

PUBLIC LANDS COALITION

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NEWS MEDIA RELEASE

1 July 1991.

PUBLIC ACCESS UNDER ATTACK

Public expectations of reasonable recreational access to the countryside is of little consequence in the eyes of the National Government. This is the message the Public Lands Coalition draws from further changes made by the planning and development select committee to the Resource Management Bill.

The Coalition, made up of the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society, the Federated Mountain Clubs of New Zealand, and the New Zealand Fish and Game Council, is bitterly disappointed with the public access provisions now in the Bill.

Coalition national researcher and spokesman, Mr Bruce Mason of Dunedin, believes that if the Bill in its present form becomes law, the Queen's Chain concept of access along waterways will be further eroded as will the right of access to publically-owned national parks, conservation areas, and reserves.

"The select committee had a wonderful opportunity to enshrine in legislation the concept of maintaining and enhancing public access to public lands held for public recreation purposes," Mr Mason said.

"The majority of the select committee has rejected a large number of

calls for making this a matter of national importance. Presumably, as the Bill remains silent on this aspect, existing access rights to the public estate are at risk,” Mr Mason said.

The select committee has also removed the existing minimum width of three metres for esplanade reserves when land is being subdivided along rivers and sea coast. “Conceivably this will allow district councils the discretion to approve ridiculously narrow reserves that fulfil legal requirements but for practical purposes exclude the public from using them,” Mr Mason said. District councils will also obtain the right to dispose of public roads along shorelines without any requirement for public reserves in their place.

“With central government abrogating most of its responsibilities to regional and district councils, it now appears that continual local vigilance and citizen pressure will be essential for public recreational access to much of New Zealand,” Mr Mason concluded.

For further information—

Bruce Mason