

# PUBLIC LANDS COALITION

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Freedom of Public Access Welcomed**

Public Lands Coalition spokesperson Dr Hugh Barr has welcomed the Prime Minister's assurance that the Government has no plans to restrict public access to the Queen's chain.

The Prime Minister, Mr Geoffrey Palmer said on Tuesday (Otago Daily Times 29/11/89 via PA) that he wanted "to assure everybody that the Queen's chain is secure".

The legislation relating to the Queen's chain is currently before a Parliamentary select committee. As it is written it provides for adjacent land owners, as managers, to temporarily close the Queen's chain to public access 'for public safety or operational reasons'. Additionally the Minister of Conservation would gain powers to close off public access.

"I am sure that all New Zealanders would agree with Mr Palmer that there must be no restrictions on public access to the Queen's chain. There are none now so our Coalition was justifiably alarmed at the proposed restrictions on access, and loss of Crown ownership, which appeared in the Conservation Law Reform Bill," Dr Barr said.

"Free access to our rivers, lakes and coasts is part of our national heritage. We are heartened by the Prime Minister's positive commitment to protecting public rights."

The Coalition has had useful discussions with Minister of Conservation Phillip Woollaston on the issue. These have resulted in a better understanding of Government's intentions and of the Coalition's concerns.

Mr Palmer has also given an assurance that the Bill will be amended to make sure that it does achieve Government's intention of strengthening protection for the Queen's chain.

"We hope the final law will reflect the Prime Minister's assurances, however everything will depend on what the fine print says," Dr Barr commented.

Dr Barr said he thought the Bill would require substantial amendments so that it really does provide greater protection. The Public Lands Coalition does not believe it is possible to adequately protect the Queen's chain, and public access along it, by appointing adjoining landowners or other private interests as managers.

"Currently farmers informally use the Queen's chain for grazing. This is generally a satisfactory situation. The Crown as the land owner has the right to say how the chain is used, if at all. This is far stronger than the proposals in the Bill that legitimise private use and development, and then attempt to contain it," Dr Barr explained.

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