

25-OCT-99 16:56

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Hon. Dr Nick Smith

M.P. for Nelson

Minister of Education

Minister of Conservation

**MEDIA RELEASE
EMBARGED UNTIL 4PM
MONDAY 25 OCTOBER 1999**

HISTORIC DEED SIGNED TO PROTECT LORDS RIVER FOREST

Conservation Minister Nick Smith and Rakiura Maori Lands Trust Chair Graham Lloyd today signed a historic deed of settlement and deed of covenant to protect 3,515 hectares of native forest at the Lords River on Stewart Island.

"This deal will permanently protect one of the most spectacular and unspoilt areas of New Zealand. The Lord's River is our 'Amazon'. It has stunning scenery and, because of the absence of pests like stoats and ferrets, has bountiful birdlife. This virgin forest has far more value to New Zealand conserved and managed as a National Park than being logged and chipped."

The deed involves a settlement of \$10.9 million to the owners in exchange for the area being permanently covenanted and managed as National Park. A Heads of Agreement was signed in July this year, subject to confirmation by beneficial owners and final approval by Cabinet. This confirmation has occurred, enabling the deed and covenant to be signed. This forest is to be known as the Tutae Ka Wetoweto Forest, and a management plan focussing on conservation and protection will be developed by the trust with the Department of Conservation.

The Lords River was one of the blocks of land provided as economic compensation for South Island Landless Maori under the provisions of the South Island Landless Natives Act 1906 (SILNA). These forests are not protected by the normal provisions of the Forest Act requiring that any harvesting be sustainable. The issue here was to negotiate a fair settlement that would protect the forest but not undermine the provisions of the 1906 Act of Parliament.

"Today is made more special with the presence of Mrs Stewart to witness the signing of the deed. Mrs Stewart is 97 years old and brings with her three generations of owners. She was one year old when the lands were first granted to her family. She is the oldest SILNA owner and the largest owner in the block."

Dr Smith also announced that a moratorium on logging had been negotiated on a further 44 SILNA blocks. The voluntary moratorium was proposed as a mechanism to prevent immediate logging in exchange for financial help for owners.

"The SILNA forests are a hugely complex and difficult issue. They have a sorry history and were never adequate compensation for what was lost by Maori. However, we can't allow them to be clearfelled and lost forever. The Lord's River agreement and the solid progress on the moratorium bodes well for a permanent and lasting solution to this thorny problem."

ENDS

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29-OCT-99 18:30

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Hon. Dr Nick Smith

M.P. for Nelson

Minister of Education

Minister of Conservation

MEDIA RELEASE
29 OCTOBER 1999

LORDS RIVER DEAL A GREAT INVESTMENT SAYS SMITH

Conservation Minister Nick Smith today said Government's \$10.9 million investment in the protection of 3300 ha of virgin indigenous forest on Stewart Island was a sound strategic investment that would ensure the survival of this special place for the enjoyment of all New Zealanders.

"The Nga Whenua Rahui and Nature Heritage Funds were established by the National Government to protect significant natural areas in private ownership. Forest and Bird's criticism of the Lords River deal is bizarre. It seems that Forest and Bird believe that Maori land is not private land. This is an extraordinary claim to make in 1999 and reflects a colonial attitude to Maori property. The Lords River deal is an appropriate and proper use of Government funding. It is a priority because it meets the criteria of the funds, and also achieves the wider objectives of settling Treaty grievances and provides a lead for the conservation of other Maori owned indigenous forests."

The Government recognised that parts of the deal involved settlement of Treaty claims and forestry issues and these have been funded quite separately. The Government has allocated additional funds to help with the cost. The funds have previously been used to protect the Waitutu Forest.

"The Lords River deal is particularly large but is very significant. It is one of New Zealand's last wildernesses and has extraordinarily high conservation values. While the \$10.9 million price is high, some conservation groups advocated that we should pay \$16 million for the protection of the Block. Whenever these funds are used for large purchases, they come under pressure in the short term. The funds have achieved outstanding results in protecting nearly a quarter of a million hectares of private land in less than six years. I am satisfied that the good work of both funds will be able to continue well into the future. Bids for funding have been growing over the years and Government is constantly reviewing this, and other methods, to assist private landowners to conserve the natural heritage on their land."

ENDS

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