

MERGER WILL CREATE A SUPER-MINISTRY

About 60 jobs are expected to be lost when the Ministry of Fisheries and Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry merge next year on February 1.

The Minister of State Services, Tony Ryall, said on March 10 that the merger would deliver better results by reducing “back-office bureaucracy”. It was expected to save \$10 million in the first full year, with \$8.5 million annual savings over time, Ryall said. The move follows the integration of the Food Safety Authority and Biosecurity into one organisation last year. The cost of the merger would be covered from within “existing baselines,” he said.

“This merger will reduce duplicated and overlapping functions between the two organisations, and create an agency that is better able to support our primary industries.”

A spokeswoman for Ryall said most of those who may lose their jobs are expected to be staff from the Wellington headquarters of the merged ministries. Roughly 2300 people work across both ministries. Details of the cuts are expected to be decided in the next year. “But I imagine they will be duplicated roles,” she said.

In 1995 the National government, led by Prime Minister Jim Bolger, split the then Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries into two government departments. The new merger effectively reverses that decision.

The current chief executive of MAF, Wayne McNee, who previously held the same role with MFish, will be the acting chief executive of the new super-ministry. Since taking over MAF just before Christmas, he has been working to make it more efficient and relevant to the agriculture sector.

The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, David Carter, says the merger will provide integrated policy advice, “to better support the government’s agenda for long-term economic growth from our primary producers.

Carter says the new agency will be better equipped than (the two existing ministries) to work with primary sector stakeholders, including iwi, local government and international trading partners on regulatory, food and biosecurity issues.

“I expect a proportion of the savings will be shared with the sectors the agency works with to reduce the costs of doing business.”

Fisheries Minister Phil Heatley says grouping the ministries together will create an agency with greater capacity and capability. “As Minister of Fisheries, I look forward to continuing my close affiliation with the recreational, commercial, customary and aquaculture fishing sectors.”

The president of the Recreational Fishing Council, Geoff Rowling, says the merger is a threat to public fisheries. “It will only serve to speed the devolution of control to commercial interests.”

He says fisheries management is tilted towards the commercial seafood industry, “with little to no support for actively managing the public’s interests.”



Fisheries Minister
Phil Heatley


With management of the marine environment becoming more complex, the voluntary model is no longer viable, Rowling says. “It is very likely a Department of Primary Industries firmly focused on maximising an economic return for the country is unlikely to focus on public access to fish, or provide real opportunities for recreational fishers to actively participate in fisheries management.

“The very least they should do is fully fund an independent investigation into how this interest can be better represented and protected.”

The Public Service Association says the move is an unnecessary distraction in a time of national emergency. National Secretary Richard Wagstaff says claims the merger will save \$10 million annually are guesswork and a smokescreen for a small-government agenda.

“We’ve been on this merry-go-round before, in 1995,” Wagstaff said. “That restructuring was meant to provide a more efficient service and save money. Now we are told the opposite is true.”

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