



Council meeting urges forest and high country protection.

The Society's 63rd Annual General Meeting and Council Meeting were held at the Shaw Saville Lodge in Wellington on the 21 June. Councillors passed resolutions on three key conservation issues on which Government is poised to make decisions.

The Society's Council made a last minute plea to secure reserves in Buller, and to have the Department of Conservation manage high country public lands. It also unanimously re-affirmed its opposition to the Department of Conservation having any responsibility for native timber logging.

The 100-strong Council represents 48,000 members from 50 branches and sections throughout the country.

New Society President Dr Alan Mark urged the Government to keep its election promises on the Buller region.

"They must give legal protection to the natural treasures which have been proposed for reserves such as the Oparara, Ngakawau, Atbara-Nile and the long-promised National Park at Punakaiki.

"Sawmilling in the region must be reduced to the level of unsubsidised yield and jobs be safeguarded by encouraging alternatives such as tourism, especially by providing tracks and a visitor centre at Karamea," Dr Mark said.

The Council unanimously supported efforts to protect nature on the publicly-owned high country pastoral lease lands which make up 2.7 million hectares, or 10 percent of New Zealand's land area.

"It's absurd to give the responsibility for these extremely important lands to an independent and commercially-minded Land Development and Management Corporation (LDMC). Such a move would be an economic and environmental disaster. The LDMC is seeking a \$6 million subsidy to take over pastoral lease management. They are also talking about major rental increases, sale of land for tourist ventures and pushing for maximum pastoral production — inevitably at the expense of natural values.



Outgoing Society President Dr Alan Edmonds (left) and Conservation Under-secretary Philip Woollaston share an amusing moment before Mr Woollaston gets down to the serious business of his speech to the Council meeting.



"Many high country farmers share our concerns and certainly the Minister of Conservation, Russell Marshall, believes the high country lands should be placed in the stewardship division of the Department of Conservation.

"However, an earlier Cabinet suggestion was the lands would go the Land Development and Management Corporation. Since then officials have shown such a move could be unworkable. Cabinet must now review its earlier suggestion," Dr Mark said.

Referring to its third resolution, Dr Mark said councillors feared the Department of Conservation (DOC) would become a "resurrected" Forest Service if it were involved in native timber production. There was a long discussion on this subject by Councillors who also heard the Sanderson Memorial address by Conservation Under-secretary Philip Woollaston which touched on possible advantages of DOC having native logging responsibilities. However our councillors were united against such a move. The problems that would be created included a loss of accountability and political control, a confused aim for the new department and a loss of transparency — the very things that restructuring sought to avoid. It would also inevitably lead to conflict between the conservation movement and the department conservationists had championed for so long.

"Any responsibility for logging is incompatible with DOC's role. Those few small areas zoned for sustained yield management have been identified and largely agreed on between foresters and the conservation movement. They should be allotted to the Forestry Corporation with appropriate conditions on the title to prevent over cutting and other environmentally unacceptable activity," Dr Mark said.

User pays — or loser pays?

Treasury have set very strict controls on any future spending on Parks and Reserves. We understand funding is likely to be maintained at the present, woefully inadequate level. But by 1990 Treasury expects Parks and Reserves (and in fact all of DOC) to recover 20% of their gross expenditure from fees, concessions etc.

Certain principles should guide us on this issue:

- Nature conservation will never be totally self-funding. Heritage protection has a range of benefits — many for future generations which can never be economically costed and charged.
- Indirectly nature conservation is already contributing enormously to the national economy with clean water, recreational and spiritual opportunities and as the basis of our \$1.2 billion tourist industry.
- Free public access to Parks and Reserves is every New Zealander's birthright. Services may be chargeable — huts, nature walks etc, although there should not be double charging of taxpayers. Revenue sharing of the government's GST earnings from overseas tourists (perhaps \$120 million annually) is one funding mechanism for visitor facilities in Parks.

It seems inevitable that there must soon be a showdown with Treasury over the funding of the new Conservation Department — particularly if vital programmes like the Protected Natural Area scheme, coastal zone conservation and private native forest protection are to get off the ground. WE WELCOME YOUR COMMENTS ON THIS IMPORTANT FUNDING ISSUE.

Gerry McSweeney, Conservation Director