

Heritage Department at the Crossroads

As you read this, the Government either will have made or is about to make some of the most far-reaching decisions on environmental administration in New Zealand's history. The Society regards the setting up of a Heritage Department (for want of a better name) as the most important goal of the environmental movement for decades.

The Heritage proposal should see:

- Better management of already protected lands, forests and waters.
- Better stewardship of the thousands of hectares of publicly owned Crown lands and forests which now little used and are likely to be allocated for more intensive uses.
- Stronger and more cohesive advocacy of protection values to the Government when it wants to allocate public resources.
- A more rational integration of conservation and development outside development departments.
- Greater accountability of decision makers — for environmental, economic and social matters.

The Forest Service and its allies have been fighting hard to keep control of native forests — farmers too are worried about changes in management of Crown leasehold lands which don't have freehold rights. Their arguments against the Heritage Department are: a good past record of the Forest Service(!?), possible high costs, disruption of careers and the difficulty of passing the necessary legislation this year. We believe these arguments lack substance and do not focus on the decision-making principles behind the Heritage department proposal.

In response, the Forest Service has proposed two alternatives: Instead of the minister making allocation decisions they suggest that the Crown Estate Commission could be delegated to do the job — an unwise move, since ministers should be responsible to ensure greater accountability. They also suggest that there should be a Forest and Land Development Commission to oversee the management of native forests and leasehold lands. This would create the problem of the leasehold and forest developers ganging up against the conservation representatives on this Forest and Land Development Commission — the Commission would then have the ungainly appearance of a three-headed monster.

The second option proposed by Forest Service is a replay of the Forests and Lands department merger, with the same unsatisfactory roles for the two

commissions as above. This merger failed two years ago and needs to fail again.

The Society is seeking an institutional framework within which lands can be cared for properly and protection values are not swamped when allocation decisions are made. Let us hope the Government maintains its election pledge when it meets later this month.

Kauris win temporary reprieve

The Society has asked the Minister of Forests to withdraw his consent for mining prospecting by Canyon Resources Ltd in the Russell State Forest.

Already the Minister has intervened to ensure that only hand prospecting methods be used in the proposed 1100-hectare ecological area, one third of which is covered by the application.

The mining company now has to re-apply for its prospecting licence as it failed to adequately notify the public of its intentions. This provides an opportunity to ensure the entire kauri forest is safeguarded from prospecting or mining.

Ahuriri protection still sought

The Society's recent annual report stated that South Canterbury's Ahuriri River had been granted protection by the Government. However, it has been pointed out that the Government only announced the Ahuriri would not be interfered with by *hydro* developments.

In fact, the Ahuriri is not yet protected, and there is a renewed threat of irrigation extraction. The National Water and Soil Association recommended a draft national water conservation order that would, if adopted, provide a measure of protection to the river. However this is subject to an inquiry before the Planning Tribunal later this year.

The Environmental Defence Society is representing non-government organisations involved in the case. Some Forest and Bird branches have already contributed to the Ahuriri fighting fund, but further contributions would be welcome by EDS (PO Box 5496, Auckland). The catchment of the Ahuriri is the principal habitat for the world's rarest wading bird, the black stilt, making protection vital.

Park to be or not to be?

Just over 19,200 hectares of land in the Cox River-Binser Saddle area could be

included in the Arthurs Pass National Park. The long-awaited report outlining the possible extension has just come to hand. It embraces nearly 7,000 ha of unalienated Crown land, 8,900 ha of State forest and nearly 3,400 ha of the Mt White Station run. The report canvasses other options for these lands such as private disposal, State forest or reserve. The authors of the report have only given the area a rather lukewarm rating for protection "because there is little known biological data" — this is unfortunate and Society members should press for Park inclusion plus further research where needed. If you know of or are interest in the area, write to the Department of Lands and Survey, Christchurch for a copy of the report. The deadline for submissions is 30 August 1985.

Far north reserves

The Society is delighted to hear that the Lands and Survey Department has made a decision to ensure all Crown lands along the Pouto Peninsula coastline remain in public ownership. Our northern regional field officer, Mark Bellingham, reported in the May issue that "no lead has come from Lands and Survey" on this matter; thankfully this has now occurred. Mention of the Department was also omitted from an article on Unuwhao, on page 9 of the May issue. In fact, Lands and Survey support the idea of a special reserve on this area in the far north.

We have also advised that that Lands and Survey staff are now of the opinion that pastoral farming "should not now proceed at this time" in the Spirits Bay catchment at Te Paki. A full biological assessment of this and other areas of public lands in the Te Paki region should now be given a high priority to ensure that these important natural areas obtain national or other reserve status.

Notable and Historic Trees

Work is underway to grant legal protection to New Zealand's notable and historic trees. A working party has been set up to look at the following issues: A Notable and Historic Trees Board; a tree register, a tree survey; the employment of a tree administration officer. A report and recommendations will soon go to the Minister for the Environment. **Terry Fitzgibbon, Conservation Officer.**