

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS: FORESTERS AND THEIR INSTITUTE*

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INTRODUCTION

Frank Hutchinson has spoken as an inaugural member of the Institute of Foresters, and one well qualified to recall its formation and trace its early progress. For my part I want to outline the challenges that face the Institute now, as it enters its second 50 years. I want also to stress my belief that a continuing willingness to keep pace with the times is the best way to ensure that the Institute remains a vital and effective organisation, and thereby survives to celebrate its centenary. In doing this I am assuming that we all want our Institute to be regarded as an informative, respected and authoritative organisation, and not merely to become a cosy club, debating forestry in an environment isolated from public scrutiny.

While we can look with some pride on many achievements in New Zealand forestry, and the part that Institute members have played in these, it would be foolish not to acknowledge that there have also been shortcomings. No profession could claim to be infallible in this respect. However, public regard for professional bodies is heavily influenced by the way in which these groups and their members acknowledge imperfections, seek to correct past errors, and endeavour to minimise the occurrence of future mistakes.

CHALLENGES TO FORESTRY

In my view, a major shortcoming of forestry and its representatives is the failure to establish and maintain sound links with the public and with the many organisations and groups that have an interest in forestry. Sometimes their interest or concern may appear to us to be tenuous or narrow, but that is no reason for us to deny them the right to have their views considered. And of course they may have a valid role to play in forestry.

*The terms "forester" and "professional" in this address are used in a broad context, embracing all those who work in forestry.

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The problems of effective liaison between foresters and associated interests are critical, and they are by no means confined to New Zealand. To cite a fairly recent example from the U.S.A., Paul V. Ellefson, a former director of environmental programmes, now teaching at the University of Minnesota, stressed to a meeting of the Society of American Foresters in 1974 the need to recognise that:

- "Planning of land uses, including forest land uses, is an interdisciplinary affair, involving forestry professionals among others;
- "Uses of forest lands should not be planned in a vacuum but should be co-ordinated with other classes of land and ownership categories;
- "Programs for implementing land-use plans should be part of any land-use plan;
- "Incentives of all sorts are just as important tools as zoning in carrying out land-use plans;
- "Land-use plans should be reviewed and updated frequently to reflect the changing needs of people; and
- "The public should be brought into the land-use planning process."

Another American, Senator Mark O. Hatfield, has pointed out that it is precisely the failure of many Americans to view forestry on the basis of broad issues that has led to what he called a floundering state of the forestry profession in that country.

International forestry groups also acknowledge that such problems exist. A 1975 FAO symposium on "Forests and Wood: Their Role in the Environment" described the increasing polarisation between the professional resource manager, who has been schooled and experienced as a wise-use conservationist, and the new environmentalist, who militantly seeks total protection. While there are, of course, shades between these extremes, professionalism is being seriously challenged by emotionalism. The resource professional is labelled a "spoiler of the wilderness". He is often accused of being a captive of industry and one who is largely motivated by profit and maximum economic efficiency (Towell, 1976).

The observations cited could well have been made in New Zealand. Henry H. Webster pinpointed the fact that forestry must more perceptively balance its ties with various resource interest groups, strengthening some ties without weakening others. The ties of the forestry profession with the timber industry and other commodity groups are historic and important. Other ties, such as those with the new conservation

and environmental groups, are more recent, although a sense of history will show them to be much older than sometimes realised. Progress is being made in developing a more balanced relationship, but the process is still incomplete.

TAKING UP THE CHALLENGE

A body such as our Institute can play an important role in bringing together various interests and factions to ensure that understanding and decision-making in forestry are based on a full appreciation of the wide range of issues involved. It can strive to ensure that co-operation among foresters and their colleagues in other disciplines occurs as an essential prerequisite to producing joint solutions which can be incorporated in forest management planning (Rowe, 1973).

Possibly at this point we should question whether we are doing all we can and should to provide to society a source of factual, professionally reliable information for resource decision-making. Are we, as the Institute of Foresters, and as individuals, meeting this challenge?

To some degree, I think we are doing a great deal. For instance, we have answered requests from organisations such as the Native Forests Action Council and Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society, both of which have sought our views on matters of forest management. We have also made representations to the Minister of Forests, the Forest Service and the Commission for the Environment concerning the management of indigenous and exotic forests.

However, despite what we may have done and may be doing, our efforts still fall short of what is desirable. Too often the Institute has been called in after an emergency has arisen, with the call being lodged from outside the Institute and even outside the forestry profession. Surely we should be taking the initiative!

Possibly a major reason we have not taken this initiative is that we have for too long been too inward-looking in our professional approach; we have not acknowledged our need to make intelligent use of professional people in other disciplines (Bachelard, 1975).

DISSEMINATING FORESTRY KNOWLEDGE

At the same time as I make the criticism of forestry for failing to consult adequately with other disciplines, I also firmly believe that professional foresters have been too diffident about disseminating their own skills and knowledge. One has only to attend a meeting of the more extreme conservationists, or to talk with an interested non-forester group,

to realise that much of the knowledge that we take for granted is a complete revelation to the uninitiated (Bachelard, 1975).

For much too long the public's most intimate knowledge of our developing exotic forests (both State and privately owned) was gained from the outside of a "Keep Out" sign. Foresters cannot take pride in having allowed that situation to continue for as long as it did. Fortunately, but belatedly, the public now has access to these previously forbidden preserves, and thus has the opportunity to learn at first hand that exotic forests contain attractive scenery, support a variety of flora and fauna, and are not devoid of other forms of life.

Another example of our failure to inform the public is that a general appreciation of the long-term nature of forestry planning is lacking. Too often people fail to recognise that the decisions of foresters of an earlier era, the results of which are now of concern, did not cause a ripple at the time they were made. Often, in fact, they had widespread public support.

The planned development of our exotic forests, for instance, provided much-needed employment during the 1920s and 1930s; and their subsequent harvesting has provided both timber for our homes and vital overseas funds. In some quarters these exotic forests are now considered a blot on the landscape, and perhaps as foresters we bear some blame in allowing this attitude to develop as far as it has.

We need to ensure that new generations understand the rationale and the planning behind earlier decisions. And as foresters, we must continually re-examine the implications of those decisions, and update them to accommodate later research findings and changing social requirements.

Are we doing enough now to inform the public about such fundamental issues as the expansion of exotic forestry in New Zealand in relation to the wise use of the associated resources of land, energy, manpower and finance? Are we discussing the criteria that should determine the ultimate limit of those exotic forests? Are we doing enough to disseminate information on our indigenous forests?

Publicity from narrow or single-interest groups, often couched in emotional terms, needs to be counter-balanced if the public is to draw valid conclusions.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Levels of public participation in, and controversy over, natural resource decisions are steadily increasing. More and more citizens are refusing to accept what they consider to

be important decisions unless they have a role in the decision-making (Webster, 1975). It is thus more important now than ever before, that the forester informs the public fully on all aspects of forestry. This needs to be done on a continuing basis, and in terms that are easily understood.

In a paper to the Forestry Development Conference in 1974, L. F. Molloy remarked that round one in the media stakes has definitely gone to the preservationists, who have captured the headlines with simplistic half-truths based on their insufficient knowledge of the problem. A glance at recent newspapers indicates little, if any, change in this respect — a situation which is an indictment of the profession this Institute represents.

Members of the public are demanding participation in decision-making today, both in forestry and other activities. But the protagonists of this demand fail to say how the objective can be achieved. By itself the public, an amorphous body, cannot decide anything, although its role in influencing decisions of government and industry is a powerful one. In a democracy the forester's responsibility is to ensure that in forestry matters the public is fully informed and thus is able to exert a sound influence on major decisions. But in their turn, the variety of individuals and groups that comprise the public have a responsibility to recognise that, following this process, the decision of the majority should then be accepted gracefully by the minority.

STRENGTHENING THE INSTITUTE

Finally, I wish to place a challenge fairly and squarely in front of you. The Institute can call upon a wide range of expertise from amongst its members, as testified by the diversity of subjects now appearing in the *New Zealand Journal of Forestry** and the recognition given to New Zealand foresters by many overseas countries which keenly seek their advice. Bearing this in mind, there is no reason why the Institute cannot have an authoritative viewpoint on a variety of forestry issues; a viewpoint that is independent of government, industry, or any organisation directly involved in the topic under review. However, it is the dissemination of the Institute viewpoint that continues to bedevil us.

All Institute business is conducted on a voluntary basis, and I wonder to what extent this amateur approach is limiting the Institute's effectiveness in bringing the work of

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foresters and the principles of sound forest management before the general public of New Zealand. It would be naive to expect that any officeholders speaking on behalf of the Institute, as it is at present constituted, could dissociate themselves completely from the loyalty due to their employers. However, if it were possible for the Institute to employ a full-time executive officer, he could become an effective public relations officer, offering undivided loyalty to the New Zealand Institute of Foresters.

If the time has not arrived, it surely cannot be far away when, to keep pace with the times, the Institute must be prepared to have a full-time employee. This will cost money and mean higher subscriptions, and the choice is that of the members. Are we prepared to pay to have the Institute an authoritative and informative professional organisation with a role in influencing public attitudes, or do we prefer it to be a cosy club where members preach to the converted? Only you can decide whether or not you are prepared to back ideals with money and action. Your Council is responsible for carrying out your wishes, but you are responsible for conveying those wishes to Council members. I trust you will do so, and there is no better time to start than while we are together during the next few days.

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