Assignment 2: Are we doing enough to protect our environment?

It’s question time in the New Zealand parliament. Opposition MPs are on their feet grilling the Prime Minister about a recent book which argues that NZ is far from doing enough to protect its environment. “The clean, green image is a myth!” cries one of the MPs from the Green Party, “by 2030 our environment will be irreversibly compromised, many of our endemic wildlife gone, our national parks turned into mining wastelands, our rivers polluted by intensive farming activities, our fish stocks depleted because of overfishing, our coastlines polluted by offshore oil spills, and our pride in our country gone forever.” “We have an ethical responsibility to care for our environment,” says another MP, “what is the PM going to do about this? Changes are needed!” The PM bats away the questions with his usual skill, but outside the debating chamber it’s another story.

Five minutes after question time, the Environment Minister is summoned to the PM’s office. The PM is incensed by all this fuss: “Is the protection of our environment really more important than resourcing the human population of this country? Surely it is just one of many priorities we have to juggle!” he demands. “New Zealand doesn’t have the population pressures of other more urbanised countries. We have vast areas of native forest, pristine coastlines and a big exclusive economic zone for our fisheries. Do we need to worry about protecting these? Shouldn’t we focus, rather, on mining our many natural resources so we can have better education, health, housing, welfare, and transport support for our growing population? If the people of New Zealand had any idea at all of the human costs of prioritising our environment, they’d soon think differently.”

After an hour, the Minister returns in a state of some agitation to his own office and calls in his team. They listen while he lets off steam for a while, and then settle down to business. The PM wants answers: is NZ doing enough to protect the environment? Does more need to be done – and, if so, how? Or are we, actually, over-resourcing environmental protection? What are the ethical issues relating to the environment in NZ? The Minister decides to allocate various aspects of the topic to different research teams within his office. If he is happy with the quality of the reports, he will forward them to the Prime Minister.

You are a member of one of the research teams in the Ministry for the Environment. The Minister has asked your team to:

- Examine the ethical issues relating to the care of the environment in NZ
- Come up with a series of conclusions about whether NZ is doing enough – or too much - to care for its environment and recommendations about potential government actions to address any of these issues, based on key principles of environmental ethics.
- Identify public and relevant professional views on ethical care of the environment in NZ
Obviously, this is a huge topic, and one team cannot address all the issues. The leaders of the research teams meet together and draw up a process and a list of questions that need to be addressed in order to answer the overall questions.

**Step 1: Establishing a sound ethical base for environmental care and protection in New Zealand.**

Each team has been asked to develop an ethical framework for environmental care and protection in NZ by answering ALL of the following questions:

1. Is NZ’s environment under threat? What is the evidence for your answer?
2. If the NZ environment is under threat, who, if anyone, is responsible for taking action to address the threat(s)?
3. What ethical principles should be used as the ethical basis on which care and protection of the environment should be established in NZ?

**Step 2: Putting the ethical base into practice**

The next step is to show what the implications of your ethical framework are for specific issues relating to the protection of the environment. In other words, what changes would be needed in NZ’s environmental policy, if the ethical basis identified in step one was implemented?

Each team should use the ethical framework they’ve established in Step 1 to assess whether there are any ethical problems in New Zealand in relation to THREE of the following issues. You should also show what changes would be needed in each of the areas you have chosen, if your ethical framework was used as the basis of government policy related to care of the environment. The topics are:

1. Predator control: Possums and/or stoats
2. Predator control: Cats
4. Water Quality
5. Marine Environment
6. Waste management
7. Plastic usage
8. Species under threat, e.g. freshwater eels
9. Māori perspectives on the environment

In considering these issues from the perspective of your ethical framework, you should also consider the implications for the New Zealand economy and/or the lifestyles of New Zealanders.

**Step 3: Researching public opinion**
Finally, each team should explore what the public or a special interest group think about all these issues. To do this, each team should conduct a survey OR 1-2 in-depth interviews to provide more insight into public/expert opinion. Choose ONE of the following groups to investigate:

1. The general public
2. One segment of the population, eg young people, senior citizens, teachers, medical practitioners, members of a religious group
3. A group with a special interest in environmental issues, e.g. scientists, members of a particular political party or lobby group, farmers, primary industry leaders, or Māori

Conduct your interviews or survey to find answers to the following questions in relation to your targeted group:

1. Do they feel that the government is doing enough (or too much) to care for and protect our environment?
2. What do they identify as central concerns regarding our environment?
3. What are their views on ONE of the topics from Step 2?
4. What ethical principles do you think define the position of the majority of the people you surveyed/interviewed? OR do the people you interviewed/surveyed agree with the ethical basis you have established in Step 1?

Note 1: for this research, you are expected to draw on both the literature you have explored earlier on the course AND primary research in the form of a series of interviews (a maximum of three) or a survey. Interviews must be reported anonymously i.e., you must not identify the person(s) you interview in your report (instead, you should use a descriptor e.g. doctor, primary school principal).

You must discuss with your tutor how you will conduct your survey or interviews, and your survey/interview questions must be shown to your tutor ahead of time. You may not proceed with the survey or interviews until you have approval from your tutor.

You must provide anyone who consents to be interviewed or to take part in a survey with the information sheet provided. If you are conducting interviews, you should provide this information sheet when you first make contact with the potential interviewee, e.g., if you email them to ask for an interview, attach the information sheet to the email.

Note 2: One of the challenges of this report is that it must be written as a coherent whole. Not only must it read as if one person has written it, its argument must be consistent. So, for example, you cannot argue in Step 1 that we are not responsible for taking action to protect the environment and then, in the sections for Step 2 or 3, suggest that actions must be taken.
Report structure

Report length: 3000 words from the Introduction to the end of the Recommendations (ie the title page, covering note, table of contents, reference list and appendices are not included in the word count). This is a strict limit; do not exceed it (check the count in Word’s status bar).

We are looking for evidence of appropriate use of scientific style: conciseness, clarity, clear paragraphing, and appropriate use of sources (both primary and secondary). Other important features include an ability to write in report format for a specific audience and to demonstrate an understanding of the ethical issues related to your topic.

Read Writing guidelines, chapter 6, on the report to a client carefully to make sure you understand the report structure. Your report should be based on the following structure (adapted as you think appropriate to meet your audience’s needs):

- Covering note
- Title page
- Table of contents
- Introduction
- Discussion
- Conclusions
- Recommendations
- Reference list
- Appendix 1: Summary of interview/survey
- Any other appendices you consider appropriate (if needed)

When you submit the report you must also submit as an attachment:

- The list of each person’s contributions to the report