

ENM Submission

Submission on the Disestablishment of the Ministry for the Environment

Environment Network Manawatū stands alongside Environment Hubs Aotearoa to call for;

- Adequate resourcing for environmental oversight and policy development.
- Reinvestment in community environmental funding streams, including mechanisms similar to the former Community Environment Fund.
- Strong partnership frameworks between central government and community environmental organisations.
- A Minister who actively champions environmental protection, listens to scientific advice and community expertise, and who advocates for strong and long-term ecological wellbeing alongside economic development.

ENM is a member-led environment hub representing 65+ community groups working at the frontline of environmental action and community wellbeing in the Manawatū. We are recognised by Palmerston North City Council as a sector lead for our community, and are part of the national Environment Hubs Aotearoa (EHA) network.

ENM is very concerned regarding the disestablishment of the Ministry for the Environment (MfE).

This is not an abstract structural change. It compounds what we have already witnessed as a systematic weakening of environmental leadership, at the very moment Aotearoa urgently requires bold, unified, and future-focused action.

An independent, well-resourced MfE is essential to uphold environmental protection and enhancement, steward Aotearoa New Zealand's climate response, and honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi across environmental policy and practice.

We call for real and urgent environmental leadership from this coalition Government and from the Minister, Hon Penny Simmonds.

Leadership means:

- Championing science-based policy
- Protecting environmental safeguards
- Investing in prevention and mitigation
- Coordinating cross-government climate adaptation
- Recognising Environment Hubs like ENM as core infrastructure

The Government has a responsibility beyond supporting business profitability or short-term economic balancing. It has a constitutional and moral duty to protect people, ecosystems, and future generations from foreseeable harm.

Communities are not waiting, they are providing leadership in a vacuum from central Government.

Right throughout the catchment of the Manawatū River, ENM's members are:

- Coordinating local climate adaptation efforts
- Strengthening food resilience and sovereignty
- Supporting waste reduction and circular economy initiatives
- Restoring local biodiversity
- Hosting climate conversations
- Supporting communities during extreme weather events

ENM and our members are building resilience from the ground up. We are providing what can be described as “soft infrastructure”, the relational, social and local knowledge networks that hold communities together during crisis and enable behaviour change over time.

Community leadership cannot substitute for national policy leadership. We need partnership not abandonment.

While we acknowledge that cross-agency integration can bring efficiencies, this integration must ensure:

- The environmental voice remains strong and independent
- Adequate financial resourcing is maintained or increased, including for community organisations
- Specialist expertise is retained
- Environmental outcomes are prioritised alongside economic and infrastructure objectives

We are incredibly concerned that broader economic or development mandates will be prioritised resulting in weaker environmental protection. Furthermore, the environment must not have to compete for attention internally without a clearly mandated and properly resourced advocate at the Cabinet table.

As a result of absent support, the Community Environment Fund disestablishment and subsequent funding reductions across the sector have already had significant impacts.

Community organisations, including many environment hubs like ours around the country, have experienced:

- Reduced operational funding
- Increased uncertainty
- Loss of long-term funding pathways

Despite this, community-led environment hubs continue to operate, and continue to deliver programmes, and support community environmental action. We continue to mobilise volunteers and respond to the ever-increasing impacts of climatic events.

This demonstrates resilience — but it also highlights inequity.

Community organisations are being asked to carry increasing responsibility while national environmental infrastructure is weakened. This is not sustainable.

The pattern of environmental funding cuts and rolling back environmental policy, rather than strengthening protection and mitigation, is deeply concerning. We need the leadership response to be acceleration of environmental safeguards and resourcing rather than contraction.

We consider it a travesty for present and future generations if environmental stewardship is deprioritised at this critical moment in history. Climate impacts are escalating; biodiversity loss is ongoing; and Future governments will bear higher adaptation costs, greater disaster recovery expenses, and deeper social inequities if protective frameworks are dismantled now.

A strong, independent, and well-resourced Ministry for the Environment is the public's guardian for nature and climate, ensuring we act with foresight, integrity, and partnership.

We are doing our part. We call on the Government to do the same. **Retain MfE, resource it to lead,** and work with communities, iwi and hapū, and councils to protect and enhance the natural world we all depend on—**so that present and future generations can thrive in a healthy, resilient Aotearoa.**