

## **Welcome and introduction**

### **Joe Harawira, Department of Conservation**

Joe painted a picture of the old world, Maori and their place in the environment. He described how Maori view the natural world; we are the natural world, “born conservationists”. “As the river flows from the mountain to the sea, I am the river and the river is me”. Maori honour all parts of nature for their mauri (lifeforce), mana (power), tapu (sacredness). This was no different to FMC and every person present. “Let our hearts beat in unison with mother earth,” he said “and only then will we have true balance in our lives.”

### **Andy Foster, Wellington City Council**

Andy spoke of his pride in what Wellington has achieved, in restoring the natural environment and facilitating recreation. He extrapolated from this local vision to a national one, commenting on the value Wellington’s environmental culture adds to its economy. He said that victory in conservation is too often the avoidance of defeat; too often we must spend our time defending, rather than moving forward. We’ve inherited from those who have gone before -- both heroes and villains. Remember too that we borrow from those who are to come.

### **Richard Davies, FMC President**

Richard hoped that this FMC 80th anniversary conference would be as influential as the seminal 1981 predecessor, celebrating 50 years. Conservation reforms that followed in the 1980s were the fruit of passionate advocacy by FMC. He likened the legal framework of Conservation and National Parks Acts to constitutional Bill of Rights and Public Finance Acts -- a framework critical to the wellbeing of New Zealanders, though not understood by many. Unlike the economy, which is resilient enough to sustain poor quarters, if you make a conservation mistake, it is gone. He went on to briefly imagine what success might look like in another 20 years time, 2031, FMC’s centenary:

1. A vital conservation culture, where New Zealanders have a stake in and feel pride in DOC work, and a robust outdoor culture.
2. Values and principles in National Parks and Conservation Acts must remain in place.
3. The sad case of stewardship land in New Zealand has been highlighted by the plight of the Mokihinui river. People ask how can this happen? Basically, because we couldn’t be bothered. Success would see stewardship land history by 2031.
4. In New Zealand, conservation is pest control. It needs to be adequately resourced.
5. The Crystal Valley land swap saw coastal forest exchanged for the price of some high country. He was supportive of more private involvement in sustaining conservation lands, but not at the expense of important conservation values.

## **Keynote speech**

### **Hon Kate Wilkinson, Minister of Conservation**

Mrs Wilkinson described Richard’s opening address as “mildly provocative”: it’s “always good to hear different views”. “Forever Wild?” was an interesting theme. These shaky islands will be forever wild, they form and reform with some regularity, as Christchurch knows. She extended her personal thanks to FMC members, for their Landsar search and rescue contribution in Christchurch after February 22 -- and their contribution, too, to conservation hut maintenance.

Wild lands of the world are rapidly shrinking. Opportunities New Zealand can offer in that regard are, therefore, of international significance. It is only right that we share it. DOC has a role in opening up recreational opportunities on the conservation estate. Examples of access

opportunities include the national walkway verging on completion (by the Te Araroa Trust), and the National cycleway. She believed the best way to protect our wild places was for New Zealanders to see for themselves why they deserve protecting.

On tourism, and campgrounds: “Some of you are more like rugged mountain goats,” but there was a need to provide for a broad spectrum of the population. Freedom camping legislation was about restricting a small number of areas -- rest areas, and those within a short distance of roads -- and unacceptable behaviour. “Back country activities are unaffected.”

DOC review of conservation management strategies commenced this year, asking new Zealanders what natives and special places help define identity, and whether that is properly reflected in DOC’s priorities.

How do we ensure that the wild stays wild is the key question. Wild places are important to the economy; ecosystem services are vital to our two big earners, cows and tourism. We need to ensure that they continue to add value to the wealth of New Zealanders.

## **Retrospective**

### **Les Molloy**

Les summed up FMC’s involvement in five major conservation issues since 1981:

- The establishment of wilderness areas -- 7 areas, 6 of them stemming from FMC’s 1981 proposals.
- Stopping the unsustainable logging of indigenous forests -- establishment of forest parks, and 3 World Heritage natural sites including Te Wahipounamu, which satisfies all four criteria and comprises 10% of New Zealand’s land area.
- National parks, under the National Parks Act, which FMC initially opposed.
- Co-ordinated management of publicly owned land by the Crown -- DOC formation with a strong conservation advocacy function (since weakened). He commented in particular on section 6(e), under which DOC is to “foster” recreation but “allow” tourism.
- Tenure review -- a “mixed bag”. FMC had initially considerable enthusiasm for submissions, but the results have been something of a poisoned chalice.

He addressed the impact of Treaty settlements, and the “secret plan (now aborted) to pass all of the Te Urewera National Park to iwi without public consultation”. Treaty Negotiations Minister Chris Finlayson may be the “most dangerous person in Cabinet”, and FMC needed to be engaging with him, as well as his colleague Mrs Wilkinson.

Future challenges:

- Wild and scenic rivers.
- The Game Animal Council.
- Protecting the Mackenzie and South Island eastern high country.
- Tourism.
- DOC’s increasing commercial involvement.

It was time for him to pass the mantle to Quentin, Richard and the younger generation; and he wished them all the best.

### **Craig Potton**

Craig took us on a scenic tour of wild lands, few words required. He said there are two kinds

of wildness we confront: the one out there, and the one in our own heads. It was important to leave the encounter on nature's own terms.

### **Keynote speech**

#### **Dr Jan Wright, Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment**

The title of her speech was "Conservation for prosperity and posterity?" with a question mark.

She was sharing some thoughts, only ideas for discussion. She foreshadowed a report on the commercial use of conservation lands next year.

The biggest danger to the conservation estate is the onslaught of pests -- both animals and plants, particularly possums and rats and stoats. Only on 1/8 of the conservation estate is there any pest control. "Our native forests and the creatures that live within them are in retreat."

Conservation for prosperity is DOC's new "strapline". She had no quarrel in principle with commercial use of the estate. Restoring the dawn chorus to the mainland will require a great deal more money. But it must be done well, based on principles.

One fundamental principle: conservation is the priority; there should be no net damage to conservation. There may be merit in in-kind payments: pest control, in perpetuity, by putting revenue from commercial uses into a trust.

Stewardship land is very different from all the other categories of conservation land. It has a different status under legislation. It is the only land that can be swapped. The term "land swap" is very unsatisfactory. "The conservation estate is not just land -- it is trees and birds and tussocks and snails and eels and geckos and mosses. And it's tramping and camping and kayaking and climbing mountains and just sitting and looking." If you think a piece of the conservation estate is really really important to protect, make sure it's not stewardship land. If it is, work to get it reclassified.

"Conservation for prosperity" should not come at the cost of "conservation for posterity". But this is already at risk, and pests are the threat, not commercial use.

### **Perspectives on future directions**

#### **Kevin O'Connor, Department of Conservation – the Department's direction**

Kevin summarised initiatives and ideas that the department is pursuing, to try to keep in front of conservation challenges and make management of lands robust for the future. Whereas the community sees conservation as a cost, DOC's goal is to shift that perception to an investment, which will require more successful engagement with the community. It is about thinking about what conservation can do for the country, rather than what the community can do for conservation; and thinking more laterally about how to access resources available in the community, specifically, the business sector. How to protect natural and historic heritage without appearing to lock up vast tracts of land; or sell conservation for a quick buck. It would require the barbequing of some sacred cows. DOC's focus in the past has been asset management. It was now on visitor experience, ways to increase participation -- why aren't we attracting large parts of the community and, via the commercial business unit, delivering revenue for more conservation, consistent with conservation.

### **Mark Christensen, Anderson Lloyd – industry and legal directions**

Pest control was needed, the biodiversity downward trend must be stopped. He considered the role of biodiversity offsets -- as recognised by the Environment Court and in the proposed biodiversity NPS (in defined circumstances). There were many difficulties, and a lot of work to be undertaken in determining methodology for setting the right offset levels; understanding equivalence is difficult. Conservation should do everything possible to work in with industry for win-wins, but be an “iron fist in a velvet glove” -- uncertainty and inconsistency were more difficult for industry than being told they can’t do something they might otherwise wish to do. He queried whether some places should be sacrosanct as regards commercial use and offsetting.

### **Kay Booth, Lindis Consulting – recreation and tourism directions**

Kay reviewed the history of recreation and tourism on conservation lands. In 1961, 41,000 international arrivals, equivalent to 2% of NZ population. In 2011, 2.5 million international arrivals, equivalent to 57%. Energy and climate change issues would confront the future of tourism -- issues about cost and attitude -- and there is a projected decline in outdoor recreation participation. There are markets not being tapped; how do we best cater for their needs and preferences? The “luxury” conservation experience, with flushing toilets and showers on the Milford Track was discussed, with its quid pro quo of rising costs. Kay noted the importance of national park management plans and use limits; and hearing the voice of the people independently, not through the filter or lens of the government of the day, which is where the role of FMC is so valuable.

### **Wren Green, Science Consultant – biodiversity conservation trends and directions**

Some successes, but an overall picture of decline -- we were “selling Tane short”. He contrasted conventional views of ecosystems with the reality: efficiency gains driving ecosystems to the edge, like pulling rivets out of an aeroplane and waiting to see which bits would fall off. We needed to move from government to governance; and use fora like the Land and Water Forum (LWF) to address complex issues. There was subsequent discussion of LWF with the political party panel: Labour and Green members spoke strongly about the government’s failure to implement these recommendations. Kevin Hague noted the importance of implementation, to achieving buy-in in the Scandinavian models; and from Ruth Dyson, it was a disgrace to ask these people to contribute their time and expertise, then ignore their advice.

### **Political party panel – vision and policies for the future**

#### **National Party – Louise Upston MP for Taupo**

[Apologies from Hon Mrs Wilkinson, who had had to return to electorate duties in Christchurch.]

Louise commented on the importance of recreational tourism for her Taupo electorate. National was focused on ensuring economic opportunities are matched with environmental responsibilities. As the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment had said, there was every reason to get a monetary return where there could be overall benefit to conservation lands. There were advantages for business in getting involved, such as for their brand, and staff morale. It did not mean pristine areas would be turned into shopping malls.

#### **Labour Party – Ruth Dyson MP Labour conservation spokesperson**

The passion demonstrated by FMC could only be inspired from knowing our country. The current “balancing” rhetoric needed to be abandoned. It was wrong philosophically to think

of extracting commercial value from DOC lands. It ignores their value in providing ecosystem services, and tourism. It needed to be turned on its head: the role of Minister and department must be for the economic and social value of conservation to be recognised in itself. DOC's strong advocacy role had vanished these last two years. There needed to be inherent recognition and respect for value. Talk of land being "locked up" was at odds with the role conservation should play. Advocacy, underfunding, and conservation as a "nice to have" were the key challenges.

### **Green Party – Kevin Hague MP Green conservation spokesperson**

In a time of global financial crisis, and straitened times, the government's spending priorities say a lot about its values. The issue is not insufficient dollars. It is not valuing conservation, relative to, for example, the tens of billions earmarked for spending on roads. It is about priorities.

The government sees the environment as a source of resources to use. The Greens see it as inherently valuable. Also fundamentally different is the view of the relationship between economy, society and environment. The economy is only a set of tools for achieving environmental and social goals.

We could take a lesson from Patagonia -- 1% of its budget for conservation. Our conservation budget is 0.6%, and reducing. A good thing to do for conservation for the future would be, let's just uphold the law.

### **United Future environment and outdoor recreation spokesperson – Doug Stevens**

Outdoor heritage is central to New Zealand identity and a birthright. United Future was opposed to wild river destruction, and would set in place a moratorium on this for the next decade, strengthen and where necessary reinstate water conservation orders. Wilderness should be just that -- free from helicopters and jetboats. United Future is absolutely opposed to heli-hunting on the DOC estate; it was not sport, not hunting, and should have no place in this country. Fishing access -- he had a list of 38 rivers where landowners were locking up access. United Future does not want these de facto privatised, does not support roam at will, but does have a policy of public access to public resources -- lakes, beaches, rivers, mountains, &c. Will be seeking as part of a coalition agreement a stronger Walking Access Commission. Would ban 1080: there are some areas where possum and pest control can be better done by land based methods, and would be selecting areas in which to trial these alternatives.

Compiled by Claire Browning ([www.pundit.co.nz](http://www.pundit.co.nz))