



ALAN HEMMINGS

The passing of an Antarctic icon. Huskies have largely been replaced by mechanised transport, and concerns about the introduction of diseases and the killing of seals to feed them, mean that the few remaining dogs must be removed by April 1994.

This sought to prohibit mining in both Antarctica and New Zealand's major conservation areas.

Although both the Minister of External Relations and the Minister of Conservation have said they would support its reintroduction, there has been no progress to date. The domestic mining provisions seem to alarm some in government. Since ratification requires New Zealand to prohibit mining in Antarctica

anyway in what it calls a New Zealand dependency (the Ross Dependency), it would seem somewhat incongruous not to do the same in the protected areas at home.

Although ensuring the protocol enters into force is important, it will only lead to a commitment on paper. There are numerous agreements, solemnly entered into, which we see flouted every day somewhere in the world. Indeed, Antarctica became an international issue, in part, precisely because the Antarctic Treaty states were breaching even their own rules. Ensuring that all this effort actually results in improved behaviour in Antarctica will be essential. This requires positive interpretation of the letter and spirit of the protocol, which like other parts of the Antarctic Treaty system has its share of deliberately ambiguous and woolly "obligations". New Zealand has an international responsibility, therefore, to establish strong precedents in the interpretation of the protocol and good models in its own Antarctic activities.

HOW CLOSE ARE WE to a World Park? Right now the protocol falls far short of the expectations for such a park. It is

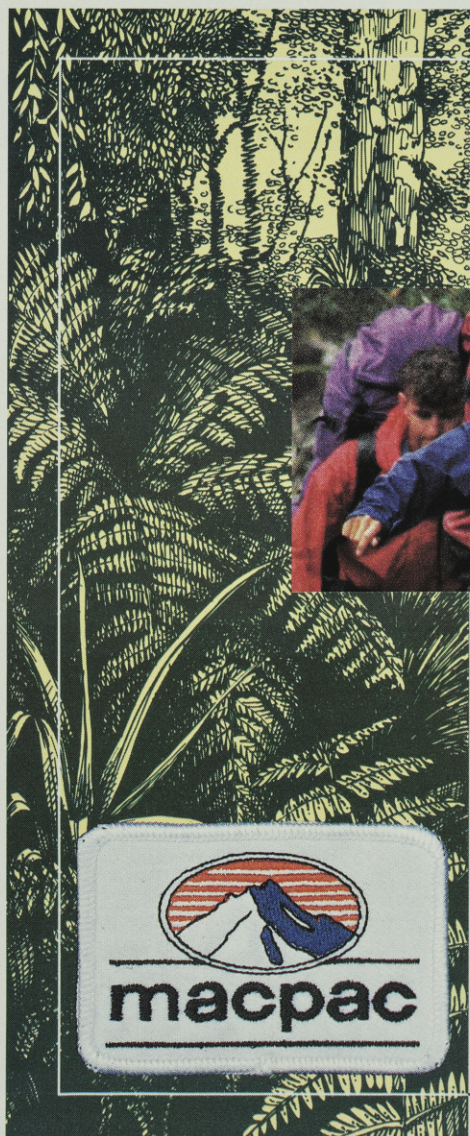
not completed, not in force, does not address all the problems and seems to have a fixed lifetime. This does not mean that it cannot become an important instrument for attaining that World Park, if properly completed, interpreted and complied with. Fifty years should also be long enough to establish a no-mining use of Antarctica as a norm, to be extended in perpetuity. But, that will not happen if we wait 49 years before we do anything more.

Antarctica is one part of the world where New Zealanders are particularly well placed to make a major contribution to an issue of international importance. It also offers a rare opportunity to safeguard the environment over a huge area, in a world where we are so often faced with a scramble to preserve just fragments. ♦



Alan Hemmings is Forest and Bird's newly appointed northern field officer. He has been a research fellow with the Antarctic Policy Group in Environmental Science at

the University of Auckland and a member of the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition for the past four years. He spent two and a half years in Antarctica with the British Antarctic Survey.



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