

Mounting protest, slow gain: 1953–1986

After WWII, conservation consciousness was increasingly evident in public life, legislation and in gradual gains as government responded to a growing demand for protective measures.



1957

New Zealand in Antarctica

New Zealand's interest in the Ross Dependency stemmed from Britain's association with it. In 1922 Britain handed administrative responsibility for this area, which was a hunting ground for Norwegian whalers, over to New Zealand.

The International Geophysical Year 1957 foreshadowed an intensifying international focus on Antarctica. Ed Hillary's dash for the South Pole in Massey Ferguson tractors was a piece of light relief. The Antarctic Treaty with its unprecedented 'deferred claims', was signed in 1959, at first by just eight nations, New Zealand among them. In 1964, Antarctic wildlife was legally protected under international law. This led finally, in 1982, to both the Agreed Measures for the Conservation of Antarctic Fauna and Flora and the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) being given effect.

Although successive New Zealand governments' involvement in the frozen continent has not been an absolute record of conservation, overall, the role of government has been to argue for protection and precaution. This stance owes much to the efforts and influence of New Zealand conservationists, particularly Cath Wallace, long-time chair of Environment and Conservation Organisations of Aotearoa New Zealand (ECO) and its Antarctic working party, the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition. In 1991, Wallace's analytical and campaign work was recognised internationally by the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize. The work contributed to the overthrow of the Antarctic Minerals Convention in favour of a protocol to the Antarctic Treaty for the protection of the Antarctic environment. The work continues on tourism, unsustainable fishing, seamounts and krill.

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**Antarctica: national interest
and international cooperation.**
Image database DOC



1962–1989

Nature Conservation Council

Established in 1962 as an independent advisory council, the Nature Conservation Council became more influential than its political masters had ever reckoned on.

Defining its approach as ‘positive and constructive’, it concerned itself with facts and making an ‘assessment of the need for research into particular aspects of nature conservation’.

The Council sought ‘wise use’ of resources in ways to reduce ‘destruction and detrimental change’.

Over the years, it challenged head-on several government plans, including the beech forests utilisation scheme, raising Lake Manapouri, selective logging experiments in central North Island native forests and the Clutha Dam at Clyde.

It also took on the neglected and the then unfashionable, such as the need to protect wetlands, mangroves and threatened plants, and initiated Nature Conservation Week, originally an idea from scouting. In its 1981 publication, *Integrating conservation and development: a proposal for a New Zealand conservation strategy*, the Council’s constructive critique of current attitudes and policy went to the very heart of sustainable development.

It became the respected environmental conscience of government. Today, part of its role is reflected in the community–government linkage played by the New Zealand Conservation Authority and conservation boards in relation to DOC. But anticipated, too, were elements of the work of, first, the Commission for the Environment, and its successor the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment.

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The Nature Conservation Council campaigned long and hard on Lake Manapouri. *Rob Suisted*

1964

Small island, big lesson

The trick of history—ever making the problems of the past seem simple through hindsight—is startlingly evident in our growing understanding of why our native species become threatened, endangered or even extinct.

The name of Taukihepa, better known as Big South Cape, a small mutton-birding island off the southwest corner of Stewart Island/Rakiura, is associated with this process in conservation understanding. As recently as 1964, the island was home to an exceedingly rare group of birds. They were the endangered South Island saddleback, Stead's bush wren and Stewart Island snipe. That year they were hit by an irruption of rats, which Forest and Bird got to hear about.

A young Wildlife Service recruit, Don Merton, later famed for his work in saving, among others, the almost totally extinct Chatham Island black robin, was certain that the views held by his elders on the Fauna Protection Advisory Council were unhelpful. Though it was



Stead's bush wren.
Don Merton



Big South Cape:
its 1964 infestations
transformed island
predator control.
Image database DOC

less than 50 years ago, these scientists held that habitat was what mattered, that exotic predators such as rats could not eliminate a native species.

By taking matters into his own hands, and translocating the saddleback to adjoining, rat-free islands, Merton saved it. Sadly, it was too late for the wren and snipe. This became a critical moment in understanding rat predation, and its consideration was, from then on, never the same.



*'Turned game-keeper':
New Zealand today, a leader in
whale conservation.
Image database DOC*

1964

Whales

Early 19th-century Aotearoa evolved from whaler and sealer contact. Commercial whaling did not end in our waters—for economic reasons—until 1964. However, this country has mounted an increasingly protectionist stance towards whales over many decades.

New Zealand's signature to the 1938 International Agreement for the Regulation of Whaling was renewed with the 1948 International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling. New Zealand withdrew in protest in 1968, rejoining in 1976. When attempts to place commercial whaling on a sustainable management basis failed, the International Whaling Commission announced a moratorium on commercial whaling in 1986.

Some member countries opposed to the moratorium, the Russian Federation, Norway and Iceland, for example, have a reservation on it, but Japan does not. Whaling quotas for customary subsistence are permitted to aboriginal peoples, as are 'scientific permits', which Japan has issued since 1986, provoking both diplomatic and non-violent protest responses—some



from ship-board New Zealand conservationists.

In 1994, the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary was created by the International Whaling Commission. Today, nearly 50 years since whaling ended, the skills of our

old whalers are still employed as whale spotters and identifiers of species. Since 2004, seven of them have helped with whale counts during seasonal migrations through Cook Strait.

Whale Watch Kaikoura, a Ngāi Tahu-owned, post-Treaty settlement enterprise, has been an outstanding success commercially and socially. Since the 1990s, Kaikoura has become a multi-experience eco-tourism centre based not only on whales—attracted to its near deep-water feeding on the Kaikoura trench—but also other cetaceans and seals.



The water cycle: an early exercise in water quality awareness. Dairy factory wash water incident—Mangatainoka River (circa 1990). *Horizons Regional Council*

1967

The water cycle

Few environmental struggles have taken longer—sometimes to limited effect—than that for the protection of our freshwater.

New Zealand was an early adopter of legislation to control flooding and soil erosion, with the Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Act of 1941. The Act, influenced by American legislation, owes much of its effectiveness to the steadfast campaign and last-minute lobbying of Lance McCaskill. Conservationist since Harry Ell's days, teacher and author of the high country classic *Molesworth*, McCaskill was one of the far-sighted who knew the value of sound practice.

It was not until 1953 that the Waters Pollution Act was passed. Yet the regulations preventing meat works and sewage discharges directly into rivers took longer, until 1963.

The 1967 Water and Soil Conservation Act created

entities responsible for both water 'quantity' and quality issues. Gradually, catchments came under early integrated management systems. McCaskill, together with Professor Kenneth Cumberland, continued to be influential.

But a foot-dragging approach to improving natural water quality persisted. The National Water and Soil Conservation Authority, with its directorate based within the Ministry of Works, commissioned the National Film Unit's 1967 film, *The water cycle*. Widely shown, it won a documentary prize at Cannes and a large following at the dawning of modern environmental consciousness.

Ironically, since about 1990, just as 'point source' pollution was becoming much less of an issue for New Zealand rivers, diffuse pollution, the nitrate run-off of seemingly ever-expanding dairy farms and herds, has provided a new challenge to river health and our international image.



1970s

A century of forestry protests

Community protests over logging of pristine native forests began in Nelson in the 1890s. Efforts to end kauri milling at Waipoua, Northland, succeeded only after many years in 1952. However, it was the South Island beech forests campaign of the early 1970s, to spare them from milling and chipping, that raised wide public consciousness.

While by 1975 the Government had backed away from its most ambitious and destructive plans for beech, those protests morphed into what was to be a sustained campaign over almost 30 years to end logging in state-owned native forests.

Okarito and Waikukupa, in remote Westland, were first up, with protective measures announced in 1981. However, the future of logging communities in these places became major considerations, pitted against the survival

of endangered species, such as the little brown kiwi. Then focus shifted to the North Island, where Waihaha, Pureora and Whirinaki tōtara and the North Island kōkako, central to conservation arguments, finally carried the day.

Forest and Bird, the Native Forests Action Council, ECO and other groups were involved; but attitudes were not always in concert. Conservation became somewhat divided between sustainable use and protectionism—increasingly, with growing rarity of flora and fauna, protectionism won out. Attempts to formally rein in logging in state native forests began on the West Coast in 1986. Finally, in 2000, the Forests (West Coast) Accord Act began the phasing out of such practices.

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Cleared native forest, as practised by government, 1980s, NW Nelson.
Image database DOC

1972

Manapouri

Forty years after much strenuous debate, protest marches and petitions, Manapouri, an exquisite Fiordland lake, still represents an historic turning point in emergent public environmentalism.

Governments from the 1920s had eyed its hydro potential through a lens of gigawatts. In 1959 Australian Conzinc's investigations into the possibility of hydro-electricity for smelting aluminium grew into an agreement between Comalco and the Government. The state would build a dam; Comalco would build a smelter at Bluff.

In 1966, Electricity Minister Tom Shand announced the raising of the lake by up to 11 metres, provoking strong criticism from the Nature Conservation Council. The first turbine, generating 400 megawatts, had been commissioned in 1959. However, with the lake not yet raised, a public meeting in Invercargill in October saw the beginning of the Save Manapouri campaign. Invercargill returned serviceman Ron McLean ('Mr Manapouri') stumped the country. Save Manapouri organisations formed throughout New Zealand and, a few months later, Forest and Bird's third petition was launched, attracting a then record 264,907 signatures.



A Commission of Inquiry confirmed fears that raising the lake would cause irreparable damage to the lake edge. In Labour's 1972 landslide victory, new Prime Minister Norm Kirk honoured his party's commitment not to raise the lake and announced guardians for Lake Manapouri and Te Anau. One of those guardians, now Sir Alan Mark, Emeritus Professor of Botany, University of Otago, had fought against the raised lake and is still an environmental campaigner today.

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Manapouri: watershed in public conservation consciousness, 1970s.
Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society of New Zealand archive

1972

Stockholm environmental conference

‘Once a photograph of the Earth, taken from the outside, is available, a new idea as powerful as any in history will be let loose’, attributed to the late British astronomer Sir Fred Hoyle, before any such photograph was taken.

In 1970, preparation began for laying the foundations for global environmental governance at the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in 1972. The world’s first international forum to address global environmental concerns, its origins lay in the trans-border issues of Northern Europe’s pollution and acid rain. While opposed by the Communist bloc and—a precursor here for later climate change diplomacy—the developing nations Group of 77, 113 countries attended.

Among New Zealand delegates were Minister for the Environment (a new portfolio in January 1972) Duncan McIntyre, a senior Cabinet Minister, and young environmentalist Guy Salmon.

The conference achieved
a high degree of

Air pollution and acid rain were key drivers for Stockholm 1972. Stack Emissions: Creative Commons; Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources 2011



unanimity among about 85 percent of the UN member nations attending, setting an agenda for international cooperation on environmental degradation. It contributed to an upwelling of environmental awareness around the world and laid the foundations for the 1992 UN Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

On a more sobering note, the topic of Ministry of Works Water and Soil division’s presentation was the importance of multiple use planning for quickly developing Lake Taupo basin. It was to take nearly another 40 years before serious measures were taken on this matter.



1975

‘Leigh’: NZ’s first marine reserve

‘Everyone was surprised at what happened when (the first) “no take” marine reserve was created, and all the surprises were pleasant ones,’ wrote Bill Ballantine, Director of New Zealand’s first marine reserve at Cape Rodney–Okakari Point, north of Auckland.

‘Leigh’, as it is often called, was the brain-child of Professor of Botany Val Chapman at the University of Auckland, which already operated a marine laboratory at the site, and Dr Bill Ballantine, who ran it. Under the first 1971 Marine Reserves Act, the primary purpose of the protection of flora and fauna was science-enabling. Ballantine’s pioneering work in design and operation has proved inspirational internationally as well as locally. It was he who some 30 years ago set the goal, still unrealised, of securing 10 percent of New Zealand’s sea coast in reserves.

Poor Knights Islands was the second, in 1981. More recently, on DOC’s watch, 32 of New Zealand’s total of 34 marine reserves have been created—including the large area around the Kermadec Islands to the north and the southern Auckland Islands, representing 7.3 percent of our territorial sea.

Marine reserves have proved themselves to be a vital tool in the protection of New Zealand’s marine biodiversity. Among a range of other coastal tools, taiāpure (recognising special significance for hapū and iwi within their rohe moana) and mahinga mātaītai (customary harvest only) have proved successful.

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Marine reserves represent ecological protection, enhancement and conservation education.
Image database DOC



1975

Our historic heritage

The Clyde Dam project in the 1980s was a milestone as the first large public project with a significant archaeological programme attached. The old town of Cromwell and many mining sites were inundated, but not before a full archaeological programme was instigated for the entire project. This was a direct result of the Historic Places Amendment Act 1975.

From the late 1960s, rising Māori consciousness and awareness among New Zealand's small archaeological community resulted in concerns being raised about archaeological sites generally. There were no effective legal controls over digging and pillaging of artefacts. Indiscriminate fossicking fed an increasing trade in Māori artefacts, both locally and overseas.

A vigorous political campaign was launched by the professional archaeological community led by Dr Roger Green and New Zealand Historic Places Trust (NZHPT) archaeologist Jim McKinlay. This brought protection to New Zealand's archaeological heritage and controls on the trade and export of Māori artefacts.

The Historic Places Amendment Act 1975 provided the first legal provisions to regulate any disturbance to an archaeological site more than 100 years old, and the Antiquities Act 1975 regulated the sale and export of Māori artefacts. These Acts have now been incorporated into the Historic Places Act 1993 (HPA) and Protected Objects Act 1975.

The NZHPT administers the Historic Places Act while the Ministry for Culture and Heritage administers the Protected Objects Act.

However, from 1987–93 the NZHPT was attached to DOC and its archaeological team transferred to DOC's Science and Research group.

The HPA moved the NZHPT from DOC to the Ministry for Culture and Heritage. The Act's provisions have substantially reduced the illegal fossicking of sites, ensuring that, where sites need to be disturbed, archaeological investigation is undertaken.

Today, archaeological assessment is routine to any resource consent involving land disturbance.

The HPA has also ensured Māori play a greater role in determining their archaeological heritage. The HPA consent process requires consultation and the views of relevant iwi, and any sites relating to Māori are assessed by the NZHPT Māori Heritage Committee.

DOC still remains legally responsible for all historic and/or archaeological sites on the lands it administers, more than 12,000 sites in total, and is bound by the HPA.

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The Historic Places Act 1993 protects Chinese gold mining relics like these in Central Otago. Neville Ritchie, DOC

1978–1989

Pureora– Whirinaki

Of all the protests over native forest felling and loss in the turbulent years from 1971 until 1988, perhaps none captured hearts and minds quite as much as those in the central North Island.

Here were ancient podocarp (pine) forests predominantly of tōtara and rimu sprung from the ash falls of Taupo's immense eruption around 232 AD. With its legislated dual purpose of protection and production, the Forest Service had one eye on conservation and one on exploitation. The contradictions of 'multiple use', exacerbated by the social priority to sustain established timber towns and their product for building, came to a head in what was already diminished—and increasingly rare—lowland forest. Compounding all that was the discovery by Wildlife Service that not only had the now at-risk kōkako (wattled crow) lost



87 percent of its habitat in the previous 30 years, its numbers had probably halved.

If trees couldn't carry the day then birds would—surely? But when politicians remained unmoved, conservationists, with the Native Forests Action Council as their spearhead, backed by Forest and Bird and the Environmental Defence Society, got going. Hoisted into treetops of trunks marked for felling—and remaining hidden—the protestors served up the perfect spectacle for television—and also, eventually, for protection of those forests.

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**Tree-top protests, world-first at
Pureora, 1978. Marcus Ladd,
private album**

1981

Wild and scenic

Legislative provision for the protection of wild and scenic rivers was a concession in 1981 made by the government of the time. Its 'Think Big' programme, including hydro on the Rangitaiki and Whaeo rivers, had exposed the limitations of the 1967 water and soil legislation. The 'multiple-use' approach to water management had meant endless compromise of outstanding values worthy of protection.

An American concept, river protection measures were magnified by a decade of bickering and protest over the proposed dam at Clyde on the Clutha. Clyde was the final artefact from an era of heroic engineering that raised a series of hydro dams successively from 1929. Each exacted an environmental price.

By legislative amendment, statutory bodies were able to nominate a river, or river section for designation, as nationally or locally outstanding. If, after a robust independent tribunal process, a river was found to be outstanding, the obligation was to determine what measures were required to preserve or protect those features. A recommendation went to the Minister for the Environment. This process



The Rakaia: our second protected river in 1988.
Image database DOC

is arguably more robust than an investigation into a national park in that it is subject to appeal to higher courts.

Today, 13 rivers, including the Motu, Rakaia, Mohaka, Buller and Ahuriri, plus Lakes Ellesmere (Te Waihora) and Wairarapa, enjoy this enduring measure of protection. Criteria include: wild and scenic, native and sport fisheries, wildlife values (such as for braided river birds or whio/blue duck), as species habitats, scientific and ecological, recreational, historic, spiritual or cultural (fishing, canoeing, kayaking, rafting), and tikanga Māori.