



*New Zealand fur seal at Knights Point. A tagging programme of the 600-700 seal pups born each season on the Open Bay Islands colony further south aims to help establish which colonies the seals caught and drowned by hoki trawlers are coming from. Photo Gerry McSweeney*

### Land status important

Much of the land in South Westland is stewardship land, with the lowest standard of protection. "When the pressure comes on for tourism activities, sphagnum moss harvesting, or mining, stewardship land is seen as the multiple use land, the land with the lowest priority," says McSweeney. The fact that it is in the World Heritage area currently makes no difference. It is the tenure of the land in New Zealand law which is important.

The bold print of Government's 1989 forest allocation decision requires DoC to take account of existing uses and lifestyles, such as moss picking, grazing, and whitebaiting. Both McSweeney and Forest and Bird Executive member, Professor Alan Mark, say the failure to identify the most ecologically important areas of South Westland and give them the higher protective status which national park or reserve classification brings, risks permanent damage to pristine environments through activities such as sphagnum harvesting.

An investigation of all Crown land managed by DoC on the western side of the main divide between the Westland and Fiordland National Parks under section eight of the National Parks Act, 1980, was announced in April 1988. The investigation would have helped resolve the issue by identifying key areas of ecological importance. Options such as the creation of a conservation park were to be considered along with formation of a new national park or an addition to existing ones.

Three and a half years later, the investi-

gation remains firmly on the back burner with the fire all but out. In an era of limited budgets, the gazettement of the Hooker-Landsborough Wilderness Area (accomplished in 1990), improved visitor facilities in South Westland (now well underway) and a management plan for Paparoa National Park are seen as higher priorities. Work on the Paparoa plan continues and the new Conservation Authority has given the national park investigation in the North West South Island top priority. The drafting of a Conservation Management Strategy for the region is also close to the top of the queue for available staff time and resources. There seems little likelihood of additional resources being available to accomplish these tasks more quickly.

Bruce Watson says DoC has been careful about the type of privileges which have been allocated in South Westland since 1987. "It has been concerned not to jeopardise the high intrinsic and ecological values of the area and is aware of the proposed higher status for some areas. . . We have tried to be conservative so that we don't prejudice the outcome of future investigations." On the issue of sphagnum harvesting, he says departmental policy is to assess the conservation values of application areas, and to grant licences on modified sites, and in areas which have had a history of harvesting. Large moss areas proposed for longterm licence, up to 5 years, are publicly advertised for comment. Fortuitous changes in the moss market and a possible over-supply in Japan have temporarily reduced the pressure of

licence applications for moss picking.

The 60 or more grazing licences south of Westland National Park on stewardship land are being individually reviewed and existing year to year licences replaced by five year leases. There has been an effort to negotiate stocking regimes with individual farmers to reduce the likelihood of hungry stock grazing adjacent forest. A contract study by the DSIR on the effects of excluding cattle from a series of plots on forest margins, grassy flats and within the forest in the Jackson and Arawata Valleys will help provide useful information for future licence reviews.

Mining is a more serious threat. What happens when a mining company applies for a mining licence on stewardship land in a World Heritage area? World Heritage listing has no status in law. Under the law and under DoC's mining policy it doesn't have the status of a national park or ecological area. McSweeney says the test against mining is weaker than it should be in these outstanding natural areas.

Lack of progress with the section eight investigation also rankles with Jenny Barrett. "We want to know what status this land is going to have placed on it so that we can have some stability for the future." She says entrepreneurs who initiate a tourism venture such as jet boat trips don't want to risk being put out of business by stricter controls on concessions if the area then becomes part of a national park.

In the absence of a section eight investigation, a Conservation Management Strategy would at least establish policy