

Division of the Department of Internal Affairs and identify, preserve, and develop selected areas of existing wetlands as wildlife habitat (Otago Regional Water Board 1979).

Furthermore, the Channel Improvement Scheme's Environmental Impact Report (Otago Catchment Board 1978) stated that areas could be maintained and enhanced for wildlife by the construction of low earth banks to pond water in low-lying areas, and the board has advised that such works would be simple to construct.

Moreover, to allow the economic analysis of the benefits of the Channel Improvement Scheme the Otago Catchment Board was asked to calculate the area of land which would be restored to agricultural production as a result of the more rapid dissipation of seasonal flood waters from the wetlands. The board must therefore be able to identify, with a similar level of accuracy, the areas that are expected to remain wetland and those which are not. Surely if the information is sufficiently accurate to justify the expense of \$400,000 of public funds on developments benefiting agriculture it is good enough to use for the identification of suitable reserve areas.

### Appeal hearing

The Otago Acclimatisation Society is now awaiting a Planning Tribunal appeal hearing against the Maniototo County Council's decision to refuse subdivision consent on one wetland area under negotiation and is optimistic of a favourable result.

Proposals for two other reserves in the Maniototo have also become bogged down. The Wildlife Service recommended that a further 60 ha of low-lying Crown land adjacent to the river should be reclassified from plantation reserve status to that of

wildlife management reserve. These areas have never been used for the establishment of plantations, but they do have high wildlife habitat values at the present time.

The Department of Lands and Survey called for submissions on the desirability of this change in status and it is my understanding that the matter was then referred to the Minister of Lands, Mr Jonathan Elworthy, for a decision.

The matter has been with the Minister for almost a year now and does not look like resurfacing while the Maniototo County Council is opposed to the establishment of reserves.

This major legal wrangle has developed over the desire by wildlife agencies to acquire a total of 140 ha of one of New Zealand's 10 most important freshwater wetlands (which represents less than 10 percent of the Maniototo wetland's total area). The acquisition of these areas does not preclude continued use as grazing land; in fact a level of grazing would be desirable in the future management of the areas. The present landowners are not opposed to the proposals and are prepared to sell.

What it does demonstrate is the need for a more co-ordinated approach to the management planning of land and water resources and the difficulty that can be encountered when a local authority decides to stonewall a proposal that does not appeal to it despite the area's recognised wildlife values.

### Recreational activity

The Taieri River and Maniototo wetlands are a major focus for recreational activity in the upper Taieri catchment, attracting waterfowl hunters from as far away as Christchurch during the game season and receiving high pressure from anglers over summer. In

addition the area is used and enjoyed by picnickers, campers, and bird-watchers. The district could only benefit from more reserves and better defined access to the Taieri River. Wildlife reserves are, after all, intended to cater for recreational use.

Wetlands are, at the present time, not given sufficient protection by legislation based on multiple-use concepts, such as the Town and Country Planning Act or the Water and Soil Conservation Act. Further, they are not yet appreciated for the positive values they offer in land management practices, and they have not been, despite the increase in public awareness, protected by public opinion or the printed word. In fact the adverse economic assessment of wetland development proposals has probably played a greater part in wetland protection than all the well-meaning articles, technical reports, and policies put together.

Considering the acknowledged importance of the remaining major wetlands in maintaining a large part of New Zealand's water-dependent flora and fauna, that is simply not good enough. What is needed is a simple legal mechanism that allows deserving wetland areas to be protected.

### References

- Bathgate, A., 1922: Some changes in the fauna and flora of Otago in the last sixty years. *N.Z. Journal of Science and Technology* 4 (6).
- Otago Catchment and Regional Water Board, 1979: Report and Recommendations to the Otago Regional Water Board from the Board's Standing Tribunal.
- Otago Catchment Board, 1978: Upper Taieri River Channel Improvement Scheme Environmental Impact Report.
- N.W.A.S.C.O., 1982: A draft for a national inventory of wild and scenic rivers. Part 1. Nationally important rivers. *Water and Soil Miscellaneous Publication No.* 42. ■