



Looking north-west along Aramoana beach, now reserved, unlike the salt marsh. Soaring in the air are royal albatrosses from the nearby Taiaroa Head breeding colony, the only mainland colony in the world.

Painting: Ronald Cometti. Reproduced with the kind permission of the artist, from the recently published *Margins of the Sea* (Hodder and Stoughton) with text by John Morton.

Save Aramoana

The idea of an aluminium smelter first surfaced in 1972, when Otago Metal Industries Ltd pointed to the "success" of the Tiwai smelter as an example which could be emulated in Dunedin. The public was then little aware of the immense costs to New Zealand of establishing the electricity supply for this industry, and to this day the costs remain a secret.

However, environmental costs were also uppermost in people's minds at the time, highlighted by the campaign to prevent the raising of Lake Manapouri. Studies at Aramoana confirmed its exceptional natural values.

Consequently, in mid-1974 the Save Aramoana Campaign was launched to spearhead the massive public opposition to the smelter, but its research and lobbying efforts came to an end later that year when the Government rejected the smelter on the grounds that sufficient electricity was not available.

National's "Think Big" scheme for the rapid industrialisation of New Zealand led to the resurrection of the Save Aramoana Campaign at the end of 1979. Believing that surplus electricity could be made available to energy-intensive industries in the "under-developed" South Island, the Government published the document "Growth Opportunities", advertising the supposed surplus for sale.

There was no shortage of bidders. Four smelter proposals came forward, and South Pacific Aluminium emerged as the front runner. By 1980, Aramoana was the chosen site.

A massive campaign was started to prove the disastrous environmental, economic and social consequences of the smelter; the independent state of Aramoana was formed and stamps printed to declare its sovereignty.

In the end, it was the economic argument which largely won the day. Perhaps more important in the long term though, was the outcome of Planning Tribunal hearings on the review of the Silverpeaks Country District Scheme. This had zoned Aramoana as a potential industrial site. The case put forward by the Save Aramoana Campaign, Aramoana property owners, Otago Peninsula residents, the local Maori community and a range of other people convinced the

Planning Tribunal that Aramoana was not suitable for industry.

Despite representations by developers, the Harbour Board and the County Council, Aramoana is now zoned to protect its rural environment, residential and recreational qualities, and biological values, explicitly excluding industrial use.

The ocean beaches of Aramoana are now formally reserved. But the campaign will not be truly won until the salt marsh, inter-tidal flats and wet "slack" areas are similarly reserved.

The Department of Lands and Survey, responsible for reserve administration, supports the case for protecting Aramoana. Only the obstinacy of a conservative and seemingly embittered Otago Harbour Board — a Board publicly committed to reservation but only after industry is established — stands in the way. While this obstructive attitude remains, it is difficult to see any progress being made.

Aramoana is land owned by the people of New Zealand and vested in the Board for the good of those people. Perhaps here is a case for strong action from the Government acting in the best interests of the country. Perhaps the time for negotiation is past, and control of Aramoana should revert to the Crown and reserve status be conferred as a matter of course.