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NATURE, SOCIETY, AND STATE: An Antipodean Perspective

Pyar Ali Memon

I. The Broader Context

A. The Environmental Challenge

*T*he relationship between people and their environment is a subject of considerable public interest and has become an important policy issue. This reflects growing concerns about the carrying capacity of the environment and about environmental quality. The primary objective of environmental management is to formulate and implement solutions to diverse environmental problems facing society, including those related to pollution, resource depletion, famines, and climate change. These problems range in scope from global to local.

While it is tempting to focus attention on finding solutions to environmental problems, their underlying causes should also be understood even if the prospects for their resolution are not especially bright. The roots of environmental problems are social rather than environmental, and they are not amenable to technical solutions alone. For this reason, environmental studies in the social sciences follow a political-economy approach based on conceptualization of human relations with nature and an examination of the complexity and contradictions of environmental management. The emphasis in this mode of analysis is on those social, political, and economic factors that give rise to environmental problems, as well as associated institutions, policies, and outcomes. This is in contrast to the neutrality of the dominant neoclassical economic approach, which advocates maximizing welfare from resource use in a free-market culture, and to the behaviorist theories, which stress the importance of individual perceptions, attitudes, and values.¹

Creation of environmental problems is a necessary outcome of capitalism as the dominant mode of production, and there are significant institutional barriers to addressing such problems. All environmental issues rise from conflict among social, economic, and political interests over who should benefit from the environment and any wealth or other advantages derived from it. The problem is "not just a question of reordering society to respond to the demands of the population, but of deciding which demands have priority over what time scale."² Many residents of advanced countries are now relatively less materialistic, but inertia is strong and deeply entrenched in our value systems and there is a strong reluctance to change on the part of those with vested interests.

Environmental problems call for effective state action, yet central and local government agencies often confront deep-seated obstacles to effective environmental management.³ These constraints stem from the fact that the state as a whole, as well as the local public authority, has priorities that have little to do with environmental concerns and may be overridden when they conflict with other concerns, such as reducing unemployment and encouraging investment. Critics of liberal democracies maintain that the reasons for lack of progress in addressing environmental questions are related to the fact that such systems are based on competitive elections, individual liberty, and private property. This encourages shortsighted environmental policies that favor the interests of the private sector. Liberal democracies use methods for policy choices that address the symptoms rather than causes of environmental problems. Drawing on the heritage of the Enlightenment, liberal democracies tend to adopt instrumental analytical reasoning as a basis for policy development, disaggregating problems and applying mechanisms of free markets to environmental management. To be sure, environmental regulation during earlier periods of rapid urban growth significantly improved the quality of life in many industrial areas, but in recent times, whether policy efforts produce benefits commensurate with cost has become a controversial matter.⁴ In the minds of many, public action is increasingly associated with growth of bureaucracies lacking public accountability. Worse, intervention to achieve environmental objectives has often been poorly targeted, fragmented, and ad hoc. It is not surprising, therefore, that public policies to redress environmental problems have been only marginally effective.⁵

Following the recommendations in the Brundtland report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) ten years ago, many international development agencies and governments have adopted the principle of sustainable development, a strategy to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.⁶ This means development that is equitable, conserves resources, and can be pursued without major ecological or social ill effects. Implementation of a sustainable development strategy requires comprehensive changes in existing power relations and institutional alignment.⁷

Radical changes in systems of production and societal relations, as advocated in the Brundtland report, are not imminent, and environmental challenges continue to escalate. Nevertheless, small attitudinal shifts over time have the potential to lead to dramatic transformation of institutions and decision-making.⁸ Every society exhibits complex and dynamic values, and it is important to understand these as the basis of policy development. The strength of the environmental movement is now acknowledged in many countries by the creation of institutional structures designed to ensure that material goals are not pursued to the exclusion of environmental considerations.

New Zealand provides an interesting setting, from the above perspective, for a study of how to manage environment. New Zealand has been a social laboratory since the 1890s, and since 1984, it has experienced comprehensive programs of economic and social restructuring. Comparable in magnitude to the accomplishments of Eastern European countries, the once highly protected economy has been opened to market forces and external competition,⁹ with the aim of increasing the country's competitiveness in the emerging global economy. Alongside economic restructuring, the reforms have also encompassed central and local government administration, environmental management, education, and the provision of social services. The ideology of the marketplace and a quest for efficiency in resource use are the hallmarks of this radical shift in policy direction.¹⁰

Insofar as environmental management is concerned, what is noteworthy is the extent to which institutional changes advocated by environmental groups have been achieved during restructuring. In contrast to the situation in other Western countries, environmental reform in New Zealand has been comprehensive in scope, with an attempt to develop an institutional framework for a national environmental policy and to undertake integrated environmental manage-

ment on an ecosystem basis at the regional level by democratically elected regional councils.

B. *Godzone* or Poisoned Paradise?

Here are two contrasting images of New Zealand. The country is frequently portrayed in New Zealand literature and folklore as a *Godzone*, an ideal place to live: a land of great beauty, blessed with pristine environments and diverse landscapes, and having an egalitarian society. The other side of the coin is that, like many societies, New Zealand has its share of problems: environmental degradation, economic insecurity in a rapidly changing global environment, and social disparities. Both images are true.

New Zealand is as diverse as it is dynamic. The direct and indirect influences of a mid-oceanic location are apparent in New Zealand's physical, biotic, and human ecosystems. Situated on the edge of the Pacific geophysical plate, it experiences a high level of seismic and volcanic activity. Its temperate climate is characterized by relatively high rainfall, but interior basins are rather dry. As a result of physical isolation in a water hemisphere, distant from huge land masses for the past 60 to 80 million years, a very high proportion of the indigenous flora and fauna are endemic. A unique geological history and the absence of major mammal or reptile predators has left a laboratory of continental evolution.

Physical diversity presented both opportunities and constraints to successive waves of Polynesian and European settlers and their descendants, and in a short time, the environment showed dramatic responses to human impact.¹¹ Contemporary New Zealand society is not as utilitarian as that of its forebears. Public awareness of and attitudes toward the environment have changed considerably since the mid-nineteenth century. While public interest in environmental issues has waxed and waned in response to particular concerns of the time, the environmental movement has gradually acquired a public standing comparable to other pressure groups, such as those representing farmers and manufacturers.

It is instructive to reflect on the plurality of environmental values in New Zealand in comparison to Europe (figure 1).¹² There, technocentrism (a manipulative mode of thinking) dominates the nurturing mode of ecocentrism. Environmentalism seeks to embrace both world-views, as a constructive tension between "a conservative and nurtur-

ing view of society-nature relationships, where nature provides a metaphor for morality (how to behave) and a guide to rules of conduct (why we must behave so)” and “a radical or manipulative perspective in which human ingenuity and the spirit of competition dictate the terms of morality and conduct.”¹³ The current situation in Europe is characterized by contradictions and tensions, and a failure to agree over cause and action. A more coherent environmentalism has yet to emerge.

Figure 1 Contemporary Trends in Environmentalism in Western Europe

Ecocentrism		Technocentrism	
<i>Gaianism</i>	<i>Communalism</i>	<i>Accommodation</i>	<i>Intervention</i>
Faith in the rights of nature and of the essential need for co-evolution of human and natural ethics	Faith in the co-operative capabilities of societies to establish self-reliant communities based on renewable resource use and appropriate technologies	Faith in the adaptability of institutions and approaches to assessment and evaluation to accommodate to environmental demands	Faith in the application of science, market forces, and managerial ingenuity
“Green” supporters; radical philosophers	Radical socialists; committed youth; radical-liberal politicians; intellectual environmentalists	Middle-ranking executives; environmental scientists; white-collar trade unions; liberal-socialist politicians	Business and finance managers; skilled workers; self-employed; right-wing politicians; career-focused youth
0.1—3% of various opinion surveys	5—10% of various opinion surveys	55—70% of various opinion surveys	10—35% of various opinion surveys
Demand for redistribution of power toward a decentralized, federated economy with more emphasis on informal economic and social transactions and the pursuit of participatory justice		Belief in the retention of the status quo in the existing structure of political power, but a demand for more responsiveness and accountability in political, regulatory, planning, and educational institutions	

Source: O’Riordan, 1989, p. 85.

Despite some of their differences, New Zealand and Europe are comparable. Recent public opinion polls conducted in New Zealand indicate that while environmental issues are perceived as important, they are accorded a lower priority than economic issues. Nor is the environmental lobby homogeneous. As the various groups have entered the political arena, ideological disagreements amongst them have become apparent. Some groups have had success in mainstream party politics, but, on the whole, the environmentalist agenda has been effectively limited to nature protection. As a result, these groups have failed to forge links with other forces whose concerns are more socially oriented. Moreover, links with the indigenous Maori people are nascent and issue specific.

New Zealanders' political ambivalence toward the environment is reflected in the myth of a "clean green" image. Compared to people in other Western countries, many New Zealanders tend to perceive their cities and countryside as environmentally clean, having largely escaped the brunt of the problems faced by many developed societies. The government and private sector have capitalized on this as an international marketing advantage. Such a "green" image may be justified to some degree given that New Zealand does not suffer from the worst excesses of environmental degradation — such as dilapidated inner cities and urban obsolescence, famines and poverty, acid rain, and severe atmospheric and water pollution — that confront many developed and underdeveloped countries.

But, in some respects at least, such differences are only a matter of degree and time, and there may, indeed, be an element of false security here. The degree of environmental damage is particularly evident in deforestation, loss of species, and agricultural pollution caused by heavy-metal accumulation in pastures and orchards. The increasing incidence of environmental problems that many societies, including New Zealand, are facing has been attributed to a number of common, interrelated causes: economic and population growth,¹⁴ technology,¹⁵ affluence and consumerism brought about by industrial civilization,¹⁶ the Judeo-Christian tradition,¹⁷ and the globalization of capitalism.¹⁸ The fact that New Zealand may be marginally better off is, in many respects, a reflection of its peripheral position in the global capitalist economy. Even though it is a highly urbanized society, it has not faced to the same degree the pressures associated with, for instance, large-scale heavy industrialization concentrated in urban agglomerations. Furthermore, New Zealand is a comparatively resource-rich society in

relation to the small size of its population, with labor and capital being the more scarce and expensive factors of production. There has also been a time lag in the diffusion of modern industrial technology, lifestyles, and values to New Zealand that have recently contributed to the environmental crisis in other advanced capitalist societies. Thus, while the pace of environmental change has gathered increasing momentum in New Zealand since the mid-nineteenth century, the above factors have mitigated to some extent the impact of this process, compared with the experience of other developed countries.

II. Globalization and Environment: The New Zealand Experience

A. An Export-Based Economy

The pace of environmental change in New Zealand accelerated rapidly with the establishment of a European-dominated society and a resource-based export economy in a dependency relationship with Great Britain. The early settlers saw forests as impediments to settlement and development. By 1880, forest covered a third of the country, down from a half in 1840. Agricultural and pastoral settlement, rapidly growing towns, and the demands of the gold and timber industries decimated the forest cover and drastically changed the face of the land.¹⁹ The country's landscape has since been altered almost beyond recognition, an outcome of widely held utilitarian values underpinned by strong belief in the unfettered rights of the private property owner and faith in the ability of the government, supported by scientific ingenuity and technical application, to manipulate the environment and promote growth.

Earlier environmental changes were associated with expropriation, settlement, and the exploitation of land, forest, and mineral resources as described above. At the same time, changes linked with urbanization, manufacturing, and tertiary economic activities were beginning to have an impact. By the 1920s, New Zealand was becoming an urban society, and by 1961, more than 60 percent of the population lived in centers with more than 1,000 inhabitants. These activities led to the development of a grassland economy based on the export of primary produce and a limited amount of product diversification. Prosperity flowed from the country's farms and processing industries to urban industries and services. New Zealand carved out a comfortable niche within the global capitalist economy, but it was both fragile and a

recurring source of economic and social insecurity and environmental malaise.

The root causes of environmental change in New Zealand are not unique. Since the Industrial Revolution, humans have gained technological power to subdue and exploit nature.²⁰ That — along with a global economic system based on international division of labor; specialization and exchange; and the combined power of the technological, political, and economic forces — has heralded the greatest known period of exploitation of and changes in the New Zealand environment. The momentum of such change has accelerated, often in response to economic and biophysical adversity. As Cumberland observed, humans did more to alter the landscape in the past 100 years than nature and humans together accomplished in the previous thousand.²¹

B. The Conflicting Role of the State

The state played a pivotal role in the development process for nearly 150 years by promoting and facilitating economic growth, and regulating and managing the impact of economic activity.

As a reflection of the country's dependent position within the international mercantile economy, the dominant focus of public policy debate in New Zealand has inevitably been the issue of economic growth. That objective engendered government intervention in the form of wide-ranging policies and programs to foster utilization of land, energy, mining, fisheries, forestry, and tourism resources. Alongside such wealth-generating initiatives, central government also came to play an important role in service delivery functions, such as the provision of housing, hospitals, roads, railways, and schools.

Even more significant was the overriding importance attached by successive governments, despite their political differences, to the state as a large-scale developer. Its involvement stretched beyond encouraging and facilitating activities of the corporate sector and private individuals. The state was also an entrepreneur: not only was the state the largest landowner,²² but it also owned and managed coal mines, forestry estates, farms, irrigation schemes, power stations, and hotels.

A strong centralist stance pervaded the formulation and implementation of public policies and programs for resource utilization and for the provision of infrastructural services in New Zealand. These objectives tended to be regarded as national and as the primary responsibil-

ity of central government. Because the making and implementation of public policies were imbued with a strong centralist perspective, it was difficult for decision-makers to appreciate the implications of territorial diversity or to permit local and regional flexibility in the choice of policy options. Policy solutions formulated at the national level were assumed to be universally appropriate to all localities and groups because New Zealand was viewed by government as a homogeneous, egalitarian society.

Despite direct public involvement in the New Zealand economy, and regardless of the ideological leanings of the party in power, politicians have been extremely solicitous of the freedom of private property owners. Rural and urban landowners have successfully guarded their apparent rights to make land utilization decisions unencumbered by excessive regulations. Indeed, state involvement in resource utilization projects and the provision of infrastructure services was perceived as necessary to encourage private sector development.

Public regulation of the presumed right of state agencies and private sector corporate developers to make land utilization decisions was sanctioned only after the 1940s and even then was limited to taking care of undesirable "externalities." But at the same time, the state was able to continue its long-standing preoccupation with economic growth. The potential impact of environmental management initiatives at the central government level was marginalized because such initiatives were institutionally co-opted within the mainstream development-oriented bureaucracy. Environmental issues and conflicts, in terms of winners and losers, were effectively suppressed and prevented by bureaucrats and politicians from entering the political arena unless forced to by public pressure. Likewise, the role of local government as environmental manager was also marginalized. Even though a number of environmental functions, such as town and country planning and water and soil management, were delegated to local government, central government was careful to protect its overriding political and bureaucratic supremacy.

Viewed within this wider political economy framework, it is evident that while the cumulative growth during the last five to six decades of environmental legislation may have served an important symbolic role, it failed to be particularly effective in satisfactorily resolving conflicts over resource utilization and in addressing important environmental issues. Because of the ideological premises on which legislation and decision-making were based, and given the

deeply entrenched interests of the state as a major developer, there were inherent constraints on the ability of central government to promote appropriate policies derived from informed judgments about alternative options for resource utilization.

C. A Maori Perspective

Racial dispute in New Zealand over ownership and management of land and other environmental resources reflects long-standing grievances resulting from the failure of successive governments to honor the Treaty of Waitangi, negotiated in 1840 between the Crown and the heads of Maori tribes. The Treaty guaranteed Maori full, exclusive, and undisturbed possession of their lands, estates, forests, fisheries, and other properties in exchange for their recognition of British sovereignty.

To varying degrees, precolonial Maori shared with each other a land- and water-based culture. Despite their small numbers, they had considerable impact on the environment, and large areas of the indigenous forest had been cleared for hunting and cultivation before organized European settlement began in 1840. Nevertheless, over the centuries, these descendants of the first Polynesians also developed skills to live in relative harmony with their dynamic physical and cultural environments. Any propensity for depletion was mediated by social norms based on sharing and reciprocity. On the eve of European settlement, explorers and missionaries recorded large, flourishing coastal communities, implying sustainable resource utilization.

Within decades, European settlement led to disintegration of the traditional Maori economy and growth of an export-oriented economy firmly positioned in the global mercantile framework. Unlike many other societies impacted by European colonization in Africa and Asia, Maori traditional economic systems did not survive, and people were marginalized more than in most colonial societies. Explanations for this include the imposition of a system of individual property rights, decline of Maori population, and rapid growth in the number of colonists. In 1840, Maori outnumbered Europeans by 70 to 1, both were equal within twenty years, and by 1921, Maori composed just 4.5 percent of the total population.

At present, Maori constitute about 15 percent of the New Zealand population and occupy a lowly position in the economy and society. To date, New Zealand society has been dominated by European values

while Maori norms, economic systems, and forms of government, including traditional institutions for resource management, have been eclipsed. The guarantees and privileges accorded them by the Treaty of Waitangi, including unimpeded rights of access to land and water and participation in management decisions, were overlooked or ignored by the state and its instruments for resource allocation and management. Concerns expressed by environmental groups were mirrored, and sometimes overshadowed, by the growing articulation of Maori discontent.²³ Their sense of powerlessness was compounded by little or no legislative provision for Maori concerns to be considered when making developmental decisions relating to mining, hydroelectricity development, and industrial projects. Only in the past decade has this situation begun to change, with the Maori voice being accorded greater recognition by politicians, as discussed below.

D. Implications for Environmental Management

A distinctive feature of the New Zealand experience has been the role of the central state as a contributor to the process of environmental change. Compared with other developed capitalist societies, the growth of the New Zealand economy has been significantly aided by the establishment and growth of a centralized political and administrative bureaucracy. The attitude of the state to the environment has been dominated by ideologies of material progress and technological prowess.

Only relatively recently—as the detrimental environmental impacts of state and private activities began to be perceived as undesirable by sections of New Zealand society, exposing deep-seated political and administrative biases in the manner in which public policies were formulated and implemented—were concerted attempts made to ameliorate the consequences. But the environmental management role was internalized within the mainstream development bureaucracy and therefore marginalized. Environmental policies, such as land-use planning and flood protection legislation, were justified primarily in functional terms to increase output and prevent the worst excesses of free-market capitalism.

Compared with the innovations in institutional arrangements in the United States during the 1970s,²⁴ the international tide of environmentalism did not bring about major changes in decision-making styles in New Zealand. While environmental groups were successful in mobi-

lizing public support against a number of large-scale development projects, their proposals for institutional reform failed to gain political legitimacy until more recently. In reality, the limited institutional innovations in New Zealand during the 1970s, such as environmental audit of state-funded projects, pale in significance when seen in relation to the extent to which the state was willing to use its political muscle and bureaucratic powers to promote its expansionist policies. Indigenous peoples' concerns were also largely ignored. The assumptions underlying the basic ideological framework within which the role of the state in New Zealand society had evolved went unquestioned. Ironically, then, such reforms have had to await the restructuring policies of the recent governments, inspired by neoliberal economic philosophies.

III. Reshaping Environmental Institutions and Policies

As noted earlier, wide-ranging changes in the role of the state have taken place in New Zealand during the last decade. These have major implications for environmental management. We shall examine here three facets of recent policy initiatives: (a) central government bureaucracy, (b) resource management legislation, and (c) Treaty issues.

A. The Changing Role of Central Government

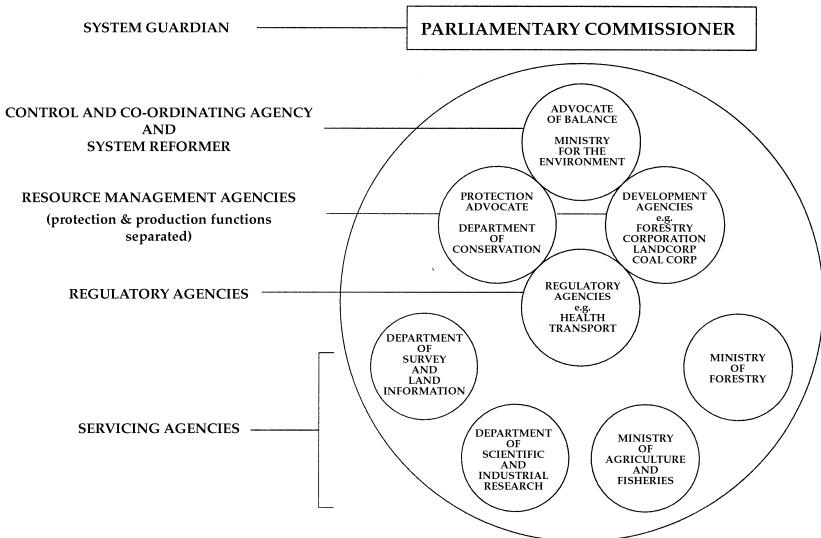
The role of the central government in environmental management has been radically recast since 1984. These innovations represent an outcome of policy development stretching over a number of years and are a product of negotiation amongst stakeholders in a rapidly changing policy environment. The earlier antecedents of these reforms may be traced to environmental conflicts during the 1960s and '70s, such as the Lake Manapouri hydroelectric development proposals and logging of the temperate rain forests on the West coast. However, it was the co-option of the environmental reform momentum within a much wider-ranging political agenda to deregulate the economy and radically restructure the public sector bureaucracy that has been ultimately instrumental in achieving the outcomes advocated by the environmental groups. From a broader theoretical perspective that questions the ability of the state to accord priority to environmental objectives when they come into conflict with economic objectives,²⁵ the recent New Zealand experience demonstrates that fundamental changes in environmental policy have eventuated as an appendage to the wider politi-

cal agenda for economic liberalization. In the absence of such an agenda, it is quite likely that the scope of the environmental reforms would have been limited to incremental changes, as had been the practice prior to 1984.

Recent innovations in the institutional framework for environmental management within central government have been fundamental. They have been implemented by means of two key legislative enactments: the 1986 Environment Act and the 1987 Conservation Act. An important attribute of the new institutional framework is that it is philosophically congruent with the unprecedented recent change of course in New Zealand's development.

A new public bureaucracy responsible for environmental management came into being in 1987. The key environmental management agencies at the central government level are the Ministry for the Environment, the Department of Conservation, and the Parliamentary Commissioner for Environment. The administrative framework within which the above agencies operate is illustrated schematically in figure 2. The former state development agencies have been either abolished or substantially restructured to separate resource production and environmental management functions. The resource production functions of the public sector, such as mining, forestry, lands, and electricity generation, have been devolved to state-owned corporations or privatized.

Figure 2 The New National Environmental Administration Framework



Have the recent changes in the central government's role in environmental management been justified? It is difficult to answer this question unequivocally. Two major desirable outcomes of restructuring have been a separation of potentially conflicting objectives, notably conservation and development, and the making of conflicts in decision-making more visible. Today, few New Zealanders would have reservations about the demise of the former state development bureaucracy, although the devolution of the ownership, as well as management, of large parts of the national estate by the private sector and foreign ownership is likely to be perceived as unwarranted.

Seen from a longer-term perspective, while the state has abandoned its historically important role as a developer, the recent reforms have reaffirmed the foundations of New Zealand society as a property-owning democracy. Thus, not only has the state stepped back from its role as a developer, but decision-making on the end use of resources has been devolved to market forces and the role of the private corporate sector has been strengthened. Commercial objectives now direct the management of resources formerly owned by the Crown, save for the ministerial influence on the corporate plans of the state-owned enterprises. This line of accountability has been broken by the progressive sale of state assets to private interests.

The principle of separating the central government's production and conservation objectives has been widely supported. However, from a spatial angle, the implementation of this approach to environmental concerns has entailed drawing rigid boundaries between production and conservation land resources. Landscapes in between, which could readily be allocated to either conservation or production, have become a contested resource.²⁶ An inevitable consequence of this is that the potential for promoting multiple utilization of large areas of New Zealand does not exist to the same extent as before. The management of the conservation estate has also come under increasing pressure because of lack of resources to deal with issues such as pest control and maintenance of an adequate infrastructure to cater to a growing number of visitors.

The environmental reforms have been achieved as part of a much wider-ranging restructuring exercise, with significant impacts on New Zealand society and lifestyles. The more immediate ramifications have manifested themselves in social dislocation of many rural communities and sustained levels of unemployment. The longer-term consequences are likely to be more subtle.

Environmental objectives have to be pursued within the context of a free market economy. Subsequently, any justification for public intervention is perceived from a restrictive, residual stance. The fundamental tenet that underpins the environmental philosophy of the post-1984 governments is that the role of the state should be restricted primarily to correcting market failures. From a wider societal perspective, changes such as economic deregulation and privatization can be expected to lead to increased conflict between different interest groups over who should benefit from the use of the environment and the wealth or welfare derived from it. It remains to be seen how and to what extent the state responds to such conflicts.

Administrative reorganization by itself will not necessarily lead to better decision-making. It could be argued that an allegedly “neutral” role on the part of the government toward the environment, which eschews consideration of end use of resources, will constrain its commitment to respond to environmental issues effectively. For example, it is difficult to see how the objective of sustainability in the Environment Act can be addressed realistically by the government without consideration of how resources such as land, minerals, and forests are utilized. Integrated environmental management at a national level still remains to be achieved in New Zealand.

B. Resource Management Legislation

New Zealand’s Resource Management Act of 1991 (henceforth the Resource Management Act, or the Act) has received considerable international acclaim as an environmental statute. It provides for the first time in New Zealand a statutory framework for a relatively more holistic and integrated approach to environmental planning based on ecological and democratic principles. It replaces a large number of formerly separate and, in some respects, inconsistent and overlapping resource use statutes.

The Act creates rational and streamlined structures and processes for decision-making within a single framework in order to provide a relatively integrated focus on natural resources (land, air, water, and geothermal — excluding minerals). The central purpose of the Act is defined in terms of the principle of sustainability (appendix). The Act recognizes that the state has an important role in environmental planning and defines a hierarchical, three-tier planning framework (table 1). This arrangement is based on the assumption that decisions should

be made as close as possible to the level of the community of interest where the effects and benefits accrue. The central government's principal role is to overview and monitor.

Most of the responsibility for identifying land, air, and water resource-management issues, developing policy responses, and implementing and monitoring these has been shifted to elected regional councils. The boundaries of these authorities are defined on a catchment basis.

But the Act does more than streamline and integrate previously existing statutes. Its constitution is the outcome of quite a lengthy and critical review. In conjunction with the restructuring of the state sector and local and regional government, and underpinned by a libertarian ideology, the Act is expected to bring about significant changes to New Zealand's environmental policies. Even though, as discussed below, sustainable resource management is the central purpose of the Act, its structure reflects a determination on the part of the government for a more open and competitive economy, a move away from state participation in promoting economic growth and toward decentralized

Table 1 The Resource Management Act: Functions by Levels of Government

CENTRAL GOVERNMENT
- Overview role
- Develop national policy statements and national environment standards
- National aspects of coastal management

REGIONAL COUNCILS
- Integrated management of regional resources
- Water and soil management
- Regional aspects of coastal management
- Natural hazards mitigation
- Regional aspects of hazardous substances use*
- Air pollution control
- Manage geothermal resources

TERRITORIAL LOCAL AUTHORITIES
- Control effects of land use and subdivision
- Noise control
- Controls for natural hazards avoidance and mitigation*
- Local control of hazardous substances use

* Allocation of responsibilities between regional councils and territorial authorities for these functions is decided on a regional basis.

administration of regulatory systems and use of economic instruments to achieve good environmental outcomes.

Environmental objectives are given statutory recognition in the Act. Compared to the preceding legislation, the Act has a clearer guiding philosophy and, in keeping with a long-term trend during the course of this century, its enactment may have led to a marginal increase in favor of public rights over individual rights. This signifies changing public values relating to the environment and increasing acknowledgment of the environmental movement. But the objectives enshrined in the Act have to be achieved within the framework of a political economy dominated by a libertarian ideology. Environmental management is seen as being essentially market led, where collective decisions are made only to cope with consequences of private decisions.

As an overriding objective — promoting *sustainable management* of natural and physical resources—is the cornerstone of the Act. The use of the term *sustainable management*, rather than *development*, is intended to cover the concepts of use, development, and protection. This is seen to be in accord with the government's ostensibly neutral stance with respect to resource allocation decisions.

The recent origins of sustainability as an environmental policy objective may be traced back to the World Conservation Strategy,²⁷ which was endorsed by the New Zealand government. More recently, the principle of sustainable development was strongly advocated in the Brundtland report *Our Common Future*.²⁸ It encompasses ecocentric as well as anthropocentric considerations, as discussed below.

Sustainability, as defined in the Brundtland report, is a value-based concept — it is the moral imperative of accepting intergenerational equity as an overriding goal in the public policy process. It seeks to satisfy reasonable material and nonmaterial needs of society indefinitely. To achieve intergenerational equity means that the actions of the current generation should not substantially limit options available to future generations. Thus, decision-making agencies have to ensure that resources are not harnessed beyond the carrying capacity of the biophysical systems of which they are a part. The above definition implies that development should be compatible with the continued functioning of these essential ecological processes.

But equally important, the sustainability concept as defined in the Brundtland report also implies that at any one particular time, the reasonable needs of all humans can be met. Such a notion of intragenerational equity raises important implications in terms of socioeconomic

constraints on access to resources by different sections of the community. From a more limited perspective, it implies that during the decision-making process, the actions of a particular developer or group should not substantially limit the options available to others. Thus, an important attribute of a sustainable development proposal is that it has a fairly wide degree of social acceptability.

The principal conclusions of the WCED report have been endorsed by New Zealand, and a number of recent policy initiatives have sought to recognize it. The Resource Management Act is the most far-reaching in this respect. However, the concept of sustainable management of natural and physical resources, as defined in the act (appendix), has a much more limited focus compared to the Brundtland report. It is a delicately worded definition, based on extensive consultation and negotiation amongst development and environmental groups, bureaucrats, and successive Labour and National governments. Specifically, the act defines three constraints on use, development, and protection of resources to achieve sustainable management of these resources: the needs of future generations; the safeguarding of ecosystems' life-supporting capacity; and mitigating detrimental environmental impacts.

The extent to which the sustainability clause provides a satisfactory guiding philosophy to protect and improve environmental quality will become clearer as its implementation unfolds. However, in view of the potential implications of this clause in influencing the direction of environmental planning practice, its interpretation is likely to be subject to considerable discussion and litigation. As has already been pointed out, the objective of promoting sustainable management, as defined in the act, can be interpreted in a variety of ways.²⁹ Thus, depending on the relative emphasis put on the word *while* in section 5 (see appendix), the biophysical and intergenerational equity constraints on managing the use, development, and protection of natural and physical resources, stated in clauses (a), (b), and (c), can carry more or less weight compared to the objective of enabling people and communities to provide for their social, economic, and cultural well-being.

In order to operationalize the three constraints on development activity stated in section 5, district and regional councils need to define environmental standards. However, environmental standards are only relative. The notion of an environmental "bottom line" may be scientifically questionable given the resilience of many ecosystems. Thus, district and regional councils could be expected to have considerable

latitude in setting such standards, depending not only on biophysical considerations but also on local socioeconomic conditions and aspirations. Hence, as is already evident, the debate about appropriate environmental standards in district and regional plans is likely to reflect the plurality of prevailing values and conflicts of interest.

Compared to the preceding legislation, the restraints on public intervention in a property-owning democracy are now more clearly defined and circumscribed, but the act does not necessarily constitute the end of this policy debate. In fact, the gains that have been achieved by the environmental movement are already being challenged in the wider arena of electoral politics, as well as through the courts. Groups such as the Business Roundtable and farmers are very critical of environmental compliance costs the act imposes. In any case, the act seems to be more about addressing externality problems rather than attending to the socioeconomic dimensions of environmental changes. Such a natural and physical resource bias in the act is as much a consequence of the concerns motivating the environmental lobby as the neoclassical economic ideology that pervades official thinking. There appears to have been a retreat from the broader community development objectives implicit in the preceding statutes, such as the Town and Country Planning legislation.

Effective implementation of the Resource Management Act will, to a very significant extent, depend on access to adequate information by district and regional councils. Ability to identify and address spillover effects of development, judge adequacy of impact reports, and formulate performance standards and monitor their effectiveness assumes a political commitment to allocate taxpayers' resources for this purpose. While the public participation provisions have been considerably strengthened in the act, the playing field is far from even from the perspective of environmental and community groups who are constrained by both lack of resources in litigating development proposals and threatened costs if court action proves unsuccessful.

C. Treaty Issues

A number of positive attempts have been made in New Zealand during the last decade to respond to Maori concerns. The principal environmental statutes such as the Resource Management Act embrace Maori concepts of nature and require environmental managers to take account of Maori values, culture, and traditions and to encourage

Maori participation in decision-making. This is specifically so in relation to water resource management and coastal issues. The traditional Maori perception of water is bound in cultural beliefs in which the physical and spiritual realms are linked. They regard water as a *taonga* (treasure) bequeathed by ancestors for the life-sustaining use of their descendants. The descendants are, in turn, charged with stewardship (*rangitiratanga* and *katiakitanga*) on behalf of future generations. Water is considered to possess a life force (*mauri*) and to have a spirit (*wairua*). The European and Maori world-views on environment are congruent in some respects, but inevitably there will be tensions. To what extent such cultural differences can be reconciled poses a particular challenge for New Zealand resource managers. The fact that the act requires that the relationship of Maori and their culture and traditions with the environment be recognized and provided for as a matter of national importance is a step in the right direction, even though it is very difficult to provide for a relationship that is based on what are often complex and poorly understood cultural and spiritual values.

The environmental statutes also require that the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi be taken into consideration in environmental management. Here, the objective is to make the Treaty permeate all aspects of resource management rather than just relate to Maori-owned resources, as many ecological issues can be significant to Maori. These principles have been determined through case law and the Waitangi Tribunal, and include tribal development, active protection of Maori interests, partnership, redress, and *rangatiratanga* (self-determination). For this reason, consultation with Maori communities on a proactive basis is mandatory and there is legislative provision for transfer of decision-making powers. As of yet, a role for the *iwi runanga* (native tribal authorities) as a relatively autonomous local authority managing its resources has not been determined.

The environmental statutes give Maori a potentially significant stake as resource managers. As observed earlier, disputes over *ownership* of natural resources have also been a long-standing source of grievance for the Maori people. These issues are being addressed through the process of negotiated settlement of Treaty claims with individual tribes. The Maori have also long contested the ownership and management of sea fishery resources. A recent national fisheries settlement has given the Maori ownership of approximately 40 percent of New Zealand's inshore and deepwater fisheries stock.

Notwithstanding the potential cultural and economic significance of the fishery settlement to the Maori, negotiating this deal has exposed deep-seated divisions and raised fundamental questions regarding *iwi* (tribal) Treaty rights as well as Maori sovereignty, identity, and leadership. The definition of *iwi* property rights has still to be resolved, and the allocation of the fishery assets may reinforce the emerging pattern of socioeconomic and geographic stratification within the Maori population.

IV. Looking Forward

Does New Zealand have an environmental crisis? There is no denying that there are significant environmental concerns. The physical and climatic qualities of New Zealand make it susceptible to natural environmental hazards such as floods, but the current environmental dilemma reflects the widespread impact of human activities. Some of the problems are rooted in Polynesian settlement during the precolonial period, and most have become exacerbated by development of an export economy based on pastoral production and by urbanization.

Even though the recent environmental management reforms have been ambitious in conception and scope, they are also consistent with the principles of economic liberalism and green capitalism. These policies are innovative when seen from an international perspective and will set the parameters for environmental management by the state for the next three to four decades. One must, nevertheless, question if the recent policies mark a significant shift from a pioneering mentality that promoted growth to one that accommodates a rising concern for environmental quality and sustainable development.

The recent reforms have led to the restructuring of agencies that previously carried out environmental management functions to achieve a mix of commercial, conservation, and environmental quality objectives. The previous organizations could divert resources to special interest groups and ignore the external costs of resource exploitation. Their successors have to achieve single-purpose objectives. Reorganization of the state sector has thus removed a major cause of maladministration in New Zealand, and an open economy unfettered by production subsidies and import controls should prove environmentally beneficial. Further, environmental decision-making has been devolved to local and regional government. In short, the new policies

provide a better framework for addressing environmental problems and concerns.

At the same time, however, deregulation of the economy and dismantling of the welfare state have exacerbated ecological problems in New Zealand, which has historically evolved as a periphery of the global mercantile economy. The New Right policies of the recent governments have linked it even more closely with the Pacific Rim global economic system. The competitive economic pressures on New Zealand will continue to be a major constraint on its ability to pursue environmental objectives in a free-market economy. Conflicts and choices between resource utilization options will be felt as acutely in rural provincial as in metropolitan regions.

The recent environmental reforms have not resolved the country's dilemmas. Even though intrinsic and intergenerational values of ecosystems have statutory recognition in the new laws, these acts do not provide direction for how conflicts between these values and anthropocentric values given the same status in the statutes are to be resolved. Policies and plans to implement these statutes are inevitably tilted toward short-term economic objectives. Long-standing problems such as environmental degradation caused by rabbit infestation and pastoral grazing pressures have worsened and there is no solution in sight, as witnessed by the recent actions of a small group of farmers to introduce a rabbit-killing virus from Australia in contravention of biosecurity laws. Progress in settling Treaty of Waitangi claims to resources by Maori also raises environmental questions. The government has promised not to use private property in settlements in order to appease farmer concerns. This has put pressure on the national conservation estate. The vestigial pioneer mentality amongst New Zealanders may be related to the relative newness of European settlement in this part of the world compared to Europe or, for that matter, the New World.

New Zealand's policies are based on a libertarian doctrine of belief in market forces and adaptability to resolve environmental demands. Fundamental matters remain unquestioned, such as the merits of continuous economic growth and increasing consumption in an individualistic society that subscribes to materialistic values. Long-standing social structures and relationships, based on private property ownership, have been reinforced through belief in the virtues of privatization. But crucial issues relating to the causes of environmental problems and conflicts are being ignored or played down.

The environmental policies are also based on the view that a secure economic niche for New Zealand in the global system will ease the task of making choices about end use of resources and involve a minimum of government intervention. The validity of this assumption is questionable. Comparative economic advantage in production of agricultural commodities and other natural resources could be to New Zealand's short-term economic benefit, which is why New Zealand strongly favors removal of tariff barriers under the aegis of the World Trade Organization (WTO). In the longer term, however, current economic activities such as sheep farming in the high country — and the lifestyles dependent on them — may not prove sustainable.

Sound development of resource-based activities in New Zealand demands critical examination of biophysical and socioeconomic activities and practices. So development of sustainable agriculture requires reduction in the use of commercial fertilizers, pesticides, and energy. Emphasis needs also to be placed on the longer-term health of these ecological and social systems that maintain a viable rural sector. Broader criteria than those based on economics and the "user pays" principle are needed to promote sustainable agriculture.³⁰ As part of a national environmental strategy, it may be necessary to reallocate land and other resources that are not used sustainably.

Any changes in lifestyles should parallel technological shifts. This will require a reexamination of the underpinnings of current lifestyles, a movement toward less materialism and individualism, and an acceptance of the "virtue of enoughness."³¹

It is also important to recognize that environmental issues in New Zealand are inextricably linked with those in the rest of the world. Solutions to global environmental threats such as atmospheric warming and ozone depletion cannot be addressed without satisfying the basic needs of the less privileged inhabitants of the earth. While this is the apparent justification for development projects sponsored by New Zealand in the Asia-Pacific region, such initiatives are frequently dictated by economic self-interest instead of humanitarian and environmental objectives. ●

Appendix

Central Purpose of the Resource Management Act 1991

5. Purpose

- (1) The purpose of this Act is to promote the sustainable management of natural and physical resources.
- (2) In this Act, “sustainable management” means managing the use, development, and protection of natural and physical resources in a way, or at a rate, which enables people and communities to provide for their social, economic, and cultural well being and for their health and safety while
 - (a) Sustaining the potential of natural and physical resources (excluding minerals) to meet the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations; and
 - (b) Safeguarding the life-supporting capacity of air, water, soil, and ecosystems; and
 - (c) Avoiding, remedying, or mitigating any adverse effects of activities on the environment.

Notes

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