



# Stan Hemsley

## Taking a stand

by Eugenie Sage

ters to the editor of the *Christchurch Press* and other newspapers frequently bear Hemsley's signature, as do carefully scribed pleas to Cabinet Ministers and MPs to save a forest or maintain New Zealand's nuclear-free stand as a "beacon of hope to the world".

In a letter to the *Press* in July 1980, during the fight to stop the logging of Whirinaki forest he wrote, "Man in his extreme greed for money and little regard for his environment will ultimately be his own executioner." Never one to let the degradation of the New Zealand and world environment plunge him into despair or despondent lethargy, Stan Hemsley attests to the power of the individual to take action and made a stand.

"In a democracy politicians have got to take notice of the people", he says. "If only a few people respond they say 'oh they're only agitators', but if a majority demand this or that then they are going to have to take notice."

It's a philosophy which spurred Stan Hemsley to collect more than 6,000 signatures in 1975-77 for New Zealand's largest petition, the 341,164-signature Maruia Declaration to save our remaining native forests. Going by bus and ferry from Lyttelton to Auckland he asked everyone he met to sign. He became a regular sight on the city's bus routes canvassing pedestrians and passengers. "I couldn't stop asking people."

More recently, he has kept a vigil in Christchurch's Cathedral Square encouraging passers-by to sign Labour's petition against the National Government's efforts to undermine the nuclear-free legislation.

"Any nation harbouring nuclear weapons is an affront to humanity. Have *Homo sapiens* the intelligence to avoid a nuclear war? A passing grade will do", he wrote in a letter to the *Press* in February 1985.

Stan has been one of the most prolific and effective letter-writing conservationists in the country. He never misses an opportunity to lobby Ministers or berate bureaucrats, most often on forest destruction issues. But 74-year-old Stan, a long time socialist, is well aware of the connections between environmental protection, peace, social justice, and economic development.

"...Peace is neither a bestowed favour nor a dream. We should not rely on others to get it. To achieve peace, people must unite closely, take their destiny in their hands, struggle indomitably and pursue it untiringly", he wrote in a letter to the *Dominion Sunday Times* in June 1989.

port of a variety of causes. Chief among them have been the forest battles of Whirinaki, Pureora, Okarito, Waikukupa, Paparoa, South Westland, Waitutu, and the campaigns against the frigates, the second smelter at Aramoana, and the Mount Cavendish gondola. Let-

THE PEN is mightier than the sword." Edward Bulwer-Lytton's words are Stan Hemsley's inspiration. Over the last two decades this energetic Lyttelton resident has wielded his pen in sup-



Stan Hemsley with Lyttelton Harbour in the background.

### On a second smelter at Aramoana

"This tidal area of unsurpassed beauty with a tranquillity engendered by the surrounding green emerald hills, unpolluted water with abundance of fish, pure air that has the tang of the sea is priceless... Are all these precious assets of nature... going to be sacrificed on the altar of high finance for foreigners?"

(Letter to the *Christchurch Press* January 1981)

### During the campaign for Paparoa National Park

"I speak for the trees, birds, insects and frogs. How can one possibly equate a chainsaw that destroys, with a majestic 1,000 year old tree; a car that pollutes and kills, with the enchanting song of a beautiful bird; a television set that destroys the ability to think, with the exquisite beauty of an insect; and a motor-mower that shatters the peace, to a lowly frog that is part of our priceless heritage?"

All these material possessions will end up as so much junk.

Given the love and protection the last of our native bush so desperately needs, then these works of nature will live for aeons."

(Letter to the *Christchurch Star* March 1979)