

## Scenic improvement?

THE OVER-ZEALOUS clearance of native vegetation alongside scenic highways has long been a contentious issue in New Zealand, but a recent Forest and Bird field trip to South Westland came across an example that would take some beating for its sheer stupidity.

Contractors working for Transit New Zealand (formerly the National Roads Board) were discovered clearing lakeside vegetation, including flax bushes, from the margin of Lake Ianthe beside the State Highway – apparently “to improve the view”. For most people travelling this Heritage Highway the flax and other native plants added to the scenic attractions of the lake while providing cover for the lake’s wildlife, including the rare crested grebe.

Fortunately, the contractors agreed to Forest and Bird’s request to stop work while a

MIKE HARDING



Scenery enhancement at Lake Ianthe, courtesy of Transit NZ.

DoC officer could be called to intervene and put an official end to this scenic vandalism alongside the Lake Ianthe Scenic Reserve.

Transit NZ is very red-faced and says that the contractor was at fault in not obeying the guidelines of the contract documents. Transit’s operations engineer, Peter Connors, says

he is “conscious of the importance of the scenic features of our roads and picnic areas and takes that responsibility seriously”. He adds that Forest and Bird’s concerns “have been thoroughly investigated so that we continue to improve our performance”.

Transit NZ’s commitment to conservation was put to the

test last month when Forest and Bird and residents of remote Bruce Bay further down the Coast called for an immediate halt to plans to fell 20 soaring kahikatea trees from the famous Semples Avenue alongside the Haast highway.

The trees form a canopy over the well-travelled world heritage road. “It’s one of the most photographed parts of the road,” says local resident Thomas Condon. “I hope the proposal is stopped before we have to go and tie ourselves to the trees.”

Because of the controversy, Transit have stopped the work and would “re-look” at the situation later in the year. Consultation with Forest and Bird and the locals has been promised before any decisions are made. Such consultation should be standard practice whenever potentially controversial roadside clearance is contemplated by Transit NZ.

## Rough times for Kidd

THE PARLIAMENTARY Commissioner for the Environment Helen Hughes has found that the Chatham Rise orange roughy fishery is in imminent danger of collapse. This fully supports the position taken by Forest and Bird on the overfishing of this deep-water and slow growing fish (see *Forest & Bird* August last year).

The commissioner’s report was highly critical of the approach of the Fisheries Minister Doug Kidd to sustainable management of the species and his decisions on catch limits.

The commissioner claimed in her report that “the decisions on [total allowable catch] for the Chatham Rise Orange Roughy Fishery in 1991-92 and 1992-93 were unlawful” because the minister took into account issues outside the scope of the legislation and the decision would not result in a sustainable fishery.

The catch level set by the Minister for the current fishing year will cause a further decline

in the orange roughy stock.

MAF Fisheries recommended that the catch be reduced to a maximum of 6,100 tonnes on the Chatham Rise but the Minister allowed 14,000 tonnes to be caught. To rebuild the fishery to a long term sustainable level, the catch would have to be reduced to 3,300 tonnes.

Mr Kidd claimed at the time that the information was ambiguous but surprisingly even the fishing industry’s own researchers agreed with MAF. In a report to the Fishing Industry Board, consultant Doug Butterworth had said that MAF “were drawing conclusions on a commonly accepted scientific basis on the most parsimonious interpretation of the data. Indeed it would be irresponsible of them not to put those conclusions forward.”

Sadly the Minister and the fishing industry seem to view this vulnerable fishery as a short-term cash crop.

Barry Weeber

## Hoiho numbers on the increase



ROD MORRIS/DOC

For hoiho, the threats from ferrets, stoats and cats continue. Over the last 11 years only nine percent of fledged chicks have survived to breed.

THE 1992 CENSUS of the world’s rarest penguin has reported a rise in numbers for the second year in a row.

The yellow-eyed penguin or hoiho, found only in small colonies from Banks Peninsula south to the subantarctic, now numbers about 380 pairs on the mainland.

But Otago Museum zoologist John Darby cautions

against reading too much into the results. The mainland figure is still well below what it was five years ago and he estimates that intensive conservation efforts such as fencing and revegetating breeding areas, establishing reserves and controlling predators, will need to continue for another five to ten years before numbers show a significant increase.