Department of Conservation’s
ministerial brief
August 1987

This document of 100 pages gives a good superficial overview of what this very new government department is all about and the main issues it faces. Despite the document’s size, there is no summary of key points and many of the statements have so little elaboration that they can only be described as tantalizing. The first 40 pages profile the Department, and a major part of this is concerned with finance. In a budget of about $100 m for this financial year, $32.5 m is allocated to personnel, $48 m to operating costs, $13 m to capital and $6 m to grants and loans. There is no discussion on why the ratio of operating costs to personnel costs is so high, whether the figure for capital is considered normal or whether there are special circumstances this first year, and where the grants and loans are going to. Half the latter are allocated under Science and Research, so presumably they include payments to FRI and others for research, but this is not mentioned.

An equally large section of the departmental profile is devoted to senior staff (with photos) and is very informative. The next dozen pages are devoted to profiles of the component directorates. These profiles are brief but adequate, and are followed by a one page description of the general functions of a region.

The final section, almost one-half of the document, is given over to ‘issues’. These are listed under the appropriate directorate, but are otherwise a very mixed bag. Of almost 100 issues listed, one-third are really only statements of function. Of the remainder, only half a dozen have clear position statements indicating the Department’s views, although in many others opposition to changes in existing land use is implied. One of the clear statements expresses opposition to removal of export controls on indigenous timber, but again the issue is not discussed.

Pertinent Questions

Few people could question the worth of having the Trust work efficiently and effectively. In view of this, perhaps the brief could have asked the Minister a few pertinent questions such as: “Does the Government accept the value of the Trust?” “Is it content to accept the present situation?” “Will it do anything about it?” Perhaps the Opposition could be prompted to raise these issues.

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The QE II
National Trust’s
ministerial brief

This short document very adequately describes the Trust’s background, its functions, its achievements and its problems. The latter consist mainly of a greatly increasing workload (33% increase last year), a huge backlog of applications for open space covenants (currently six years’ delay in processing to completion), the loss of goodwill with prospective clients these delays could engender, and grossly inadequate resources. The document would have been enhanced by a concise punchy summary and a slicker presentation, but perhaps their resources were already overstretched!

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Other Issues

Other issues of direct concern to forestry which are mentioned include the proposal for a port at Shakespeare Bay to allow export of timber from the Marlborough Sounds, and protection of indigenous forest on private land (mentioned twice by different directorates).

One of the major issues facing FRI is the future of research (and its funding) presently being carried out for DOC under a loop funding arrangement which expires in 1990. Apparently this is not even considered to be an issue by DOC, let alone discussed.

In short, this document is too long to be a useful summary, and too short to be an adequate statement of what the Department’s current concerns are; what it intends doing about them, and why. However, it is well presented and looks impressive — perhaps it is an ideal ministerial brief.

Dudley Franklin