

Development of a national aquatic biodiversity information system for New Zealand

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The New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 'Our Chance to Turn the Tide' was launched in February 2000. The associated funding package to implement the strategy included development of a National Aquatic Biodiversity Information System (NABIS). The original scope for the NABIS stated, 'the system will use available data as the core of a linked system of distributed national databases of aquatic biodiversity'. This ambitious aim has been reviewed through a scoping process in consultation with key individuals from agencies with a potential interest in the NABIS.

One of the key outcomes of the consultation was that managers identified that they required access to information about marine biodiversity, but not necessarily direct access to the data upon which that information was based. There was a clear indication that, with better information support tools decision makers would have a more complete picture of what might be impacted by their decisions (or what might constrain their decision making). They would also know where to go for further information, or in-depth analysis, and would, therefore, be in a better position to make well-informed decisions. As a result a new vision has been developed for the NABIS. The new vision identifies the NABIS as a web-based Geospatial Information System (GIS) containing a limited number of pre-defined layers of aquatic biodiversity information. The information layers will be compiled primarily for the purpose of supporting decision-makers and planners in making decisions that affect aquatic biodiversity. In the first phase of development the NABIS will be independent from the source databases, however, this does not preclude the possibility of NABIS holding metadata, data points or being an access point to dynamic data at some time in the future.

The development of the NABIS is not without risks. A number of agencies have an interest in the NABIS as potential users, information contributors or because they are developing related information systems. Expectations of what the NABIS might deliver within the existing timeframe and budget need to be carefully managed. This paper will describe the process and environment within which the NABIS is being developed. Progress on implementation will be reported and the risks and constraints described.