

Setting the Bounds of Conservation Policy



In an interview with GORDON ELL, the new Minister of Conservation, Hon CHRIS CARTER, says he wants tangible results from his department.

The Hon. Chris Carter has an outstanding example to follow. As Minister of Conservation, and of Local Government, he follows the Hon. Sandra Lee who might well have been described by conservationists as the 'Yes Minister'. Her achievements in three short years will have a lasting impact on the future of wild New Zealand — along with the Prime Minister saving the last of the forest from milling in Westland, creating new parks and reserves, extracting more funding for conservation, and campaigning internationally for whales. A former executive member of Forest and Bird, Sandra Lee was always up with the issues, and acting on them, sometimes before the conservation campaigns were formulated.

Chris Carter is conscious of Sandra Lee's achievements and in the first 10 weeks of his tenure had already spent time with her on Waiheke Island, and in frequent phone calls.

'Sandra is a good friend of mine and I gave her an undertaking I'd like to continue working with her.'

Town-bred, Chris Carter has nevertheless been close to the land. After teaching history at secondary level, he spent 16 years chicken farming in the Te Henga valley of the Waitakere Ranges. It is a place beloved of conservationists, and the local community has included several well-known activists — including Gary Taylor, Mark Bellingham, Annette Lees and John Staniland. Chris Carter and his partner farmed 28 acres just across the river from Forest and Bird's expanding Matuku Reserve. It was serendipity that one of his first official calls was to present \$140,000 from the Nature Heritage Fund for the expansion of the reserve.

He's never been a member of Forest and Bird, however.

'One of those people who are sympathetic out there but never got around to it.'

He does belong to Greenpeace; is

particularly proud of sailing to Mururoa to protest the French nuclear testing there.

'I belong to Politicians for Global Action which is an international group of politicians committed to nuclear disarmament and peace. When the National Government sent the *Tui* as a supply vessel to the peace fleet I was nominated to represent the Opposition.' He met a lot of international Greenpeace people there. It was a stimulating three-and-a-half weeks for the first-term back bencher.

After 10 weeks as a Minister, Chris Carter is already up with the issues; trying new solutions. On the management of the Abel Tasman foreshore he's negotiating for joint management initiatives between the Department of Conservation and the Tasman District Council which could lead to more rational access and control tourist pressures. He's had to sort out the protection of a surplus Crown research forest in the Mamaku Plateau near Rotorua; he's visited Tuhua (Mayor Island in the Bay of Plenty) for the creation of a Maori wildlife reserve. He's also been on Maori marae concerned with Nga Whenua Rahui protection, and visited DoC

'Fine words are great but I want to see some tangible results.'

conservancies, meeting the people, viewing their problems.

'The Director-General tells me the department is "reeling" as a result... I'm not being boastful about it...but I learned as a teacher that the best way of getting results is to get things moving, and I'm really keen on seeing outcomes.

'Fine words are great but I want to see some tangible results...'

'For example, I've been very concerned

about our seabird campaign — the protocol we signed with the United Nations on the protection of seabirds — that strategy has just been sitting at DoC so I've given them a "rev-up" on that so we get something concrete underway.

Chris Carter soon found the kind of controversy that can spring from the bicultural nature of his job: defending the expense of including three Maori elders accompanying some Archey's frogs on transfer to a research laboratory at Lincoln.

'Firstly it was a very worthwhile conservation project because frogs are internationally at risk from the virus which is spreading globally,' he says, measuring out the arguments. 'Secondly the involvement of iwi in that issue was very important as iwi have a traditional relationship with indigenous species, and we need to acknowledge that. Thirdly, and most importantly however, it was another way to involve another group of people in conservation.'

'One of the great challenges I see as Minister is to make as wide a cross-section of the community as possible aware that conservation is actually in the best interests of all New Zealanders,' he says.

'Traditionally the relationship between DoC and some iwi groups has been a troubled one. And building those links and bridges is very important.'

'We need to get people involved as much as possible. Getting volunteers, people like Forest and Bird and its wonderful Kiwi Conservation Club involved — young and old — the trust which is planting on Motutapu, the whole development of Tiritiri Matangi are other examples — it's good for the groups, it's good for conservation and it's good for the community.'

Turning to the subject areas of Forest and Bird's current campaigns, I remind him that, despite her many successes, Sandra Lee wasn't able to make much progress