

# Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall

**Acting Minister of Conservation**  
**Minita Taupua mō Te Papa Atawhai**



28 May 2021

**MEDIA STATEMENT**

## **Government speeds up stewardship land reclassification**

The Government is accelerating the reclassification of stewardship land to ensure land with high conservation value is protected for future generations to enjoy, Acting Conservation Minister Dr Ayesha Verrall announced today.

“It’s vital that land with high conservation value is classified correctly to ensure it is protected for its natural and cultural heritage and safeguarded for the future.

“Reclassification fits with the Government’s manifesto commitment to protect, preserve and restore our natural heritage and biodiversity and is one of the Department of Conservation’s (DOC) core roles and responsibilities.

“However the current process of reclassifying stewardship land is complex, costly and time-consuming. The Government intends to progress legislation to streamline, speed up and simplify the process so land with conservation value is identified and managed appropriately, while land with low or no conservation value can be considered for other uses.”

It will also allow for more efficient public consultation. Further Cabinet decisions regarding the proposed legislation will be made later this year.

“In the meantime, two independent expert national panels are being established, with their initial focus being on the Northern South Island and Western South Island.”

Comprising independent representatives – including technical experts with capability in ecology, earth sciences, landscape, recreation, heritage and matauranga Māori – the panels have been tasked with providing revised classification recommendations to the Conservation Minister.

There will be opportunities for the public, stakeholders and iwi/Māori to provide feedback on the recommendations through a public consultation process, prior to final decisions being made on the proposed reclassification.

At this stage it is anticipated it will take about eight months for each panel to undertake their work and provide recommendations.

Further details on public consultation will be announced in due course.

“There is considerable confusion over stewardship land status and ongoing debate over whether it is appropriate to allow economic activity in these areas. These new measures will remove ambiguity and provide clarity as to what conservation values are present and how much protection the land has.

“Today’s announcement recognises that many stewardship areas across New Zealand are home to threatened species and high-priority ecosystems. Reclassification will ensure appropriate protection of these areas which is critical to reversing the decline of indigenous biodiversity.

“It will also protect the cultural, historic and recreation values of stewardship areas for future generations,” Dr Ayesha Verrall said.

**Panel One** (initially focussed on the Northern South Island)

Alternating chairs: Hon Christopher Finlayson and Hon Philip Woollaston

Members:

- Mr Geoff Canham
- Ms Di Lucas
- Ms Laura Coll McLaughlin
- Ms Mary O’Keefe
- Hon Mita Ririnui
- Mr William Shaw

**Panel Two** (initially focussed on the Western South Island)

Chairperson: Dr Jan Wright

Members:

- Mr Philip Blakely
- Ms Jo Breese
- Mr Neil Clifton
- Dr William (Bill) Lee
- Dr Les Molloy
- Dr Marama Muru-Lanning
- Ms Katharine Watson

Terms of Reference for the independent expert national panels can be found [here](#)

Maps of the initial areas being considered by the panels:

- [Western South Island Map](#)
- [Northern South Island Map](#)

**Background notes:**

- *Stewardship land is the term given for land that was allocated to DOC when it was formed in 1987. This includes former State forest and Crown Land that were considered to have conservation value.*
- *Around 30% of conservation land is stewardship areas, approximately 2,508,000 ha – 9% of New Zealand.*
- *Stewardship areas are ‘conservation areas’ under the Conservation Act which are managed to protect the natural and historic values present on the land.*
- *Stewardship areas do not have to be reclassified for their conservation values to be managed and protected.*
- *Stewardship areas can be disposed of, exchanged or reclassified to add greater protection that reflects the conservation values present.*
- *The most recent stewardship land to be reclassified is the Mokihinui catchment which was added to Kahurangi National Park.*

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