried out over a much greater area in New Zealand than would otherwise occur, benefiting native species and the NZ brand. This is as it should be."

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