

GOVERNMENT ABANDONS PRECIOUS LANDSCAPES

Tenure review in the South Island high country is failing to protect its outstanding landscape values, President of the NZ Institute of Landscape Architects, Di Lucas said today.

“Important and accessible pastoral lease lands around the magnificent southern lakes and rivers, the mountain passes, the vast basins and magnificent valleys of southern Marlborough, Canterbury, Otago and northern Southland are currently being “traded away” in tenure review for protection of alpine and montane land,” she said.

Ms Lucas released the results of the Institute’s preliminary audit of tenure review assessments and proposals for ten high country stations in Canterbury and Otago. This covers properties around the upper Rakaia, the Omarama-Lindis area, and Lake Wanaka. The audit identified consistent failures in landscape protection.

“The audit shows that officials from Department of Conservation and LINZ (Land Information New Zealand) are largely ignoring the requirements of the Crown Pastoral Land Act to protect landscape values as part of “significant inherent values,” she said.

“The government is abandoning significant tracts of spectacular high country landscapes it has long owned and administered by allowing them to be privatised through tenure review, and then of course to be carved up and developed.

“These are landscapes that are well loved by New Zealanders and are major tourist attractions. Landscapes that painters (such as Graham Sydney), photographers, poets and songwriters have memorably interpreted for us,” Ms Lucas said.

“Crown pastoral leases have in the past been an effective landscape protection mechanism for these grand landscapes. They used to be well administered by government, with no automatic right to development. Land development privileges such as forestry would be assessed according to landscape and other policies. We had a rather secure landscape protection mechanism.

“The Resource Management Act provides scant protection for landscape values once pastoral leases are freeholded,” she said. “The grandeur of much high country is being put at risk.”

“Many communities that care about their special rural and coastal landscapes can vouch that it is very difficult to protect these from inappropriate development through the Resource Management Act.”

“Using the RMA Councils have allowed landowners and developers to successfully apply for subdivisions in areas of coast and lakeshore, on prominent hills, ridges and mountainsides, that could rarely have happened under previous planning regimes.

“Development is occurring on areas that were always considered rather sacrosanct. Now with an aggressive property market and international cheque books open and ready, many who care about our landscapes despair at the current carve up of the privately managed landscape jewels of this country.

“Increasingly New Zealand is seen as a haven by those offshore. Whilst prime lakeside or coastal property may seem ludicrously expensive to locals, to many from Europe and

the United States it is comparatively cheap for internationally premier sites and settings, superior to many other places in the world.

“The way the current tenure review process is being administered is seeing the end to effective landscape protection. The New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects established a High Country Landscape Group to investigate what is happening.

“This abandonment by government of landscape protection seems quite bizarre. Government has a mechanism in the legislation to ensure these values are looked after, and they just are not bothering. Once freeholded without any protection mechanisms, the opportunity for secure landscape protection is gone. “

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Refer also background report, plus appendices, Audit Process, audit Results (graphed).