

# Jodanne Aitken's Submission on the draft Biodiversity Strategy for Selwyn District

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Kea are of particular importance for the Selwyn Biodiversity Strategy because as well as being endangered and iconic they are also active off public conservation land on land that is owned, managed or regulated by Selwyn District including local roads, Selwyn District assets and on private and other land regulated under the District Plan and subject to bylaws. The Selwyn district is a key location for kea in New Zealand.

I have been involved with kea for over 5 years as both a volunteer for the Kea Conservation Trust (KCT) and as a researcher through my graduate studies at Lincoln University. Currently, I am a PhD candidate at Lincoln University focusing on kea movement ecology in the Arthur's Pass area. Part of my research has focused on the movements of kea captured in Arthur's Pass township.

Previously, it was unknown how often and how far these birds travel out of the Bealey Valley, given that they were only ever sighted in Arthur's Pass township. In the figure below you will see over 9000 GPS points from 17 birds showing the large distances kea are capable of traveling. When you compare this data to sightings in the kea sightings database it highlights that we are not necessarily seeing all the places kea are going. However, the big movements we see from birds solely out of Arthur's Pass township combined with their historic numbers east of the main divide (ski fields and high-country stations), suggest that if kea are not in the high country already, they probably will be with increased conservation efforts to manage their threats (stoats and feral cats) in this habitat type. That is why I support the inclusion of kea in the list of species in the High Country and Foothill habitat. The Selwyn Biodiversity Strategy needs to capture both current and predicted distributions

of endemic taonga species to ensure that it continues to achieve desired conservation outcomes into the future.

Kea, particularly in the Arthur's Pass area, are a special part of the Selwyn district, and therefore should be included in the strategy as a special interest fauna. Kea are a key part of the alpine ecosystems resilience to change, given they are the only extant, long distance seed disperser left in this habitat type. With only 5000 individuals left in the wild, Selwyn District council are in a position to shape their biodiversity strategy to work alongside current kea conservation efforts South Island wide, but also locally within Selwyn. Having spent plenty of time in Arthur's Pass village and with the local community, there is a real drive to change the narrative around kea in the village and implement changes that ensure kea are well cared for in the district. The main problem facing kea in the village is access to food which brings them close to the main road where they are often hit by vehicles or brings them into contact with other dangers such as poisons, including lead, or electrical wiring. The nature and risks of kea-human interactions and the fact that these interactions frequently occur on land that is not public conservation land but is subject to territorial authority regulation (such as local roads, private property and council property) means that the district has a key role to play in kea protection. By identifying kea as a special interest fauna in the biodiversity strategy, and supporting community efforts to protect kea, the Selwyn district can go from a place where negative human-kea interactions occur, to an example for other districts around the South Island of human-kea interactions done right.

My submission is in support of that of the Kea Conservation Trust.

The changes I'd like to see in the strategy are:

#### **Acknowledgment of the organisations protecting kea**

Organisations that help protect kea in Arthur's Pass include the Arthur's Pass Wildlife Trust, South Island Wildlife Hospital (SIWH) The Kind Foundation, Forest & Bird, and the Kea Conservation Trust.

#### **Inclusion of kea in the list of Special Features of Selwyn's Biodiversity**

Kea should be added to section 3.2 of the strategy as a special feature of Selwyn's biodiversity. The proposed wording is:

“Kea (*Nestor notabilis*) – Threatened – Nationally Endangered. Kea are the only mountain parrot species in the world and now number fewer than 5,000 individuals in the wild. They occur throughout the mountain lands of the District and are frequently visible in and around Arthur's Pass Village, Arthur's Pass National Park and the ski fields.”

#### **Ensuring kea are acknowledged across their range**

Kea should be added to the list of species in the High Country and Foothills landscape types as they utilise all of these landscapes as well as in the montane and subalpine landscape. Restoration of eastern populations of kea through improved pest control is likely to lead to more presence at the margins of the Southern Alps. Pests, lead and human interactions should be identified as key threats in all landscape types utilized by kea

#### **Action to protect kea**

Goal 4: There should be an action attached to Goal 4 about supporting communities to manage interaction with kea, including through the development of a bylaw to ban feeding of kea off public conservation land except for a conservation purpose and through advocacy to other agencies such as NZTA Waka Kotahi about the importance of managing kea-human interactions.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have further questions about my submission.

Sincerely,

**Aitken, Jodanne**

