



***Making Our Place: Exploring Land Use Tensions in Aotearoa New Zealand.* Edited by Jacinta Ruru, Janet Stephenson and Mick Abbott. OUP (2011) RRP \$45.00. Pb, 243pp. ISBN 9781877372889. Reviewed by Olivia Macassey.**

The New Zealand Government is currently

considering significant changes to the Resource Management Act (RMA), the legal framework for management of land, water, and air in Aotearoa New Zealand. Proposed changes could alter the purpose and principles of the Act, placing an increased importance on economic concerns, and lessening the weight given to sustainability and environmental protection. As **Jacinta Ruru, Janet Stephenson and Mick Abbott**, the editors of *Making Our Place: Exploring Land Use Tensions in Aotearoa New Zealand* observe,

[m]ost of the tensions and battles over landscape change are those in which rights to use and develop property are pitched against these other contributions [i.e. enjoyment of landscape, environmental health and biodiversity] that landscape offers to individuals, families, hapū, iwi, communities or even tourists. (204)

Making Our Place provides useful perspectives on an important subject, advocating that we approach land use issues as nuanced, complex interactions between often competing desires and discourses.

That these interactions are dynamic is suggested by Mick Abbott's description of "being landscape", in which landscape is an interactive process rather than a static resource: "Instead [of being discrete from humans], the landscape begins exactly in those very places and moments where collectively and individually both people and their environment mingle" (77). The editors have produced an earlier volume discussing people's relationships with land (*Beyond the Scene: Landscape and Identity in Aotearoa New Zealand*, OUP, 2010). *Making Our Place* extends this conversation to explore contestations around how we use and manage it.

Bracketed by the editors' introduction and conclusion which frame and summarise them, twelve chapters are arranged in thematic sections, 'Challenges', 'Transformations', and 'Negotiations'.

The collection's overarching question is articulated as: "are there better ways to reconcile the tensions inherent in our struggles with the land and with each other in making this land our home?" (13-14).

In addressing this question, chapters describe and analyse a range of issues, interactions and concerns relevant to their specific case studies. The importance of the RMA is often evident. For instance, Bruce Clarkson's account of ecological heritage in the Taranaki notes its instrumental role in aiding conservation of natural landscape features through assigning some responsibility for this to local councils (125-6). In her discussion of the Waikato river, Linda Te Aho notes that although the RMA "provided some hope that Maori interests in the environment might be recognised," Iwi must continue to negotiate legislation in their quest for kaitiakitanga (155). And in Janet Stephenson and Seth Gorie's investigation of public debate around the siting of wind farms, the authors point to the inadequacy of expert landscape assessment reliance on the RMA category of "outstanding natural" qualities of landscape as a "visual resource" given that for locals, landscape was a "dynamic and meaning-filled surround from which they drew emotional and cultural sustenance and a sense of belonging" (193). Decisions on how resource management is governed in Aotearoa, then, should concern us all.

While over half of the contributors to this volume are academics working at the University of Otago, they hail from diverse fields: ecology, environmental design, history, law, sociology, surveying, theology, and tourism. The resultant disciplinary differences make for a somewhat mixed terrain, but stylistic consistency smoothes the reader's path. Admittedly, many chapters are more successful in detailing and analysing specific land use tensions than they are in advocating specific solutions. But the editors' wish "that this book will bring fresh perspectives to recurring tensions" is well realised, and their ambition to "help inform the development of practical, inclusive, and innovative techniques to work beyond them" (20) ought to be fulfilled; such a plurality of thoughtful, nuanced perspectives is constructive. The variety of case studies (everything from the Tutukaka coast to the Mackenzie basin, from wāhi tapu and cathedrals, to milking sheds and D.O.C tracks) is appealing. Individual chapters will be useful for those with specific interest in their subjects, but taken as a whole, *Making Our Place* works as a useful primer on the complexity of land use issues for academic and general audiences alike.