

**MAORI CUSTOMARY USE OF NATIVE BIRDS, PLANTS
AND OTHER TRADITIONAL MATERIALS:
A SUBMISSION BY THE CANTERBURY BOTANICAL
SOCIETY IN RESPONSE TO THE POSITION PAPER
ISSUED BY THE CONSERVATION AUTHORITY**

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WITH ADVICE FROM OTHER SOCIETY MEMBERS
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Preamble

The Canterbury Botanical Society has a special interest in and concern for New Zealand's indigenous botanical heritage. The Society is therefore extremely interested in the possible policy suggested by the New Zealand Conservation Authority for the ongoing Maori customary use of native plant materials.

Introduction

We are concerned that there are two separate documents, one in English and one in Maori, and that the Maori version "fairly reflects the counterpart English version". Such separate versions are likely to give rise to misunderstandings of intent. Should a bilingual document be deemed necessary, then the two versions should have been put side by side in the one document so that a comparison can be made.

Our comments apply to the English version.

Treaty Issues

We understand the desire to balance the sovereign rights and duties of tribal Maori with those of the "Crown", which we take to be national authorities. However, we do not accept the assertion in Clause 3.2 that "*a traditional Maori ethic of conservation*" provides "*more acceptable constraints than bureaucratic impositions by an official Crown agency*".

There is no evidence that there is anything special about the traditional use of the environment by Maori before 1840. The customs were the outcome of adaptation to the environment within the limits of available technology after an earlier period of exploitation. All societies pass through this transition.

The work of the Department of Conservation is underfunded, and is supported by a number of willing voluntary agencies. The phrase "*bureaucratic impositions*", seems inappropriate and offensive.

Present Situation - Plant Materials

We support the present permit system for the control of plant materials. However, we would encourage the greater cultivation of native plants, both for commercial propagation and for customary use, to avoid the depletion of wild habitats. We concur with clause 5.7 in that *“any programme of customary use must be balanced by a complementary programme of appropriate improvement, such as propagating and growing native plants for weaving or for bird food sources”*.

Possible Policy

We do not support the idea of tribal committees with conservation powers. The proposed structure envisages a complex administrative matrix of authorities which we believe would be costly in time and money and divert much-needed funds from fieldwork in conservation.

We are utterly opposed to the idea that tribal committees should be able to exchange trade and gift items that others are forbidden to touch. We note the policy envisages that reasonable costs for transport and storage *“should be part of the negotiations between committees”* (Clause 6.6). Further, in clause 6.7, wider financial implications are spelled out: *“Factors which will need to be covered will include administrative and secretarial needs, practical requirements such as freezers or other storage facilities, the expenses and travel costs of committee members and koha requirements”*. We wonder who is expected to foot this bill or if it is expected that these costs are to be provided from the existing and diminishing Vote Conservation.

We do not support the proposed policy which we believe would be costly, divisive and not serve conservation ends.