

## EDITORIAL COMMENT

### *Forests Amendment Bill*

This Bill, which received royal assent on 19 November 1976, arose from a series of recommendations by the Forest Legislation Working Party of the FDC. A major intent of the legislation was, in defining the functions of the Forest Service, to give greater emphasis to conservation and the protection of the native flora and fauna.

Thus, a section which in the principal Act read "The Forest Service . . . shall have exclusive control and management of — (a) All State forest land, whether for the production of timber or other forest produce, or for the protection of the land with a view to water conservation or soil stabilisation, or for ensuring the balanced use of the land, or for scientific purposes, or for recreational or amenity purposes not prejudicial to forestry;" was redrafted in the amendment to read ". . . shall have exclusive control and management of — (a) All State forest land to ensure the balanced use of such land, having regard to the production of timber or other forest produce, the protection of the land and vegetation, water and soil management, the protection of indigenous flora and fauna and recreational, educational, historical, cultural, scenic, aesthetic, amenity and scientific purposes."

Similarly, the principal powers of the Minister were restated giving greater emphasis to areas of conservation and protection not directly connected with the production of forest produce.

Another FDC recommendation concerning increased freedom of access to publicly owned forests surfaced with the introduction of two new types of State forest land for public recreational purposes — open indigenous State forests and wilderness areas. Open indigenous State forests may be established by notice in the *Gazette* and varied or revoked in the same way. The purpose is "to allow the public to have freedom of entry and access to the area for such purposes as may be prescribed . . .". Wilderness areas must be established, varied or revoked by Order in Council, following public consultation. Again the public will have freedom of entry "subject to . . . such conditions and restrictions as may be necessary for the preservation of the native flora and fauna . . .".

These proposals received critical comment at the Select Committee stage. A number of organisations logically queried the need for further categories of recreational land when more

than 20 different types of this already exist, administered by 5 central Government agencies as well as local and regional authorities. And certainly consideration of the four types of area set aside for public use under the Forests Act indicates no clearly defined reason to have both recreation areas and open State forests as separate entities. It was pointed out too, that the setting aside of wilderness areas is already provided for under the National Parks Act and the Reserves and Domains Act — despite the fact that wilderness does not itself recognise departmental tenure boundaries. This portion of the Bill, however, passed unscathed through the Committee stage.

In another clause, the term "working plan" in the Act was amended to that of "management plan" — with the definition of such remaining unchanged. Apart from that the Bill tidied up a miscellany of minor nuts and bolts from fines for offences, through to compensation for destruction of diseased trees.

But to most people the major aspect of the Bill in its final form was its allowance for greatly increased opportunity for public consultation in management proposals for both indigenous and exotic forests — another aspect touched on in a number of FDC recommendations.

The Forests Amendment Bill *as drafted* made provision for the public to view management plans for State forest parks and to comment on recreational aspects of these. Following the return of the Bill to the House after its consideration (along with submissions) by the Lands and Agriculture Select Committee it was extensively modified to provide opportunity for the public to view and comment on:

- (a) All aspects of State forest park management plans.
- (b) Proposals to establish, vary or revoke forest sanctuaries and/or wilderness areas.

Further and most importantly, it allowed (but did not require) the Minister to make public and invite comment on *any* management plan or part thereof. If the Minister chooses to do so, he is then required to consider the public response before approving the plan.

This considerable liberalisation in the area of public consultation before decision-making followed submissions to the Select Committee from a number of organisations, but in fact the provisions differed little from an FDC Indigenous Policy Working Party recommendation. That the provisions are not at variance with broad Forest Service policy is clear from the Forestry Development Council report of May 1976 describing action on the recommendations of the FDC a year earlier. It is also apparent from the presentation to the public

of the Forest Service report "Forest Management Alternatives for Western Southland". Nonetheless, it is interesting that a change of this magnitude and importance arose during the Committee stage — clear indication that public submissions *are* in fact considered. In correspondence with our Institute the Minister of Forests has given the assurance that ". . . my discretionary right to withhold management plans [from public scrutiny — Ed.] will be used as sparingly as possible".

The aspect of the Bill concerned with public consultation can be expected to have a marked impact on New Zealand forestry and foresters. With the progressive move toward more overt public administration it was inevitable that sooner or later legislation would enable or require such publication of management plans. If the western Southland management alternatives are indicative of the future standard of these, then the Forest Service can only benefit from a public demonstration if both its approach to management and its management skills. A sentence at the end of a recent impact report from Southland Conservancy, "The proposals . . . must now be considered by the public at large, on whose behalf they have been formulated and who must be the ultimate judge of their acceptability", would have been inconceivable ten years ago. Tomorrow apparently, under the new legislation, this will be the norm.

### *The "New" Southland Beech Scheme*

The report "Forest Management Alternatives for Western Southland" presents in effect a revised beech scheme for Southland. The original one needed modification in the light of the 1976-approved indigenous forest policy, and the new one, in addition to catering to that requirement, has been removed from isolation and carefully fitted (as a series of pieces) into the jigsaw of the overall regional wood supply needs of Southland.

The report demonstrates inexorably, over 211 pages, that if Southland is to be regionally self-sufficient in timber, or even if the Forest Service is to meet its basic contractual commitments for wood supply in the region, then firstly, all available beech forest which can be managed on a sustained yield basis should be; and secondly, some clearfelling or partial logging of beech which cannot be managed for sustained yield will be necessary between now and 1988.

Although the title of the paper promises alternatives there are in fact very few — the main changes are dictated by the indigenous forest policy. By the time the constraints of existing sawlog commitments are accounted for, the public is

essentially left only with the chance to influence the decision as to the *type* of indigenous forest which must be managed under special justification clauses of the policy; and whether a large area of it should be partially logged or a smaller area clearfelled. The choice with regard to the volume of wood involved is minor.

None of the foregoing summation, however, makes clear the excellent quality of the report — the first of a number promised by the Minister of Forests which would examine alternative courses of action for major indigenous forest resources. If subsequent reports for other regions match this one in the wealth of data, the imagination used in the approach and the logic and clarity of presentation, then future forest management decisions in New Zealand will be very soundly based. And if the requirement for public consideration of management alternatives automatically leads to planning in this depth, then the role of public participation should be extended by mandate to the affairs of all other government departments!

How does the likely new beech scheme differ from the old? The original proposals (excluding Waitutu State Forest) were designed (i) to salvage annually 170 000 m<sup>3</sup> of industrial wood, some going to waste in meeting existing sawlog commitments and other able to be salvaged from previously cut-over forest; and (ii) to place 15 000 ha of manageable (predominantly) silver beech from Longwood and Rowallan forests on to a sustained yield basis. An important philosophy involved the need to obtain maximum productive use of land — and thus the conversion to exotic forest of 43 000 ha of poorer quality beech forest was a major part of the scheme.

In the revised scheme it is proposed that an area of mountain beech from Dean Forest be added to the 15 000 ha of silver beech previously planned for sustained yield management, bringing the area under that category now to 23 200 ha. The maximum area which might be logged and converted to exotics would now reduce to only 16 200 ha. The new scheme would thus appear to actually utilise less than 70% of the forest in the original scheme, and at most would convert only 37% of the area to exotics that was originally planned.

The scheme could be operated either to meet the Forest Service's existing contractual sawlog commitments, or the region's entire wood requirements, depending on the alternative adopted. It would (at least in the short term) provide the same amount of industrial wood as the original scheme, and (if management of the mountain beech of Dean Forest is successful) it would provide more beech forest under sustained yield. The level of reserves (and of course protection forest) would remain unchanged and there would in addition be a

substantial amenity area reserved. Waitutu Forest would remain reserved.

The trade-off for maintaining in an indigenous condition some 27 000 ha of poorer quality beech forest is the loss of a large exotic forest estate. Under the terms of the indigenous forest policy approved by Government this loss is inevitable. Thus reversion to the original plan is *not* one of the alternatives offered in the report.

At the time of writing, the public comments invited and received on the proposals have not been analysed. They will be of considerable interest in the case of this, the first region in which the effects of implementation of the new indigenous forest policy have been fully spelt out. It is expected that the conservationist will be happier than the sawmiller. But, after all, *that* is what the new indigenous forest policy was all about.

#### *Rare and Endangered Indigenous Plants*

The New Zealand forester, while considerably less rare than he was 50 years ago, could nonetheless still be expected to have some fellow feeling for the endangered status of plants. And yet the conservation backlash has recently been such that it is easy to groan when a list is published for New Zealand of over 300 taxa of provisionally rare and endangered plant species (D. R. Given, *N.Z. Jl Bot.*, 14: 135-49, 1976). Is this step really necessary, or is New Zealand simply following a fashionable world trend in producing its own version of the *Red Data Book*?

Consideration of Dr Given's arguments suggests that, provided the list is compiled and maintained with care, it should be welcomed by all who come into contact with our indigenous flora. There is a need in decision-making, both at the managerial and political levels, to have some quantification of the importance of species and of their rarity; and documentation of the sort proposed by Dr Given should prove invaluable in this respect. Additionally, as he points out, recognition of rarity status enables active measures to be taken not only to preserve but to build up very marginal populations.

How rare is rare is a very open-ended question as all steak eaters know, and there is certainly scope to query some of the taxa placed on the provisional list. J. L. Nicholls, in a Note in this issue, has sub-listed from Dr Given's paper the species which occur in lowland or montane forest in New Zealand, and certainly some of these would appear to be of marginal rarity only. But overall it is safe to assume that both the original list and the sub-list in this issue will receive frequent reference in managerial decision-making. And that, of course, was a major reason for their production.

As a postscript it is of interest that a paper just published in the *Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand* (6: 307-79, 1976) provides information on the chemical constituents occurring in a number of New Zealand plant species, including 12 on the rare and endangered list. Clearly this should be taken as an awful warning to conservationists to ensure that location maps associated with the current register do *not* find their way into chemistry laboratories!

### *Forestry Development Planning*

In this issue a paper by R. K. Grant criticises the methodology used in the preparation of the N.Z. Forest Service Forestry Development Plan for the Otago Planning District, and in reply the authors of the plan reiterate their belief in the correctness both of the planning and of the conclusions.

Essentially the disagreement reflects the fact that Forest Service planning at the national and regional level is based on the concept of social net return; and it is largely in the area of social considerations that disagreements exist. This is perhaps not unexpected — social cost benefit analysis is a relatively recent development in economics, and thus methodology is considerably less advanced and more controversial than in financial analysis.

Nonetheless, social implications of planning are likely to become more rather than less important, and there is clearly a need to clarify the areas of disagreement in the Otago Plan before plans are prepared for other areas. It seems clear that variation in parameters such as employment multipliers and migration patterns, which by their nature can only be *estimated* for a proposed development, may have very profound effects on the social net returns obtained. And it is also clear that the nature and the viability of any proposed industrial development is closely tied to political decision-making — *e.g.*, in the field of protection — and thus is subject to change.

As it is obviously important that there be confidence in the correctness of planning, it would seem necessary that further research be undertaken to confirm, or if need be to amend, those aspects of the Otago Plan over which disagreement exists. And because decision-making belongs increasingly to the man in the street, it is appropriate that the Otago Plan be queried, and defended, publicly. The last word on social net returns does not appear to have been said; and the *Journal* invites further comment on the issues raised by Mr Grant, and defended by the Otago planners.