P.O. Box 1271
145 Cuba Street
Palmerston North 4410

P: 06 355 0126
E: admin@enm.co.nz

enm.org.nz

Environment Network Manawatū Submission

On the Environment (Disestablishment of Ministry for the Environment) Amendment Bill.

On behalf of our 65+ member organisations, Environment Network Manawatū **strongly OPPOSE the** Environment (Disestablishment of Ministry for the Environment) Amendment **Bill.**

We **OPPOSE** the disestablishment of the **Ministry** for the Environment **AND we OPPOSE** the disestablishment of the **Minister** for the Environment.

Overview

Environment Network Manawatū (ENM) stands alongside Environment Hubs Aotearoa to call for:

- Adequate resourcing for environmental oversight and policy development;
- Ongoing investment 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's environmental role

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 the sector lead for our community, and are part of the national Environment Hubs Aotearoa (EHA) network.

ENM's position on this matter

ENM is extremely concerned regarding the disestablishment of the Ministry for the Environment (MfE). We are worried that the important environmental focus of the Ministry will be swamped, watered down and potentially lost within a Mega-Ministry.

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, promote stewardship of Aotearoa New Zealand's climate response, and honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi across environmental policy and practice.

Communities are providing environmental leadership that should be supported by government. ENM and our members help to keep our public and local community motivated towards environmental action. This work is under strain within an increasingly difficult economic and geopolitical landscape.

Community organisations, including many environment hubs like ENM around the country, have already experienced reduced operational funding, increased uncertainty and loss of long-term funding pathways. If we don't have a national direction or a strong national leadership the work of community-based organisations like ours may become untenable.

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

- Hosting climate conversations;
- Coordinating local efforts in climate adaptation;
- Strengthening food resilience and sovereignty;
- Supporting initiatives for waste reduction and development of circular economy practices;
- Protecting and enhancing local biodiversity;
- Supporting communities during extreme weather events.

ENM and our members are building resilience from the ground up. ENM is providing what can be described as "soft infrastructure", the relational, social and local knowledge networks that hold communities together during crises and that enable behaviour change over time, while our member groups are making actual and significant changes in support of their local environments.

Community leadership cannot substitute for national policy leadership. A lack of national leadership through disestablishing the Ministry for the Environment, could demotivate environmental stewardship among the public. We need partnership not abandonment.

Desired Action

We are calling for government-level leadership focussed on:

- Championing science-based policy;
- Protecting environmental safeguards;
- Investing in prevention and mitigation of environmental degradation;
- Coordinating strategies for cross-government climate adaptation;
- Recognising the impact and importance of community-led environmental action.

The Government has a responsibility beyond supporting business profitability or short-term economic balancing. It has a constitutional and moral duty to protect people, especially future generations, from foreseeable harm such as that resulting from environmental degradation.

ENM wants the Ministry for the Environment to be retained so that:

- Environmental outcomes are prioritised equally with economic and infrastructural objectives;
- Adequate financial resourcing is maintained or increased, including for community organisations;
- Specialist expertise within the Ministry is retained.

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

The recent disestablishment of the Community Environment Fund and other funding reductions across the sector have already had significant impact in diminishing support for our environment.

Demonstrating incredible resilience to date, 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. Community organisations are being asked to carry increasing responsibility while national environmental infrastructure is weakened. This is inequitable and not sustainable; resilience is not a limitless commodity.

The ongoing pattern of environmental funding cuts and rolling back of environmental policy, rather than strengthening protection and mitigation, is effecting the reverse results, which is deeply concerning. We need the governmental response to be acceleration of environmental safeguards and resourcing rather than a contraction thereof.

We will 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, and needs to act with foresight, integrity, and partnership.

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

Conclusion

ENM and other environmental proponents 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.**