

# Conservation Department on 'holy crusade'

**BLenheim** — The Department of Conservation's quest for partnership with iwi Maori was called a holy crusade by the guest speaker, Bruce Mason, at the New Zealand Deerstalkers' Association conference in Blenheim.

Mr Mason of Dunedin, a researcher for Public Access New Zealand, spoke at the opening night of the 46th conference on Friday.

"All lands and waters under the department's control are now liable for handing over to iwi, or to any claimant of Maori descent, under a spirit of 'partnership,'" he said.

The validity of Maori claims appeared to be incidental to the cultural agendas of senior departmental staff and their Minister, he said.

Their advocacy for devolution of ownership and control of public lands to Maori had "the air of a religious order".

Mr Mason said he had written a paper on the Treaty of Waitangi in which he concluded that partnership was a myth and that the department had no legal basis



Mr Mason

for pursuing partnership policies.

Those in the recreation movement who had analysed the dogma and actions of the bureaucrats were liable to be abused as "racists". PANZ wanted equal rights for everyone, regardless of ethnic origins, he said. Government closeted State owned enterprises' commercial



Mr Smith

assets away from Maori claimants while public land was being freed up, he said.

That convinced him the Government was not driven by high moral purpose but by "good old-fashioned expediency".

PANZ research had found that in most cases DOC and the Government were acting contrary

to the findings of the Waitangi Tribunal.

That was the case for the Greenstone and Caples valleys and for Codfish and Crown Titi islands off Stewart Island. Court action might be needed because political solutions were unlikely, he said.

Ordinary New Zealanders did not feature in the Government's view of the outdoors.

Mass alienation of public land was being planned through Government partnership with tourism and Maoris, he said.

The tourism industry was pushing for track fees in national parks to pay for high-standard facilities mainly to benefit their clients. New Zealanders would be priced out or displaced, he said.

Another guest speaker, Tasman's member of Parliament, Nick Smith, said the issue was access, not ownership.

An access strip giving a person a legal right to gain access was more important than acquiring land, he said.