

OPINION PIECE – John Schrider

It was interesting to hear the discussions at the recent AGM about the increasing pressures on Council to maintain voluntary effort to enable the retention of current levels of membership services to members. I do recall the same discussions at Council a number of years ago and it seems that there has been little progress on developing new ideas and plans to address this important issue.

In my view there is no better time than now to reopen this debate and I applaud the current Council for putting this back on the agenda for consideration during this current term. There is no question that NZIF is at a bit of a crossroads in trying to decide whether to remain an organisation that relies on voluntary contributions from members or whether the demands and expectations of the increasing levels of professionalism required to maintain both regulated and public expectation levels of performance that NZIF might be able to respond to.

The first question that should be addressed is whether NZIF as it currently exists wishes to become the organisation that reflects the increasingly demanding standards of member service delivery and a preferred forestry organisation that can demand respect from society in general as a mouthpiece for issues relating to the forest industry.

I believe strongly that NZIF does enjoy a position as a professional association of individuals representing such a great diversity of expertise, views, and well researched opinions about forestry in general and as such can strengthen its position as a reputable contributor to forestry debate and decisions moving forward.

Having reached this point, I cannot see how this can be achieved with continuing reliance on member volunteers to continue to provide the necessary resources to maintain, let alone grow the influence and reach of NZIF.

My firm conviction is that NZIF must move to engage a full time Executive Officer to manage the organisation. This of course means an annual requirement of say \$0.15m - \$0.25m of budgeted expenditure and inevitably this must come from increased revenue and/or reallocation of funds for member services and other planned expenditure.

My suggestion is that this Council might look at developing a plan to achieve this say by 2030, although much earlier would be better. This should provide a series of progressive actions between now and then to achieve this that will include an itemised look at revenue earning opportunities as well as a clear plan for impact on member subscriptions and membership growth. Here I take the view that membership subscriptions must increase, and this will only be acceptable to members if a clear pathway is defined, benefits are articulated, and progress on this pathway is communicated regularly, probably at AGM.

I am not advocating that this process must bind future Councils to the plan as things can change but suggest that each new Council address and commit to the plan or alternatively provide compelling reasons not to do so. This might include a statement by individuals when pitching for election to Council.

In the meantime, it seems that contributions from members and elected Councillors will still be required to maintain existing and new NZIF activities however this could be managed during transition to the ultimate goal of engaging a salaried Executive Officer. One suggestion for dealing with this is to provide basic honoraria to those who contribute to encourage their on-going interest and commitment to assist with the transition.

I noted the discussions on some suggestions for increasing revenue and would support an increase in the cost of the CPD webinars that seem to be reasonably successful in attracting membership participation. \$10 is ridiculously low. I would also support more focus on promoting these webinars to non-members, at a higher cost of course. I believe there is an untapped market for these amongst regulatory bodies such as Councils and also other land-based organisations, research and lobby groups. As an added opportunity, journal papers should be available outside the membership perhaps as executive summaries provided freely and the papers that can be accessed behind a paywall.

So, just a few takeaways from the AGM discussions that members may wish to comment on.