

country abutting the Whanganui National Park. Creating Kahurangi National Park was an early priority. Attempts were also made to establish a kauri national park in Northland, and to add further forests which would virtually double the size of the Whanganui National Park. Both these latter proposals met the Section 8 criteria of the National Parks Act, confirming they are of national park quality, but no further progress has been made because of a number of outstanding Maori claims over these areas under the Treaty of Waitangi process.

**T**here is no shortage of information about the best wild places in New Zealand, so the technical side of putting together a new national park proposal is not too difficult. The hard work is the door-to-door salesmanship (advocacy) and consideration (consultation) required in negotiations with local communities; also the politics of dealing with developmental interests, including miners, and Government ministries such as Energy and Commerce.

The creation in 1995 of the Kahurangi National Park, New Zealand's second-largest, involved talking with local people about their fears of change, and making considerate adjustments to existing reserve boundaries where community hardship might have resulted from the upgrading of protective status. Industry lobbies shaped the boundaries too, including goldmining interests which succeeded in having Sams Creek excluded from the park.

The consultation process was punctuated by claims that turning 'stewardship land' into national park meant local folk would never 'get it back' for development. In several communities there persisted a

view that stewardship land was their potential frontier country, only temporarily allocated from forestry or land development into stewardship land while the new Department of Conservation sorted out its priorities.

Conservation cannot afford such ambiguities: if land has high conservation values these needs to be recognised under one of the many protective classifications developed for this purpose over the past 100 years or more. National parks are simply the highest classification in a suite of possibilities. For example, Forest and Bird has advocated upgrading several other areas to higher protective status as conservation parks, including the establishment of a Tongariro Conservation Park to protect lowland forests in the central North Island, and a high-country grassland park mooted for the inland slopes of Mount Torlesse.

The shopping list for new parks is influenced by the need to recognise areas with appropriate status, and sometimes to correct the mistakes of the past. Opposition to the establishment of the Paparoa National Park, for example, led to its trimming to a coastal frontage while excluding other publicly owned land rising to the mountains inland. A case could be made for extending these boundaries to recognise the back-country. Mountains and forests inland from Westport were excluded from the investigation for the Kahurangi National Park following pressure from development lobbies. There has been subsequent talk of recognising this whole region, from the Paparoa Ranges north to Farewell Spit, as a World Heritage Area; recognising the rich natural heritage surviving from the ancient super-continent of Gondwana, which has remnants here dating

back 150 million years or more.

The main reasons there have been so few determined efforts to redress the imbalances in our national park system stem from a lack of will, generally expressed by officials as a lack of money to go through the investigative stages required by law. On those few occasions when Governments have been determined to establish parks and reserves, activity has been remarkably accelerated. This is why the enthusiasm of the Prime Minister, Jenny Shipley, for a national park on Stewart Island needs to be taken seriously. The Department of Conservation can now embrace a long-discussed possibility in its business planning, and the local conservation board is able to get to work.

Stewart Island with its rich forests and wildlife is a prime prospect for national park status. Its granite mountains, senescent rivers, its long harbours and wild coasts present landscapes 'so beautiful' that the island could qualify as national park in visual terms alone.

There are several examples from this Government where Ministerial determination — driven by the priorities established by New Zealand First in the Coalition Agreement — has produced comparatively rapid action. The story of the recent addition to Fiordland National Park of an area larger than Egmont National Park, is told on page 6 of this journal. The case for this 'Waitutu addition' dates back to the 1930s: in the 1980s Forest and Bird successfully conducted a substantial campaign to have the area assessed as a national park but it has taken till now to formalise it.

Notable changes driven by Dr Nick Smith as Minister of Conservation also include the proposal to add the coastal foreshores to

*Coastal pohutukawa forest grows on a boulder bank of Little Barrier Island in the Hauraki Gulf. The rich variety of trees and plants peculiar to the north of New Zealand has yet to be recognised in a national park, though the concept is included in the Northland kauri national park proposal, presently 'on hold' because of Maori claims to the forests. Little Barrier Island was once a component of the Hauraki Gulf Maritime Park which, like national parks prior to 1986, had its own citizen board. An Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Bill presently before Parliament proposes integrating management of the gulf and its waters through a forum of local bodies, officials and Maori. Nearby Great Barrier Island and the Coromandel Peninsula contain Crown reserves which have been suggested as potential national parks or national reserves.*

