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Environment Committee

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Response for Environment Committee on plastic pollution

Introduction

1. Thank you for providing an opportunity for Te Ohu Kaimoana to provide input on the issue of plastic pollution in Aotearoa waters. This is an issue of deep concern to us and we welcome this opportunity to assist the Environment Committee in its review. We were able to circulate a draft of our response with mandated iwi organisations (MIOs) and asset holding companies. The feedback received has been incorporated into our response, and those who had the opportunity to provide comments have endorsed the views outlined below. Please note that this response does not detract from any responses independently provided by iwi.

General response

2. The rate at which plastic pollutants enter our ocean compared with the rate at which the natural system can process it is of great concern for iwi as it affects their relationship with Tangaroa. Ocean resources are considered a gift, requiring reciprocity in order to maintain the health of ecosystems and therefore society. We need to consider our actions to ensure respectful and responsible practices are in place covering:
 - a. The excessive use of plastics in society
 - b. The management of plastic waste on land and associated challenges
 - c. Plastics entering the marine environment.

Through this, we will safeguard these gifts for future generations.

About Te Ohu Kaimoana

3. Te Ohu Kaimoana was established to implement and protect the Fisheries Settlement. Its purpose, set out in section 32 of the Māori Fisheries Act 2004, is to “advance the interests of Iwi, individually and collectively, primarily in the development of fisheries, fishing and fisheries-related activities, in order to:
 - a. Ultimately benefit the members of iwi and Māori generally; and
 - b. Further the agreements made in the Deed of Settlement; and
 - c. Assist the Crown to discharge its obligations under the Deed of Settlement and the Treaty of Waitangi; and
 - d. Contribute to the achievement of an enduring settlement of the claims and grievances referred to in the Deed of Settlement.”

4. MIOs have approved a Māori Fisheries Strategy and three-year strategic plan for Te Ohu Kaimoana, which has as its goal “that MIOs collectively lead the development of Aotearoa’s marine and environmental policy affecting fisheries management through Te Ohu Kaimoana as their mandated agent”.

Fisheries Management

5. Fisheries have a high cultural, economic and social importance to Māori, exemplified by extensive involvement in customary non-commercial, commercial, and recreational fishing. The 1992 Deed of Settlement agreement with the Crown formally recognised and gave effect to Māori customary commercial and non-commercial fishing rights through the establishment of customary regulations and the provision of commercial quota interests.
6. Through customary non-commercial fishing rights, iwi and hapū are able to maintain their cultural values and connection with Tangaroa. In the commercial sector, Māori owned quota returns \$60 million annually to its iwi beneficiaries, helping increase the value of the Māori economy and benefiting Māori generally. Collecting kaimoana for sustenance and recreation is an important part of maintaining cultural connections at the individual level.
7. Iwi endorse the Quota Management System (QMS) as it allows for sustainable use of resources, ensuring continued benefits for future generations. This aligns with the Māori world view of sustainability and reciprocity, where resources are viewed holistically from the mountains to the sea.
8. Mismanagement of plastic products on land and at sea poses a direct threat to the sustainability of fishing resources and marine ecosystem functioning. The principle of reciprocity is key regarding resource management in that disrespecting the ocean by using it for waste disposal diminishes our ability to access its services.

The Plastic Pollution Problem

9. Approximately 80% of produced plastics ends up in landfills or the natural environment. Projections indicate that by 2050, this will amount to 12 billion tonnes of mismanaged plastic waste.¹ Globally, approximately 10 million tonnes of this plastic waste enters the ocean and persists in the marine environment.² In clusters of marine plastic pollution, such as the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, it is estimated that 20% of the garbage is generated by ships while 80% comes from land-based sources.³ Plastic waste can cause entanglement or be ingested by a variety of marine species with lethal and sub-lethal effects. Aotearoa is home to the world’s most endangered dolphin and sea lion species; we have the highest diversity of seabirds in the world, as well as valuable marine fisheries that rely on the provenance, credence and sustainability of our seafood. It is our responsibility to uphold the mauri of the habitats that support these taonga.
10. The detrimental effects of plastic pollution on the marine environment impact all users of the marine space and undermine the fisheries management system. Plastic entering the bodies of key food species and polluting local coastal ecosystems removes the ability of iwi and hapū to derive benefit

¹ Geyer, R., Jambeck, J.R. and Law, K.L., 2017. Production, use, and fate of all plastics ever made. *Science advances*, 3(7), p.e1700782.

² Jambeck, J.R., Geyer, R., Wilcox, C., Siegler, T.R., Perryman, M., Andrady, A., Narayan, R. and Law, K.L., 2015. Plastic waste inputs from land into the ocean. *Science*, 347(6223), pp.768-771.

³ New Zealand Seafood Industry Council, 2010. Waste Management Handbook for Inshore Vessels. ISBN

from their customary rights. This would limit cultural expression and the connection between iwi and hapū and the coastal environment. Plastic within the flesh of fish lowers the quality of commercial catch with the potential result of lower economic value⁴, effectively diminishing the value of iwi quota and tarnishing the reputation of our seafood industry. The persistent nature of plastic pollution means the consequences of inputs today will continue to degrade our customary, commercial and recreational fisheries resources, negatively impacting our international trade brand.

Rangatiratanga and the Fishing Industry

11. Those involved in fisheries recognise that fishing and associated industrial activities are a source of plastic pollution in the marine environment. Regulations in Aotearoa have been crafted to reflect this understanding. Under the Resource Management (Marine Pollution) Regulations and the Maritime Transport Act 1994, it is unlawful for vessels to discharge plastics into the ocean anywhere at any time. Large vessels over 400 tonnes are required to have a garbage management plan and a garbage record book. On these vessels it is also mandatory to record and report all lost fishing gear that could potentially pose a threat to the marine environment. We are currently unaware of how this data is used by Maritime New Zealand.

Iwi Initiatives

12. Moana New Zealand, an iwi-owned commercial fishing company, is taking steps to minimise their impact on marine ecosystems. They have partnered with the World Wildlife Fund to ensure healthy valuable ecosystems for future generations. Regular on-site waste audits are conducted at facilities to identify areas of improvement while recycling schemes at plants have diverted 22 million tonnes of waste (not all of which is plastic). The use of single-use plastic products in packaging and supply chains is being reduced. Polybins, a polystyrene packaging component for much of the shipping and packaging processes, are being phased out and replaced with cardboard and other materials while remaining polybins are being recycled into photo frames. These serve as examples of what actions the fishing industry is taking to minimise their contribution to marine pollution. However, land-based activities must be addressed.
13. Another company with significant iwi involvement is Sealord. It has put in place programs to promote the practice of recycling land-based plastics. This includes introducing a pouch recycling programme where consumers can choose the recycling option for pouch packaging in tuna pockets and tuna express ranges. These pouches can be free posted to TerraCycle to be recycled into plastic goods such as park benches, watering cans, and waste bins. Collectors are also given incentive by being offered two cents per pouch collected. This money can be used to provide funding to charities or schools.

Our Position

14. The use of plastic products is at a level that is unnecessary, and mismanagement of this waste is having detrimental effects to our environment to the point that it is a sustainability issue for our ecosystems. We feel the first step to address this issue is managing it from the source. Thoughtful processes toward removing superfluous plastic from our day to day society would greatly reduce the plastic input to both our marine and terrestrial ecosystems. This would be further aided by the development and implementation of more effective waste management and recycling schemes, minimising the amount of plastic waste that flows from land to sea. From this we can investigate

⁴ Gibb, R., Bunce, M., Mee, L.D., Rodwell, L.D. and Rewhorn, S., 2017. Sources, fate and effects of microplastics in the marine environment: a global assessment. *Global Change Biology*, 9.

innovative technologies to deal with removing the existing plastic from our environment, however, we need to ensure the primary source is managed through policy and infrastructure first. By upholding principles to respectfully manage our inputs to the environment we can ensure that future generations are able to access and enjoy healthy resources that support the culture, economy and society of Aotearoa.

Conclusion

15. The problem of plastic pollution and its effects on the marine environment is one that requires collaboration and innovative solutions from all parties. Te Ohu Kaimoana would like to reiterate our interest in this issue and our support for initiatives to reduce the negative impacts of plastic pollution on the marine environment. We would like to be involved in any further work on this challenge as it pertains to iwi fishing and Aotearoa's environmental integrity.

Naku noa, nā



Dion Tuuta
CHIEF EXECUTIVE