

**Statement to the Hearings Panel of Commissioners, 30 October 2023**  
**West Coast Penguin Trust**

**My name is Inger Perkins and I am the Manager of the West Coast Penguin Trust.**

The West Coast Penguin Trust was established in 2006 prompted by concerns that penguin numbers were declining.

**Our Vision** is that Sea and shore birds and their habitat across the West Coast Te Tai Poutini are healthy and thriving.

**Our Mission** is to achieve our Vision through research, education, awareness, advocacy and practical projects, founded on strong science. Penguins and other sea and shore birds are a treasure or taonga, and we strive to protect and conserve them and the wider marine and coastal environment.

Where there is a perceived risk to sea and shorebirds and their habitat, the Trust will advocate to remove that risk.

Our late Chair and Scientist, seabird ecologist Kerry-Jayne Wilson, a member of the NZ order of merit for her work with seabirds, had expertise in this area and we have drawn on that in our contribution to the process to develop TTPP. However, I am not an expert, I am here as an advocate.

With regard to the plan's Strategic Direction chapter, we believe climate needs a stronger focus to reduce the contribution of the region to the crisis, and thus to contribute to improved outcomes for our biodiversity.

Climate change is increasingly impacting seabirds.

Climate change, as evidenced by the strong Tasman Sea marine heatwaves of last summer, affects the abundance and distribution of food sources for Westland petrels / tāiko, **Fiordland crested penguins / tawaki**, and **little penguins / kororā**, which can impact breeding success.

Last year, we saw a very poor breeding year for **kororā**, likely directly linked to the sea surface temperatures that were several degrees above normal, under the extreme La Niña conditions.

Now we are into the El Niño phase of the El Niño Southern Oscillation. This can bring weather systems with stronger or more frequent winds and more rain from the west in the summer and from the south west in the spring and autumn; in stronger phases, effects can be more intense. These systems have the potential to push prey fish out of reach of penguins. We saw this in 2015 during the last El Niño phase with the total breeding failure of **tawaki** in South Westland. Adult penguins travelled up to 100km off shore and were diving to 100m, an order of magnitude more than usual, in very poor feeding conditions; sadly probably all chicks starved to death that year in two of the three colonies we were monitoring.

Climate scientists forecast more intense and more frequent El Niño and La Niña events.

A warming climate results in more moisture being held in the air, around 7% more water vapour per one degree of warming. The heavier air masses result in more intense heavy rainfall events, with 10-20% heavier rainfall.<sup>1</sup>

Major rainfall events wash vast volumes of sediment into our rivers and out to sea, reducing visibility to zero over large areas. **Penguins** use sight to catch prey fish and cannot feed in such conditions, which can be expected to become larger, reach further and last longer.

The warmer climate also increases the risk of cyclones making landfall on the West Coast. In 2014, Cyclone Ita caused slips and is thought to have destroyed hundreds of Westland petrel or tāiko burrows. The tāiko breeds near Punakaiki and nowhere else in the world, so the population is immensely vulnerable.

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The s42 report makes the following recommendation at paragraph 299:

That a new Strategic Direction section be included within the Plan entitled “climate change” and

that the following objectives be included within the Climate Change (CC) Strategic Direction:

CC – O1: To enable communities of Te Tai Poutini/the West Coast to build resilience to and adapt to the effects of climate change.

CC – O2: To support communities to make good decisions around climate change exacerbated hazards and managed retreat to safer areas of lower risk.

CC – O3: To support technologies and activities that enable greenhouse gas emissions reductions and the transition to a low carbon emissions economy, while ensuring their adverse effects are well managed.

We believe that it is essential to have a Climate Change section within TTPP Strategic Direction, but it needs to be stronger, much stronger.

It needs to go beyond building resilience, managed relocation and supporting technologies and activities that will enable a transition to a low carbon emissions economy.

We propose the addition of a fourth objective CC-O4 or replacement of the proposed CC-O3 that will be more proactive and will do more to ensure carbon emissions are reduced.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://environment.govt.nz/news/the-science-linking-extreme-weather-and-climate-change/#:~:text=One%20degree%20of%20warming%20in,to%2020%20per%20cent%20heavier>. – MfE and IPCC

This is our proposed objective and we invite appropriate experts to improve it:

To achieve a transition to a low carbon emissions economy aligned with national Emissions Reduction Plans by enabling and supporting emissions reductions through existing activities and new technologies and activities.

Appropriate policies and rules will need to be added to the plan to support climate objectives to ensure that permitted, controlled and discretionary activities are contributing to the transition to a low-emissions economy rather than creating more carbon emissions that exacerbate the problem.

In conclusion, we believe that climate needs to be front of mind for every aspect of the new plan and then for every resource consent. Our region needs to be part of the solution and help reduce the threat of the climate crisis to our biodiversity.

Thank you.