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# A message from the Minister

One man who will play a key role in conservation matters over at least the next three years is the Government's Minister for the Environment, Russell Marshall. *Forest & Bird* has therefore asked him for his broad comments on what he sees as the issues in conservation.

Before entering Parliament in 1972, Russell Marshall was an active member of CORSO, the United Nations Association and the Samaritans. He was also involved in campaigns opposing the Vietnam War and sporting contacts with South Africa. Married with three children, the 48-year-old cabinet minister lists his interests as classical music and genealogy.

**Forest & Bird:** What is it about your background that makes you a suitable Minister for the Environment?

**Marshall:** It's a good question. Firstly, I had the portfolio for 1982, so I have had some experience with it, albeit briefly, in Opposition. Secondly, it has been suggested to me — though I'm not sure if this is a reason why — that I lived in an area where there were no particularly controversial environmental issues. I was seen to be, in terms of party politics, neutral. Thirdly . . . it would be fair to say that many people who have liberal or even enlightened attitudes towards education also have liberal or enlightened attitudes towards environmental issues. Even before that 1982 experience — and certainly afterwards — I have maintained a general, overall philosophical interest in environmental and conservation issues.

**Forest & Bird:** When you entered Parliament 12 years ago you were fairly idealistic. Do you still retain a measure of that idealism?

**Marshall:** I'm still idealistic. I'm what you might call pragmatically idealistic in that I'm more aware of some of the difficulties and constraints that you have, but I don't think my idealism is tempered at all. In fact, it could be argued that one clarifies one's mind even more with the passage of time. The view I have about the changes that are needed is probably stronger now than it was 12 years ago. The more you know about a situation, the clearer your thinking becomes about it. I have, for instance, rather more radical ideas about education than I did 12 years ago because my knowledge of the area is much larger than it was 12 years ago.

**Forest & Bird:** How will a Labour administration treat environment issues?

**Marshall:** My optimism about the environment is based on the fact that my party is more sympathetic to environmental concerns in the large sense than Ian Shearer's party was. I

don't expect to be dealing with such an unsympathetic Cabinet as he was. I would like to say that, in my view, Ian Shearer did his very best for environmental issues, and I think environmental groups are in his debt for the lonely battle in which he was engaged. Environmental issues are non-partisan, they are not necessarily party political ones.

**Forest & Bird:** Do you see yourself being able to devote enough time to the portfolio, especially since you have one other?

**Marshall:** I think it's a matter of exercising some stewardship over the time. One of the things which is clear is that I shouldn't spend a lot of time wandering around the country going to schools. It's an important part of the job but I don't have unlimited time. I intend to use other Government members to do some legwork for me. I remember being a backbencher in a Labour Government and being under-used. If I haven't got much time but we have the people with abilities which ought to be used, then we ought to use that opportunity.

**Forest & Bird:** What do you identify as the key issues in the environment area?

**Marshall:** The first one is the whole question of planning and development. The two things ought to be done together. There will be, in the establishment of the new Ministry (for the Environment), planning functions and environmental functions.

**Forest & Bird:** Could you talk about your working relationship with Koro Wetere. Will there be a lot of consultation?

**Marshall:** I have a long standing close relationship with Mr Wetere, particularly on Maori issues. He is a man steeped in Maoritanga, and he's not likely to ride roughshod over environmental issues. I expect to have a good working relationship with him and other ministers involved in development portfolios.

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**"I don't expect to be dealing with such an unsympathetic Cabinet as he (Ian Shearer) was."**

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Russell Marshall