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The Hon John Key  
Prime Minister of New Zealand  
Private Bag 18888  
Parliament buildings  
Wellington, New Zealand, 6160

14 April 2010

Dear Prime Minister,

We are writing to you on behalf of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the world's oldest and largest global environmental network, and its World Commission on Protected Areas, the world's foremost authority on protected areas. We write to communicate our serious concern about the proposal of the New Zealand government to remove areas from the legislative protection provided under Schedule 4 of the Crown Minerals Act, which protects high value biodiversity areas of the country's conservation estate. We also understand that the government plans to survey other conservation lands with a view to possible future mining.

As you know, protected areas are the foundation of New Zealand's biodiversity conservation and they also play crucial roles in climate change adaptation and mitigation, provide water, are a prime resource for the tourism industry and are the foundation of the nature-based lifestyle New Zealanders value and promote.

IUCN Members have expressed their views on mining and protected areas through various resolutions at World Conservation Congresses. These can be summarized as:

- Protected areas should be "no go" areas for mining, and States should prohibit by law all exploration and extraction of mineral resources in Category I to IV protected areas, which in the context of New Zealand includes World Heritage Areas, marine reserves, national parks, nature reserves, scientific reserves, wilderness areas, wildlife sanctuaries and internationally significant wetlands.
- States should uphold the integrity of critical ecosystems, notably in the management of the world's protected areas and establish and enforce international best practices and national laws for mining.
- Removing or changing the boundaries of protected areas to allow mining exploration and/or exploitation should not be considered. Existing protected areas are fundamental to national environmental efforts and should not be seen as something to trade off for short term economic gain.

We therefore express our deep concern about the proposal to remove areas from Schedule 4 on three major grounds.


- (i) Such a decision would risk New Zealand, a valued IUCN Member, being perceived in the international arena as diminishing the immense global importance of protected areas

at a time when the international community, through the United Nations International Year of Biodiversity, looks to governments to strengthen their commitments.

- (ii) Every incursion into protected areas contributes to irretrievable biodiversity loss. Given that New Zealand's biodiversity has experienced one of the highest species extinction rates in the world due to the loss of habitat and the introduction of invasive species, we believe that your country's protected areas need to play their vital role in conserving biodiversity in perpetuity.
- (iii) Removing legislative protection to allow mining in areas that are currently protected sets a very serious precedent and risks New Zealand's respected international reputation in biodiversity conservation

In conclusion, IUCN believes that the proposed changes are worrying departures from New Zealand's past progress in conservation over many decades and we do not believe such direction is in the long term interest of New Zealand and a healthy planet.

Yours faithfully,



Julia Marton-Lefèvre  
Director General of IUCN



Nikita (Nik) Lopoukhine  
Chair, IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas

cc : The Hon Kate Wilkinson, Minister of Conservation  
The Hon Gerry Brownlee, Minister of Energy and Resources