

# The greening of a FOREST GIANT

By Gerry McSweeney

**"W**e are committed to the best possible use of New Zealand's resources – and sometimes that means to leave them in their natural state."

With those few words, Bryce Heard, Chief Executive of Tasman Forestry Ltd, wholly owned subsidiary of the giant Fletcher Challenge group, joined with the Minister of Conservation, Forest and Bird, Federated Mountain Clubs and the Maruia Society on 22 June to sign the historic Tasman Conservation Accord.

Negotiated over a 15 month period, the Accord safeguards 52 important areas of native forest throughout New Zealand from Otago to the Coromandel totalling 42,101 hectares. It represents the biggest commitment ever made by a New Zealand company to conserving native forests and wildlife.

It has also delighted staff of the Conservation Department, particularly Rotorua Regional Conservator Dave Field and Principal Wildlife Officer, Alan Saunders of Waikato who have played a key role in the Accord and in the battle to save endangered kokako in the Central North Island. Today a total of only about 1,000 kokako survive. The largest remaining population are found from the Mamaku Plateau to Rotoehu Forest between Tauranga and Rotorua.

Under the Tasman Accord, 3,500 hectares of native forest on Tasman's Gammons block in the heart of this area will be sold to the Conservation Department and added to the adjoining Kaimai-Mamaku Forest Park. Not only will this safeguard the kokako, kiwi and other native birds in the Gammons forest, it will also provide birds with a continuous forested corridor from the Forest Park across the Bay of Plenty to the important outlying reserves of Puwhenua, Mangorewa and Otanewainuku.

As well as protecting kokako habitat, Tasman Forestry will grant \$150,000 over the next three years for research and management to ensure the kokako's survival.

Under the Accord some tawa forests in the Gammons block will still be cleared in order to meet Tasman's legal commitments to the Kinleith pulp and paper mill until December 1990 when Kinleith will substitute plantation eucalypt for the native tawa it presently uses

to produce the bulk of New Zealand's high quality papers. However, until this conversion occurs, tawa will only come from low conservation value cutover forests that do not contain kokako and are not part of the vital Mamaku plateau wildlife corridor.

## Historic End to Clearance

Amidst the Accord's long list of forest names, hectares of reserves and of the threatened species protected, it is easy to lose sight of probably the most significant provision of the Accord.

The Accord states: "Tasman Forestry shall adopt an environmental code of practice for its operations in New Zealand that will preclude the clearance of indigenous forest."

In February 1989 Tasman also gave a commitment to the Commerce Commission that were they successful in their bid to acquire state production forestry assets they would "bring about a halt to all logging of native forest as soon as practically achievable."

This is an historic commitment. It means an end to the pioneering days when industry regarded our bush as a treasure house to be plundered. It parallels the Government's 1986 decision to set up a Conservation Department, since entrusted with protecting 98 percent of New Zealand's publicly owned native forests.

Because of this commitment to stop all bush clearance and halt all native logging in state production forests, Forest and Bird has supported Tasman Forestry's bid to purchase state forest assets. If the Crown is to sell these forests we believe Tasman's ownership of them would be preferable to their purchase by, for example, Nelson Pine Forests Ltd who run the beech woodchip mill at Nelson, Venture Pacific Ltd who seem increasingly keen to woodchip the North Westland beech forest and Carter Holt Harvey – Caxtons who continue to log native forest and are reluctant to negotiate with us. It is also preferable to their purchase by a number of Asian companies bidding who have expressed little interest in forest conservation. It may also be better than leaving the state forests with the Forestry Corporation who have doggedly championed the logging of native forests in South West New Zealand and fought against enforceable sus-

*The protection of Tasman's Gammons Block by sale to the Department of Conservation will safeguard the forest homes of the largest remaining population of kokako in the North Island. Photo: Rod Morris*

tained yield covenants in North Westland.

Bryce Heard and David Buckleigh, Managing Director and General Manager of Tasman Forest Division respectively, make no bones about why the company sees no future in clearing native bush for pines or logging for native timber.

"It simply doesn't make economic or environmental sense. New Zealanders don't want their remaining native forests logged. Also because we are now down to remote remnants it's very expensive to log these areas. The most economic areas to establish plantation forests are on already cleared farmland, some of which is reverting to scrub, and not to embark on the expensive business of first clearing the native forest."

David Buckleigh and Bryce Heard should know. On their staff they now have the best advice available on New Zealand's pine forests in former Forest Service scientist Dr Wink Sutton. Dr Sutton, who is currently also president of the NZ Institute of Forestry,