

## Re-opening the Forest Debates

**A**NYONE WHO KNOWS NATURE knows that nothing stays the same. Cyclone Bola left us a demonstration of that, as did the Tarawera Eruption and any number of natural disasters which have had a catastrophic effect. The regenerative forces of nature have in the past gradually repaired the damage. But nature cannot respond quickly enough to repair the massive damage people have inflicted on New Zealand's natural landscapes.

Rapid change has been a continuing challenge in our recent work. The latest has been adjusting to another Government's ways of doing things. In the conservation area legislation held over from the previous Government has continued on the agenda of the new. The Resource Management Law Reform Bill, which is rewriting the way we manage much of our countryside, has been a major pre-occupation for conservationists under both Governments. The management of privately-owned native forests has been another.

In 1988 Forest and Bird embarked on a campaign to end the destruction of New Zealand rainforests by the woodchip trade with Japan. We also sought greater protection for native forests on private land.

Last year a Labour Government introduced controls on the export of native woodchips. These forced the wood-chippers of Southland and Nelson out of the native forests and into the extensive exotic plantations. Labour also announced it would introduce land-use controls that would ensure no further clearance of native forest on private land and permit only low-impact logging.

Just before last Christmas a new National Government reviewed that indigenous forest policy and let the wood-chippers back into the forests of Southland. Conservationists in Southland and elsewhere were very disappointed at this. So Forest and Bird has recently presented to the Government an alternative proposal for Southland forestry, where exotic softwood plantations would be logged instead of native beech. We will continue to press for an early end to industrial uses of our native forests.

The National Government also committed itself to the introduction of land-use controls, as had Labour, to protect forests on private land. Six months later the promised legislation has not surfaced and major issues in its planning remain unresolved. For example, will such laws bind the Crown? Will Maori land be subject to the same controls as other private land? Will the unfortunate proposals for the export of rimu, kahikatea and matai logs and timber continue?

Sadly, the uncertainty and delays by both Governments has led to a frenzy of bush-felling, as landowners exercise their property rights before controls come into force. The promise of better protection to come is actually accelerating disaster in native forests on private land.

As a broad-based interest group, apart from party politics, Forest and Bird is well-placed to bring concerned people and groups together to resolve conflicts. In the argument over land-use controls Forest and Bird is now suggesting other ways to protect the forest. This will involve us talking with land-owners, Maori, interested communities, the departmental advisers and politicians. Our cause is a transparent one – better protection for natural values. By acting as honest brokers we can, hopefully, help gain the protection even political parties have espoused, before it is too late.

Such activity is part of our pro-active approach to change. To maintain our objectives for the protection of nature and scenery, Forest and Bird is working to offer formulae which help the whole community to accept responsibilities to future generations.

**Gordon Ell**  
*National President*



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