

## Back to the 70s ... near Wanganui

**N**ative forest is being stripped off the hill country north of Wanganui in a forestry scheme designed to attract investment from Taiwanese immigrants. In scenes reminiscent of the forest 'battlegrounds' of the 1970s, huge roller crushers plummet down steep slopes smashing the protective cover of freely regenerating native forest. This is happening in the catchment of the already stressed Waitotara River — its waters laden with silt from weeping slips on the surrounding cleared hill country.

The forest clearance has the blessing of the Taranaki Regional Council which the forestry media describe as adopting a 'pragmatic approach' to environmental issues. The New Zealand Forestry Group's managing director, Wesley Garrat — a former immigration consultant — has marketed the forestry scheme to Taiwanese immigrants who hold individual 20-hectare titles. The company's Paparangi Station straddles the boundary between the Taranaki and Manawatu-

Wanganui regional councils, and between the South Taranaki and Wanganui district councils.

Wesley Garrat praises the Taranaki local authorities for their having a different attitude to native forest clearance from their Wanganui counterparts. His company has been blocked from clearing native forest on its land which lies within the Wanganui River catchment. The Manawatu-Wanganui Regional Council's soil conservator, Alan Kirk, said he did not believe commercial forestry would be feasible on the upper slopes of the block which are consolidated sandstone with little top soil.

'I think there's a potential for an

environmental hazard occurring because the soils are not proven sustainable forestry soils, he says.

The resource management director of the Taranaki Regional Council, Bill Bayfield, defends the clearance. He describes it as a model forestry project with good environmental management. Because Taranaki local authorities do not require resource consents for forest clearance, there is no opportunity for public submissions on the development and for the impacts to be properly assessed against the requirements of the Resource Management Act.

The Department of Conservation has identified the area as

providing habitat for a range of native birds including kiwi.

Forest and Bird's Wanganui Branch spokesperson, Derek Schulz, says the clearance looks more like a scene from Indonesia than from a country that claims to be at the leading edge of sustainable management. He said because the New Zealand Forestry Group were not members of the New Zealand Forest Owners' Association, they were not bound by the Forest Accord. He feared further native forest clearance would occur in the Taranaki area because of the absence of land clearance rules and the reliance on voluntary conservation initiatives. — *Kevin Smith.*

## ... and in the Bay of Plenty

**R**egenerating forest shrublands recommended for protection have been crushed by Tasman Forest Industries near Kawerau. The company is one of the Fletcher group of companies which is signatory to the New Zealand Forest Accord to protect native forest from felling.

The chief executive of Tasman Forest Industries, Barry Poole, has vigorously defended the clearance, arguing it was only 'blackberry and scrub'.

However, a report by a

Department of Conservation planner, Fiona Hennessey, identifies the cleared vegetation as predominately successional forest shrubland — developing forest — with emergent rewarewa, kamahi, kanuka and mamaku over a manuka canopy. The cleared vegetation was part of an area recommended for protection by the Department of Conservation (an RAP) because of its 'significant ecological values'. It was also a 'significant natural heritage feature' in the proposed Whakatane District Plan.

Planning and conservation staff of the Department of Conservation in the Bay of Plenty recommended opposing the clearance of the indigenous vegetation. In their view, little indigenous vegetation remained in the semi-coastal zone of the Rotorua ecological district (only 600 hectares in 5500 hectares), giving the area significant conservation value. They feared that if the forest shrubland was cleared the remaining forest vegetation on the block would be

left as fragmented pockets with little habitat value. An independent report commissioned by TFI confirmed the conservation significance of this vegetation.

DoC staff also pointed out that under the New Zealand Forest Accord, which Fletchers played a leading role in negotiating, Tasman Forest Industries could not clear the forest shrublands.

Unfortunately, DoC's Regional Conservator, Chris Jenkins, under pressure from Tasman and the block's Maori owners, agreed to the clearance. In his defence, Jenkins says he reminded TFI of the need to consult with Forest and Bird under the terms of the Forest Accord.

TFI chose not to consult and bulldozed aside the regenerating forest. Forest and Bird has since commenced discussions with Fletchers and the New Zealand Forest Owners' Association over the clearance, which is the most significant reported breach of the Forest Accord since it was signed in 1991. — *Kevin Smith.*

