

# Keeping it clean

Chief Executive of Air New Zealand Rob Fyfe explains why the company has such a high stake in protecting the environment.

First and foremost Air New Zealand is a tourist airline—linking our remote nation to global trading partners and enabling visitors to come and experience the unspoilt beauty that is New Zealand. Central to our nation's appeal is its 'clean green' image. The diversity of its land and seascapes, the uniqueness of its fauna and flora, and its rich culture attracts more than 2.3 million visitors each year—not bad for a country of only 4.2 million inhabitants. The growth in tourism has been driven by the nation's strong international profile and increasing air capacity.

Air New Zealand plays a major role in ensuring the country's image is maintained around the world. As one of the most active and effective marketers of New Zealand globally, we spend millions of dollars a year encouraging tourists to visit. But we see the paradox; in doing so we must manage our impact on the environment in a sustainable way.

Environmental lobbyists around the world, but particularly in Europe, are painting air travel as the new tobacco. Air travel is an easy target; a little less air travel seems a lot easier for people than fundamentally changing one's lifestyle and current behaviour, like driving less, consuming less electricity and eating less processed foods. Politicians and even environmentalists themselves have been publicly hounded for making long-haul flights. In a recent survey, one in five Australians said they were considering abandoning air travel because of its environmental impact.

As a geographically-remote nation, which relies on tourism as a major source of income, and air travel as the only realistic means to get in and out, any consumer reluctance to take long haul flights is not good news for us. Tourism is made up of around 18,000 small and medium enterprises, meaning it's fragmented and not very visible, but it employs one in 10 of us. It

contributes more than NZD 18 billion annually to New Zealand's GDP—around 10% of the total. Looking ahead, it's clear to me that making Air New Zealand the most environmentally-friendly airline in the world will be integral to the future success of New Zealand as an attractive trading partner and visitor destination, and to the country's economy as a whole.

Governments and consumers in all major countries now see the degradation of our environment as the key issue of our time. Our Government has taken a very strong stance on environmental sustainability. In essence, it has committed New Zealand to punching above its weight, demonstrating global leadership and "showing the world how to do it".

Customers big and small are factoring in environmental responsibility before making purchasing decisions, and this is something we should embrace. Working with the Government we're taking a bold

stand in support of a sustainable planet. A cornerstone to that is our long-haul fleet replacement programme. We're committing more than NZD 2 billion to acquiring what will be the world's youngest, most environmentally-friendly and technologically-advanced long-haul fleet.

And Air New Zealand's commitment to environmental responsibility will not be confined to the traditional. We're working with Boeing and Rolls Royce on the development of biofuels. The inaugural step in the relationship will be the first commercial trial of a biofuelled, Rolls Royce powered, Boeing aircraft in 2008–2009.

Much of the debate around Kyoto focuses on the cost impact of compliance, and the risk that it will make us uncompetitive as a nation, particularly if the US and

Australia continue with their stance and elect not to ratify Kyoto. We have to ask if we want to be a nation dependent on commodity producers. If our only competitive edge is as a low-cost producer, it's very hard for a nation the size of New Zealand to compete. Taking the lead on environmental performance and delivering meaningful, differentiating performance, rather than 'green-washing', can become a competitive advantage for us and enable New Zealand, our products and services to command a price premium. Our future as a nation lies in quality, sustainability and working with our environment to capitalize on our key competitive advantage—the land we live on. ■

[www.airnewzealand.com](http://www.airnewzealand.com)

Air New Zealand is a member of the Star Alliance network of airlines that has teamed up with IUCN, UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands to launch Biosphere Connections. With the aim of promoting biodiversity conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources, the initiative uses the communications activities of the four partners including websites, publications, events and in-flight entertainment systems. It also allows the airline connections of the Star Alliance to help connect the people and places of IUCN, UNESCO MAB and Ramsar in their daily work.

