

Department of Conservation revamp badly flawed

Article by Deidre Mussen, February 4 - 2015, is taken from website "Stuff" and also reported on the front page of the Wellington "Dominion Post" and other media. See the links below.

- <http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/65751239/department-of-conservation-revamp-badly-flawed>
- <http://www.pressreader.com/new-zealand/the-dominion-post/20150204>

Bosses of the Department of Conservation have been forced to backtrack on parts of its \$12.5 million restructure after admitting serious problems with the unpopular project.

Nearly 100 staff lost their jobs in the restructure, which split DOC into two main groupings when it came into effect in September 2013.

Only 18 months later, it is about to reinstate some roles and test new ways of working as a result of numerous flaws in the restructuring.

A review by Australian consultancy Taribon last September and October, which included a survey of 1006 DOC staff, slated the restructure, blaming it for a breakdown in communication, inefficiencies, leadership difficulties and preventing DOC achieving its goal of significant steps towards conservation gains.

DOC director-general Lou Sanson wrote to the Conservation Authority this week about plans to tackle the problems, noting it was "well down the track of putting supervisors back into offices to reduce the span of control".

Sanson, who took the helm after the restructuring, said it would pilot a "refocused" way of working in the West Coast and Nelson/Marlborough offices, starting in the middle of this month.

The department's deputy director-general of conservation partnerships, Kay Booth, who is leading the three-month pilot, denied the changes were backtracking and said it was instead "building on the restructure" by looking at how the organisation operated.

"I don't believe the structure is a failure," she said. "Essentially, what we are doing here is responding to what we've heard from staff and several reviews of the organisation that we have had over the last year."

But in a presentation to the Conservation Authority yesterday, she admitted the Taribon review revealed that only 7 per cent of DOC staff believed the two new groupings – called partnerships and services – worked together "seamlessly".

"Similarly poor results were recorded for questions around decision-making, efficiency and communication in general."

Forest & Bird's campaign and advocacy group manager, Kevin Hackwell, said: "It is definitely a backtrack of the restructure. It wasn't going to work, it didn't work and this was inevitable."

He criticised the State Services Commission, which did a performance review of DOC last July, concluding it was heading in the right direction while undertaking one of the biggest and most challenging transformations in the public sector.

Hackwell said the commission failed to "spot huge holes" in the new structure but he welcomed DOC's plans to address its problems.

"The fact that it has been such a failure reflects very poorly on the State Services Commission."

Booth said staff numbers at DOC would remain unchanged but roles would alter under the planned reforms.

Its past structure had issues but the restructured one suffered other problems that needed to be dealt with, including developing clear goals and improving leadership, decision-making and lines of communication, she said.

DOC did its own extensive review last year, which concluded its staff lacked clarity about their roles.

The "partnerships" group was supposed to identify and capitalise on "step change growth", which meant major steps in conservation gains, but the new structure prevented that happening, Booth said.

Green Party conservation spokeswoman Eugenie Sage agreed, praising DOC for taking action over its flawed structure.

"The restructuring was a debacle and showed no understanding of how conservation worked on the ground."

- The Press