

PUBLIC LANDS COALITION

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Press Release

QUEENS CHAIN AMMENDMENTS INADEQUATE

While the Public Lands Coalition welcomes some of the changes made to the Queens Chain legislation it is seriously concerned that the bill still provides for the Queens Chain to be closed to the public.

The PLC wants all provisions for closure of public access to the Queens Chain and the ability to appoint private managers over strips to be dropped. There must also be an absolute requirement for strips to be established on all SOE lands.

Coalition spokes person, Mr Bruce Mason said the amended closure provisions were really no better than those in the original bill. Now the manager is able to request the Minister of Conservation to close the strip "in any case to protect any asset ."

"This is a backward step as closure provisions do not exist in the present Land Act, where the public's right of access is unfettered. This represents a major erosion of the public's access rights." He said.

"The public's right of access must come ahead of private assets on conservation and recreation land."

"As the bill now reads strips can be closed for as long as the Minister decrees, and could conceivably be closed permanently if provided for in an agreement between the manager and the Crown which are conceived without public knowledge."

This is contrary to what we believed were Governments intentions". Mr Mason said.

Mr Mason said the Select Committee has taken up many of the PLC's recommendations and the Coalition is pleased that Crown ownership of strips is now indisputable and that strips will be shown on public plans.

"Our concern that strips should not be able to be sold has also been adopted, with the deletion of this section from the bill.:

Mr Mason believes that some of the amendments are dangerous.

"For example a whole new section has been added which allows the Minister to decide not to establish any strips on Crown lands being transferred to SOE's."

"This new provision seems designed to accommodate State owned Enterprises and Governments wish for quick land sales at maximum dollar values, at the expense of Public interest." Mr Mason said.

The PLC still has major concerns over the management provisions of the bill.

"The Select Committee has only tinkered with this section."

The PLC view is that the status quo should be retained whereby adjacent land owners can have informal use of strips. The appointment of managers has more disadvantages than advantages. They impose a huge and costly bureaucratic burden on the Department of Conservation.

"Allowing managers to make improvements to strips creates private interests and will create de-facto ownership rights, with "improvements" and "rights of use" becoming chattels having market value in the same manner as does land."

There are currently no provisions for strips to be developed under the Land Act and we believe the provisions which allow managers to make improvements is completely inappropriate and weakens the conservation and public access values of strips.

Mr Mason said the Select Committee had got some things right but the bill still doesn't fully reflect the Governments stated intentions:

We are now looking forward to the Government getting it in line with the Prime Ministers assurances that Queens Chain legislation would be strengthened and that there would be no restriction of public access.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

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