



Department of Conservation funding increased

The Government has increased the budget for the Department of Conservation by 6.4% for the 1995/96 year.

The actual figures, about which there has been some public debate, breakdown as follows:

	(\$000)
Total expenditure	\$143,020
less GST (\$15,891)	= \$127,129
less Employment Scheme Reserve (\$3,800)	= \$123,329
less revenue earned by the Department (\$22,614)	= \$100,715
less capital charge (\$6,616)	= \$ 94,555

The figure of \$100,715,000 for Crown Revenue for 1995/96 is \$6,032,000 more than the budget for 1994/95. In the larger context the DOC budget represents 0.3% of total government expenditure.

Before looking at where the extra money has been allocated, it is worth noting that the starting point was the 1994/95 Budget, less a 1.5% reduction. This was common ground for most government departments. In fact since DOC was formed in 1987 it has had a total budget reduction of 25% and a reduction in staffing of 35%.

The areas to which the Government has allocated additional money are: possum control at \$4,400,000 and threatened species and island habitat management, \$2,700,000. Both figures are exclusive of GST.

The possum-control money will be spent on protecting areas of high ecological value throughout mainland New Zealand and the Chatham Islands. It will fund 130 possum-control programmes on an ongoing basis. The total amount of money spent by the Government on possum control on conservation lands has doubled in the last two years.

The additional threatened species money will be spent on five key areas. They are: predator management, particularly of rats and mustelids; ecological restoration, which involves predator removal and transfer of threatened species to restored habitats; programmes to develop islands as sanctuaries; programmes to manage mainland sites as de facto islands through intensively controlling predators, and increased effort on highly threatened bird species such as kakapo and kokako.

Looking at the conservation budget as

a whole, the department proposes to spend 29% on managing the conservation estate and threats such as fire and annual pests, 25% on providing and managing recreation facilities, 15% on threatened species and islands, 12% on visitor and public information services, 6% on managing leases, licences and concessions, 4% each on management strategies, statutory planning and acquiring legal protection for conservation values and least of all, 1%, on policy advice.

Since the Budget was announced other political parties have released "alternative" budget policy statements. One party has signalled a commitment towards annual increases to the conservation budget of \$25, \$50 and \$75 million dollars over the next three years. These proposed increases in conservation spending would

suggest that the message is finally getting across to New Zealanders and politicians that our native plants and animals, and all the natural values that we collectively recognise as the New Zealand identity, are being destroyed around us at an alarming rate by introduced pests. On current projections bird species such as the kiwi and kaka may within 50 years only be found on predator-free, offshore islands.

A lot of the credit for making the politicians and public more aware of these acute conservation problems and gaining political support for increased funding must go to the Royal New Zealand Forest and Bird Protection Society. Forest and Bird have been active throughout the country in publicising the plight of our native forests and threatened species through the news media.

New figures are evidence of NZ's sustainable forest resource

Around 62,000 hectares of forest were planted in the year ended March 31, 1994, taking New Zealand's net stocked area of planted production forest to 1.39 million hectares, the Ministry of Forestry announced in April.

The total standing volume contained in New Zealand's planted production forests is estimated at 270 million cubic metres, up by 17 million cubic metres for the year ended March 31, 1994. In addition, it is estimated that between 15 and 16 million cubic metres of roundwood were harvested from New Zealand's planted production forests for the March 1994 year.

"The continuing upward trend in areas and standing volumes with no reduction in the average tree age is evidence that New Zealand's planted forests are being sustainably managed," says Mike McLarin, Senior Policy Analyst with the Ministry of Forestry.

"New Zealand's forest resource is made up of mostly young crops, with around 60 per cent being 15 years old or younger and the average age estimated at 14 years. This is a result of the planting boom in the 1970s and early 1980s and

means we'll have vastly increased volumes available for harvesting over the next decade," said Mr McLarin.

Those trees planted in the boom (trees now 10 to 20 years old) are also generally much better tended with high levels of pruning, according to Mr McLarin. Nearly 60 per cent of New Zealand's planted forests have been pruned.

Radiata pine made up 90 per cent of New Zealand's planted forest resource, with Douglas fir the next most common species at approximately 5 per cent of the total.

Detailed Inventory

These figures have been published in the Ministry of Forestry's A National Exotic Forest Description (NEFD) as at April 1, 1994. The report contains a detailed inventory of New Zealand's planted production forest estate by providing forest areas by age class, species, tending regime and location.

Copies of the NEFD are available from Ministry of Forestry offices for \$NZ35 (incl GST).