New Zealand: Environmentalists victory save precious forests

A 30-year campaign led by environmentalist organizations in New Zealand (see WRM Bulletin 30) has at last reached its goal, since the new government has recently introduced legislation to stop the logging of publicly-owned temperate rainforests at the West Coast, and to transform them into national parks and other conservation reserves. "These lowland forests are considered by many New Zealanders to be a unique and significant part of our natural heritage, too valuable for logging of any sort to continue," expressed Pete Hodgson -the Minister responsible for timberlands- addressing the Parliament on May 11.

Even though the environmentalists regret that the government approved the logging of the rimu tree of Orikaka forest for two more years, they believe that the new legislation constitutes a victory. The government is also satisfied with this decision and considers that shortening the period of the concession operating in the area from five to two years would achieve a significant conservation gain while minimizing the risk of job losses. Not that happy is the timber industry sector, included the state owned company Timberland, which had even hired a relations company to run a secret campaign to gain support for an expansion of logging of rimu trees. Nevertheless, the reached solution is not very bad for industry, since no restriction on the amount of logging allowed in the interim has been established and additionally it will receive U$S120 million in 2002 when the operations cease.

The NGO Native Forest Action has announced that it will continue campaigning against the remaining logging operations. The group intends to persuade the government to get the loggers definitively out of the priceless rimu tree forests.

Article based on information from: Sandy Gauntlett, 17/5/2000, Inter Press Service, 23/5/2000, sent by Pat Rasmussen, Leavenworth Audubon Adopt-a-Forest, 24/5/2000;