

Kermadec Islands Marine Reserve



The spotted black grouper is extremely friendly, coming right up to divers for a tickle under the chin. Its natural curiosity would make it very vulnerable to fishing. Photo: Roger Grace

READERS with long memories might recall an article in our August 1986 magazine about a marine reserve proposal for the Kermadec Islands. Many Forest and Bird members wrote submissions to the Government supporting the reserve, but so far have seen no reserve gazetted for their efforts.

It appears that bureaucratic hiccups have been responsible for putting the proposal on hold, but now that these have been overcome the way is clear for Conservation Minister Philip Woollaston to announce the reserve.

Lying 400-530 nautical miles north-east of New Zealand, the Kermadecs comprise four islands, the largest of which is Raoul Island, approximately the size of Little Barrier Island. Subtropical waters give rise to a unique mix of warm temperature New Zealand and tropical species. Among the attractions are the huge spotted black grouper (up to 1.2 metres in length) and New Zealand's only reef-forming corals.

Once the marine reserve is gazetted, fishing will be restricted to outside the 12-mile limit. At present there is no commercial fishing in the area.

The Kermadecs are also a potential candidate for World Heritage status. The related Lord Howe Island group already has been designated a World Heritage site. However the Kermadecs can boast of a virtually untouched marine ecosystem, unlike Lord Howe Island where the spotted black grouper population has been decimated. 🐟



New Zealand's only reef-forming corals occur in the Kermadecs, reflecting the islands' tropical affinities. Photo: Roger Grace

Kokako Forest Saved

FOREST AND BIRD'S conservation advocacy recently averted the clearfelling of the most important remaining area of unprotected kokako forest.

330 ha of the Gammons Block in the Mamaku Plateau adjacent to the Kaimai Mamaku Conservation Park had been set aside during the Tasman Accord negotiations as a last resort source of tawa for Elders NZFP's Kinleith mill. Logging had commenced in the block, which is owned by Tasman Forestry.

However, letters written by Forest and Bird

members along with Basil's persistent lobbying persuaded Elders NZFP to speed up their programme of substituting eucalypt for tawa. Senior Elders NZFP executive George Wheeler and Forest and Bird's Basil Graeme played a key role in achieving protection for the block.

Kokako will not be the only wildlife to benefit. The forest has been surveyed as having the highest density of North Island robin ever recorded.

Protection of the block means that for the first time this century, no areas of kokako habitat are being felled. 🌲

Gerard Hutching