



Beginning again in humility

by Peter Hooper

The recent announcement of the new Conservation Department and Ministry for the Environment brings new hope on the horizon. At last Aotearoa has been assured of the stewardship her natural landscapes have long needed. Bark Bay, Abel Tasman National Park. Photo: Greig Royle

The pressure of human need upon environment has been with humanity since ancient times: deforestation, the silting of rivers, fire, monoculture exhausting soils. For modern man it was the industrial revolution in western Europe two centuries ago which, in its hunger for fuels and metallic ores, flayed alive significant areas of the fragile lithosphere.

In our own time reaction has come. From initially setting aside tracts of habitat for the hunting of wild animals, we have come to understand, with the aid of science, that landscape must be protected for its own sake. This is an enormous extension of ethical comprehension. In terms of self interest, it is only commonsense that we should care for the life support systems of earth upon whose communities our own survival depends.

Following that recognition came a period of conflict between thinking entrenched in exploitative processes and new claims to rescue and restore wounded environments.

Here in New Zealand, as elsewhere, the drama has been enacted.

In 1981, when my essay *Our Forests Ourselves* was published (John McIndoe), I wrote with cautious optimism: "In the course of this essay I have endeavoured to trace the outlines of how, over 150 years, the European invasion of New Zealand affected our landscape. The imposition of an alien culture in no way related to the indigenous people of the land itself produced attitudes of mind which blinkered New Zealanders for generations to the real opportunities before them. Time alone could remove those blinkers, and is now doing so."

At that time I could not have expected that within four years a Government would decide to establish a Department of Conservation, that the principle of a nature conservancy as enunciated in the Maruia Declaration of 1975 would be within the bounds of reality.

The late seventies saw widespread apathy and cynicism about future direction in New Zealand, and against this background it was not obvious that revolutionary environmental values were taking root. The untiring work of thousands of dedicated