

Environment and Conservation Organisations of New Zealand (Inc.)
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CHAIRPERSON'S ANNUAL REPORT 1988

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By now you will all be well aware of what has been the most pressing concern for the ECO Executive this year – the reviews of local and regional government and resource management laws. But this has certainly not been the only issue to concern us and our member bodies, and I will try to touch briefly on some of the other multitudinous matters which seem to fill an environmentalist's days and nights.

It has been a year of gains, but sadly perhaps more a year of losses.

Our first loss was Cath Wallace as Chairperson. Cath has devoted so many years of hard work to ECO that it was very hard to accept that she needed to reduce her involvement and resign as Chairperson. But as Vice-Chair she has continued to be a central figure in ECO, and to continue the long hours which she was supposedly avoiding. University work has gradually intruded, however, and I am sure you will all agree that Conference hasn't been quite the same without her.

Cath is a hard act to follow. I cannot pretend to be the type of Chairperson she was, but I have had a very strong Executive to support me. ECO is always a team effort, with every member of the Executive, all our member bodies, and our Friends, contributing to its success.

The other major loss for ECO was the death in March of Bruce Henderson, our Treasurer for so many years. Bruce was valued by us, not only for his excellent work on the accounts, but also for his frank advice. He was always able to bring a note of realism to our discussions, and suggest practical strategies.

During the last year, three other deaths removed important workers from the movement. Sir Charles Fleming died in September 1987, a loss not only for conservation but also for science in New Zealand. Helen Rainforth died within days of Bruce. She had been an important figure in Action for Environment in Wellington, as well as doing work for ECO. Helmut Einhorn, who chaired the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Architectural Centre, and was the husband of Ester who manages the Friends of ECO records so well, died in April.

Despite these losses, we have achieved much.

Department of Conservation

Our relationship with DoC has been greatly enhanced by the establishment of regular meetings between DoC senior staff and NGOs.

Over the year, DoC has initiated several reviews to which we and our member bodies have contributed. These include the draft Mining Guidelines, the review of Conservation Quangos, and most recently the Protected Areas Legislation Review. We have also made comments on DoC priorities.

The Executive hosted a farewell dinner for Ken Piddington, who left his position as DoC Director General in March, to work with the World Bank.

Bob Fantl, an executive member, provided a professional review of the Milford Sound Development decision for DoC in March.

Ministry for the Environment

Our relationship with the Ministry has been more varied, and perhaps less comfortable.

We participated in the review of the Environmental Council. This review led to the termination of the Council, and their last meeting was held on 23 March 1988. The speech given by John Hayward at the final meeting, which was reproduced in part in the February/March ECO Newsletter, contains some interesting observations on the value of the environment movement and the effect of budget constraints on the environmental agencies.

The Ministry itself changed over this period. With the addition of the planning and water and soil sections of the Ministry of Works and Development, it expanded in both functions and (to a lesser extent) staff. This led to a review of its structure and the adoption of a matrix structure, building renovations, and increased internal difficulties. The Ministry has gradually adopted a more neutral, less advocacy stand over the year. The Ministry of today, less than two years down the track, is not the organisation we had envisaged in the heady days of the Environment Forum.

The Ministry conducted a number of policy reviews over the year. You have heard already about the ICC work on hazardous substances and pollution. In addition, there was a Working Party on TBT anti-foulants, another on Freedom Camping and Campervans, the Blakeley Committee on Forests South of the Cook River, and a Working Party on Exotic Biota and Genetically Modified Organisms, and the Food Irradiation Working Group.

Antarctica

1988 has been an important year for the Antarctic campaign. Despite the views expressed at the Policies on Ice seminar in September, and the hard work by environmentalists before and since, the Antarctic Minerals Convention is now close to being a reality. The final negotiation meeting was held in Wellington between 2 May and 2 June. A massive amount of work was put in by Cath Wallace and the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition team from all over the world. They will now be concentrating on persuading New Zealand not to ratify the convention, and thus open Antarctica to mining.

Land Allocations

The Public Lands Coalition, working with DoC, have been successful in gaining conservation status for many important pieces of land. This work continues, with Electricorp and Railways land now coming under scrutiny.

The other major development in this area was the passing of the Treaty of Waitangi (State Owned Enterprises) Act. This not only helped to delay land allocation decisions, but also provided valuable clarification of the principles of the Treaty.

Mining

With the Monowai mine decision, the Minister of Conservation triggered a major debate over her Ministerial consent role. I am sure that our Coromandel groups will be watching the results of the Golden Cross decision just as closely.

The Wharepapa Declaration which was launched by NFAC in 1987 closed in June. Signatures are being counted, and it will be presented in August.

Other activities

Molly Melhuish worked with the Royal Commission on Social Policy, preparing an energy paper. This contains material which will have value for us for a long time.

Molly Melhuish and Barry Weeber attended an international conference on Environmental Impact Assessment in Canberra in 1987, adding to our ideas on this subject.

Resource Management Law Reform and Local Government Review

And of course, this filled the rest of the time.

The Executive formed a Working Group in October, in anticipation of the amount of effort which would be required on these reviews. This Working Group has contributed a considerable amount of work and inspiration, including:

- * two workshops on the reviews
 - * two issues of ECO News
 - * submissions to both reviews
 - * submission on the Local Government Amendment Bill
- and * seemingly endless information gathering, negotiating, attending meetings, and presenting our case to committees.

There is much that could be said about these reviews. Some of it I have already covered in my address on Friday. Other matters are covered in our submissions.

Suffice it to say here that these reviews have made this a difficult year. They have required a great deal of effort, and have provided little reward to date. There has been no funding assistance, despite early and repeated promises from the Ministry for the Environment. Our hopes of employing a research officer/coordinator for the reviews were therefore dashed. Nor did the position of liaison officer with the RMLR Core Group develop as we had hoped. Communication with both reviews has gradually reduced during this year, despite our best efforts.

There have been rewards, however. The ECO Working Group has been a stimulating experience for all of us on it. We have been given an incentive to develop and promote basic environmental principles, and this will help with future campaigns even if they are not accepted now.

These reviews will undoubtedly continue to dominate us for at least another year.

Membership

ECO had 98 member bodies when I wrote this report. The figure changes constantly, as new groups join and others leave. Groups leave for many different reasons – because they have achieved their purpose and disbanded or gone into recess, for financial reasons, or because they no longer wish to belong for other reasons.

I must regretfully record that the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society resigned in January. The Society is now a Corporate Friend, and we are continuing to work together. I look forward to being able to welcome them as a member body again in the future.

One of our major challenges is to improve the service we provide to our member bodies. We made an initial attempt to allocate special responsibility for each member body to a particular B class representative. This has worked well in some cases, but I hope that we will be able to improve communication over the next year.

Finances

Once again we have just managed to make the books balance at the end of the financial year. That this is so is due to the small number of generous individuals who contribute to the special fund, and to all our Friends of ECO.

We have also received two vital contributions this year – grants from the Willi Fells Trust, and from the Environmental Council.

Tributes

There are so many people who provide valuable assistance to ECO, and it is never possible to mention them all.

We are fortunate to be able to call on numerous people to do that most vital and unexciting work – collating, stapling, labelling and sorting newsletters.

In addition, we owe a special thanks to our special volunteers – Noel Elvines, our Honorary Auditor; Barbara Marshall who has stood in as typist whenever needed; Ester Einhorn who manages the Friends of ECO records; and Colin Benson, our Acting Treasurer. Colin also keeps our mailing list in perfect condition, and is our resident computer expert and technician.

And of course, it is our staff who hold the place together and make it all work. Chris Horne has had an even larger work load over the last year than normal, and continues to provide an excellent newsletter, office management and campaign assistance on a very small salary. We have a new typist. Sandra Jack brings to us not only an aptitude for computer work, but also a background in environmental issues.

I would like to finish by thanking again the ECO Executive. They have provided long hours of voluntary work and a wide range of expertise. It is to them that the credit goes for the high standard of submissions and work on the reviews which we have achieved.

But it is you, the member bodies and environmentalists, who are the reason for ECO existing. Thank you for your support, your ideas, your contributions, and particularly for your work for the environment in your own fields and regions.

Paula Warren,
ECO Chairperson.