

Forest & Bird welcomes Government's mining decision

Title Independent conservation organisation Forest & Bird (BirdLife in New Zealand) welcomes the Government's decision to maintain the protection of New Zealand's core conservation land as a victory for the environment and the people of New Zealand. The Government announced today it has abandoned plans to mine 7000 hectares of land protected under Schedule 4 of the Crown Minerals Act. "Forest & Bird is relieved to see the Government finally recognising the real value of the core conservation estate," Forest & Bird Advocacy Manager Kevin Hackwell says. "This decision effectively creates a cross-party consensus for protecting New Zealand's most beautiful wild landscapes for future generations to enjoy and for maintaining habitats for some of our most endangered birds and plants. "The decision is a victory for the tens of thousands of New Zealanders who marched in Auckland and other centres against the proposal and who sent almost 40,000 submissions during the consultation," he says. "Although Forest & Bird is pleased about the backdown, we believe the law should be changed to ensure that an Act of Parliament would be required in the future to remove any land from Schedule 4 protection," Mr Hackwell says. Plans to mine Schedule 4 land failed to recognise the intrinsic scenic, recreation and conservation values loved by New Zealanders. Mining these wild landscapes would also have diminished rather than grown the economy, because of the impact of tarnishing our 100% Pure New Zealand international marketing of our tourism and primary product export industries. Forest & Bird is concerned about Government plans to expand mining in other conservation areas. Mining will be made easier by the decision to change the Conservation Act so economic benefit will be added to the criteria for access to conservation land. The sign-off for such agreements allowing access for mining will become jointly the responsibility of the Energy and Resources Minister and the Conservation Minister, rather than solely in the hands of the Conservation Minister, as at present. "Forest & Bird rejects Mr Brownlee's claim that New Zealanders have given the minerals sector a clear mandate to explore and mine non-Schedule 4 land," Mr Hackwell says. "The strength of opposition to the Government's plans makes it clear that New Zealanders are very concerned about the impacts of mining wherever it occurs and that they expect stronger constraints on the mining industry to significantly reduce the damage they do." On the positive side, applications for access will in future have to be publicly notified. Overall, Forest & Bird welcomes the backdown on the threat to our most precious wild places. "I think it's going to reinforce forever that Schedule 4 and our core conservation estate are important and they shouldn't be touched - I think that is the key thing," Mr Hackwell says.