

# QEII National Trust Celebrates 25 Years and 56,000 ha

**C**elebrating its 25th birthday, the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust reports more than 1600 landowners have now taken out open-space covenants with the Trust, protecting 56,000 hectares of native forest and other national treasures on private land.

The QEII Trust open-covenant system allows natural features on private land to be legally protected while the landowner retains ownership and management.

'Land once covered with rich forests and wetlands is now intensively farmed, and much of the little that remains has been protected by farmers with the help of the Trust,' according to the chairman, Sir Paul Reeves. 'When the farming industry was established, whole ecosystems were destroyed, so

the fragments which remain are very important.'

Sir Paul believes an important cultural shift is taking place among landowners and managers in New Zealand.

'Increasingly native vegetation, landforms, wetlands and cultural features are seen as assets. And people are prepared to fund and manage land to protect and enhance these assets.' Sir Paul says the Trust is finding it hard to keep up with the demand from land owners. 'Land owners are the residential custodians of what we seek to protect.'

'The Queen Elizabeth II National Trust Act became law in 1977. To commemorate the Queen's silver jubilee, Parliament established a trust to 'encourage and promote the provision, protection and enhancement of open space for

the benefit and enjoyment of the people of New Zealand.'

The first covenant was placed over land owned by Gordon and Celia Stephenson at Wautu in the south Waikato. Gordon Stephenson, a distinguished life member of Forest and Bird and currently South Waikato branch chair, was an instigator of the QEII National Trust and its founding deputy chairman.

In its 25th year the Trust also celebrated its 1500th covenant — on the South Canterbury property of Graeme and Chris Henriksen.

'This was the Henriksens' third covenant and they represent, in a spectacular way, the commitment and enthusiasm of land owners,' Sir Paul Reeves says. 'It took us 20 years to notch up 1000 covenants, but it has only taken another five to reach 1500.'

Land protected by open covenants may include any important landscape feature of aesthetic, cultural, recreational, scenic, scientific or social value. It may also include wetlands, streams, lakes, forests, forest remnants, tussock grasslands, archaeological and geological features, coastlines and rural landscapes.

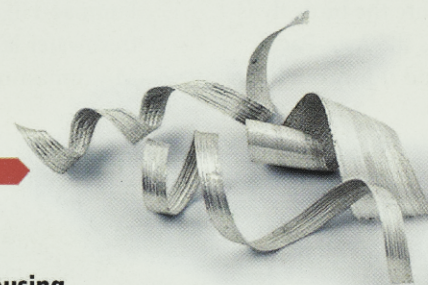
If an ecological assessment shows an area is worthy of protection, an open space covenant can be registered against the land.

This is a legal agreement between the National Trust and a land owner, and is registered on the title of the land — so it binds future owners to the agreement. With a covenant on the land, the land owner still owns it, but the National Trust acts as a permanent trustee.



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