

Forest and Bird

Journal of the Royal Forest and Bird
Protection Society of New Zealand Inc.

August
1982

No. 225

Vol. 14
No.3

ISSN 0015—7384

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COVER: The New Zealand parrots, a plate reproduced from the book of historic and rediscovered Lodge paintings featured in the review on page 19 and in the centre fold of this issue.

INSIDE COVER (OPPOSITE): Waimou Stream, eastern Coromandel Peninsula, scene of kauri logging and gold-mining in the past, is now regenerating slowly to its former beauty. David G. Collingwood photo.

Forest and Bird is published by the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society of New Zealand Inc.

Head Office: Seventh Floor, Central House, 26 Brandon Street, Wellington.

Postal address: P.O. Box 631, Wellington.

Editor: J. W. C. McArthur.

Printed by Bryce Francis Ltd, Wellington.

Registered at P.O. Headquarters, Wellington, as a magazine.

Contributors to *Forest and Bird* may express their opinions on contentious issues. Those opinions are not necessarily the prevailing opinion of the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society.

Integration or isolation

THE MINISTER of Lands and Forests has recently promoted afresh the idea of reorganising the environmental sections of Government departments into one large department. In particular he suggests taking non-production forests from the Forest Service and adding them to national parks and reserves, which would come from the Department of Lands and Survey. Consideration would also be given to adding the Wildlife Service from the Department of Internal Affairs and the Freshwater Fisheries Section of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Also being eyed are the Commission for the Environment, the Environmental Council, the Nature Conservation Council, the Historic Places Trust, the Queen Elizabeth II Trust, the new Landscape Commission, and the Ecology Division of the D.S.I.R. It is certainly thinking big.

This is no new idea. It was suggested in clause 4 of the Maruia Declaration in 1975. Our Society did not favour the proposal then, and it is timely to re-examine the reasons.

The immediate impact on the Forest Service and the Department of Lands and Survey would be to leave them administering commercial enterprises only in the form of production forests and farm land. The internal balance between exploitation and development on one hand, and conservation and recreation on the other, would be severely affected.

Much has been said about the conflict between these values. Conflict there certainly is. It is the resolution of this conflict that our Society was formed to achieve. The proposed divorce would in my opinion heighten and polarise the problems within Government administration. Though the independence of the new department of State may appear attractive, it could in reality be isolation.

Isolation could have further serious consequences — financial ones. The new department would not produce any financial benefit to the community unless, of course, the Tourist and Publicity Department was also absorbed. This would suggest immediately that in times of financial stringency, such as today, the new department's budget would be the first to be trimmed or cut. It is still an unfortunate tendency to consider conservation and recreation as luxuries rather than ecological necessity.

As to the agencies such as the Commission for the Environment, I would require much convincing before I would accept that their independence, which is their essential characteristic, would be preserved. If this were the price of apparent administrative convenience, it must not be paid.

As this is a broad review, I refer to the aspirations and potential of the existing departments that would be affected. In my view it would be of great importance to ensure that the proposal be acceptable, objectively anyway, to the men and women who at present service the environment. These include the specialist scientists, the expert administrators, and many dedicated workers in the field. I am sure that if the proposal is further examined, the human factor I mention will be of considerable importance.

It seems to me that if the proposed conglomerate is the natural consequence of inter-departmental co-operation, it may well be worth while and desirable. However, if it isolates environmental considerations from all other activities, it can only be detrimental. Integration appeals to me more than isolation.

— A. A. T. Ellis, President