

Native Bush Protection

Have you got a piece of native bush or scrub on your property? If yes, what are your options for it? One obvious option is to clear the land and return it back into pasture or some other profitable land use. A serious option is to protect it. A third option is to continue using it for shelter post shearing or somewhere to put the cows over winter.

Should you wish to clear your piece of scrub or bush and return the land to pasture, you will have commitments under the RMA to fulfil. Firstly with your local district council who administers issues relating to land use, and secondly your regional council who administers issues relating to soil and water. Both of these bodies will have certain criteria that you will have to adhere to when undertaking this activity. In addition to this, under the *Sustainable Land Management and Climate Change* proposal recently released by government, any deforestation after 31 December 2007 may attract a \$13,000 per hectare tax if the proposal is accepted in its current form.

Protecting small pieces of bush on your property should be a serious option. This can be achieved simply just by fencing out the livestock. There is also the option to protect it for in perpetuity with a covenant. A covenant is a legally binding agreement which means that the landowner and subsequent landowners have to protect and manage the area concerned. Some options for Legal protection include:

Queen Elizabeth II National Trust Open Space Covenant

A QEII National Trust covenant is an agreement between a landowner and the Trust, under which the owner agrees to manage the defined area in a way that is detailed in the covenant. You retain ownership of the land and a Trust representative will visit every two years to assist with specialist management advice. The covenant is registered against the title of your property and binds subsequent owners. The Trust provides financial assistance with the establishment of the covenant and covers standard legal and survey costs. Having a QEII Open Space Covenant, still retains the area in private ownership and does not mean that the public have access. The QEII Open Space Covenants are very flexible and can include or exclude many wishes of the landowner.

Covenant with Department of Conservation (DOC) or a Territorial Authority

These are similar to QEII National Trust open space covenants but are agreed between the landowner and either DOC or a territorial authority (city or district council). They are often associated with pieces of bush with regional or district significance.

Protected Private Land Agreement with DOC

Through DOC, a landowner can set aside an area of natural value as 'protected private land' under the Reserves Act 1977. The notice is registered on the land title and is normally binding on subsequent owners in a similar way to a covenant.

The cost to fence a piece of bush has often been reason it has never been done in the past. There are organizations out there that are prepared to front up with a proportion of the cash needed for fencing, or even seedlings for bush enhancement. Some of these organizations include Queen Elizabeth II National Trust; some regional and district councils with a biodiversity budget, Trust; Honda NZ Native Tree Fund, Trees for Survival, Forest & Bird, Ducks Unlimited, Fish & Game. These organizations are all worth approaching if you are considering protecting a piece of bush.

Continuing to graze the under-storey serves a purpose for the farm system however it does nothing for the long term sustainability of your bush. Where this is happening it is worth considering establishing blocks of agro-forestry trees that are dual purpose – they provide both shelter and timber. It is surprising how quickly the under-storey of an area of scrub or bush will re-generate without animal grazing pressure.

If you have ever wondered about the health of your bush, you can determine this easily by using a simple *Bush Vitality Assessment Kit* that is available from most regional councils. This kit brings together a wealth of science and practical knowledge to help landowners determine quickly and easily the ecological health of their bush. The kit tells you what to look for and why, and how to interpret what you see in the bush. It also gives guidance on how to improve the bush health.

