

Going



Forest and Bird volunteers and staff are using the Resource Management Act to protect nature and natural values. ANDY DENNIS, EUGENIE SAGE and BARRY WEEBER report on successes.

Planning laws are an important tool for conservation. The provisions of the Resource Management Act 1991 can be used for improving protection of threatened species and habitats, for preserving landscapes such as the natural character of the coast, and the general quality of the natural (and cultural) environment. As a consequence, Forest and Bird has been an active advocate for nature using provisions of the Act. These include making submissions on regional policy statements, and the provisions of district and regional plans, all required of councils under the law.

Forest and Bird staff and committee members frequently attend hearings to substantiate the concerns raised in submissions under the Act. They use its provisions when opposing the granting of resource consents for activities which would have

adverse environmental effects.

District and regional councils recognize some of these concerns by modifying their decisions on plans and resource consent applications. But Forest and Bird has increasingly needed to continue its advocacy for nature all the way to the Environment Court. This is the place where appeals brought under the provisions of the Resource Management Act are determined.

Because the Act replaces the old planning system, it serves as the defining law controlling peoples' ability to make changes to the environment. The increasing importance of the Resource Management Act as an instrument for environmental protection is reflected in the 22 references on plans and seven resource-consent appeals Forest and Bird currently has before the Environment Court. Ten references and

appeals by Forest and Bird have been resolved since the Act came into force in 1991.

Nationally, Forest and Bird is one of the few community organisations to have made submissions on most regional and district policy statements and plans. In so doing, branches and staff have devoted a huge amount of time and energy to making submissions and attending hearings. Little of this work receives media attention or a public profile.

The Society's objective is to persuade councils to implement the Resource Management Act's purpose of 'sustainable management'. This can be done through district and regional plans, and associated 'policy statements'. The Society seeks policies and rules which recognize and protect indigenous forests; also wetlands, tussock grasslands, and other native ecosystems.