

THE NEED for a *Handbook of Environmental Law* was suggested about 18 months ago by Forest and Bird's field director, Mark Bellingham. Head office has always provided technical advice for branches on a wide range of issues but over recent years this has become more difficult and time-consuming. So many of New Zealand's laws and institutions have changed that even Forest and Bird staff have had trouble keeping up to date.

As the culmination of many years of upheaval, the passing of the Resource Management Act last year represented a rare opportunity for the society to publish a working guide to clearly explain the new laws and how they could be used.

My involvement as editor came about through a potent blend of enthusiasm and naivety spiced with a dash of idealism. I was later to discover a fourth and essential element, fortitude, and I grew to understand why books are usually dedicated to the author's spouse.

Returning to New Zealand early last year after several years overseas I was looking for something a little different while settling back. Short-staffed at a critical moment, conservation director Kevin Smith needed someone to sit in on the final select committee hearings for the Resource Management Bill. Soon after, as the Bill progressed towards Act, Kevin suggested that something ought to be "cobbled together for the branches". After a blackboard session in which the proposed contents were debated the concept of a more comprehensive publication emerged. As time went on it grew larger and better.

Being a grass-roots organisation, Forest and Bird maintains contact with a wide range of practitioners, academics and activists. It was time to see if the immense amount of research required could be short-circuited by persuading some of these people to contribute.

Fortunately the publication met with enthusiasm. Chapter authors were soon

signed up. Amongst them were Robert Buchanan, a former senior investigator at the Office of the Ombudsman, who covered official information, and Richard Boast and Bill Hastings, lecturers in law at Victoria University, who wrote on the Treaty of Waitangi and international treaties respectively. Public access to land, one of the trickier subjects, was handled by Bruce Mason of the Public Lands Coalition.

Drawing on his years of experience, Whanganui River battler Keith Chapple

cal tips. Knowing where to pitch the text was always difficult but feedback was never in short supply. Most of it was positive, occasionally ecstatic, like the day a chapter came back from Kevin Smith with a scribbled note: "this is brilliant copies to all head office staff immediately."

We were aiming at a moving target. In June the government announced its long-awaited indigenous forests policy and the Historic Places Bill was introduced, in July the Building Act came into force and even as the book was going to print

policy changes were being proposed for the Queen's Chain. All these developments had to be analysed and the text updated. Originally planned as a 200-page book it grew finally to over 300.

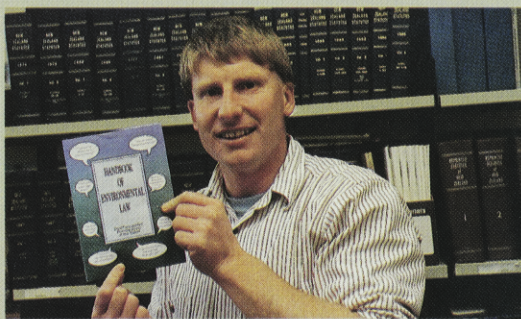
It was clear that the handbook was going to be useful for a wide readership, since there was no competing publication to match it in breadth and depth. To advance one of the society's key objectives, public education, it was priced cheaply. Without any active promotion, orders trickled in from all directions: government departments, law firms, surveyors, activists, universities and polytechnics and

local councils. The Law Faculties at Auckland and Canterbury Universities are using it for their planning and environmental law courses and the Stout Trust have purchased 650 copies for schools and libraries nationally.

Forest and Bird has long been New Zealand's leading environmental advocate. Now the *Handbook of Environmental Law* enhances the society's reputation and establishes its intellectual leadership while consolidating its activist roots. As a valuable reference guide the book should become a standard text and all members should make sure they have access to a copy. ♦

The Handbook of Environmental Law is available from Forest and Bird mail order, PO Box 631, Wellington for the discount price of \$26.95 plus \$2 post and packing. It is also available from bookshops.

Environmental law made easy...almost.



DON POLLY

The Resource Management Act had its first birthday last month. Forest and Bird celebrated the anniversary by publishing a guide to conservation and environmental law in New Zealand.

The editor of the book, CHRISTOPHER MILNE, explains how it came into being.

contributed an inspiring chapter on effective advocacy, Judy van Rossem covered freshwater and Jon Jackson explained the technical area of subdivisions and reclamations. Remaining subjects such as coastal and marine protection, mining, historic places, hazardous substances and pests, air and noise pollution and the protection of land, plants and animals were written by myself and head office staff members Barry Weeber and Mark Bellingham.

Sir Geoffrey Palmer, sponsor of the Resource Management Act, wrote the foreword.

The objective was always clear: to provide a user's guide to all New Zealand's environmental laws. The handbook had to be in plain English and had to provide sufficient information for readers to act without much recourse to other material. Wherever possible, procedures were committed to flow-charts and practitioners were consulted to provide practi-