

THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF FOREST DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHLAND

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ABSTRACT

With the rapid expansion of the forest industry in Northland over the last decade considerable concern has been expressed, by some sections of the community, on the possible impact of forestry on the social infrastructure of rural communities. This paper briefly reviews the issues involved and note is made of the steps which have been taken to counter the forestry threat of "change". To illustrate the points made, the paper outlines recent forest developments in the Hobson County and particular note is made of the impact that 12 years of forest development has had on the social structure of a small rural community on the Pouto Peninsula.

INTRODUCTION

From the early 1960s there has been a large increase in the planting rate of exotic forest species in Northland. This increase in planting has been the result of realising the potential which had been determined for the export of forest produce, and has been carried out by both the state and private sector.

In the late 1970s the *Northern Advocate* published a large supplement entitled "Industrious Northland". In the introduction to this supplement it was pointed out that Northland was poised on the threshold of a new era of industrial expansion — a host of new projects were on the drawing board; projects which promised to transform Northland's economy and to provide thousands of new jobs for the region's growing work force. It was noted that forestry could once more be a towering force in the north's economy and might well challenge agriculture for the crown as the single most important industry in the region.

The Northland Resources Survey (1978) noted that there were large tracts of undeveloped areas of reversion and low natural fertility either lying idle or in agricultural production at very low levels but which were well suited to exotic afforestation. This study noted that there was a land potential for forestry of over 334 000 ha. The afforestation working party of the 1981 Forestry

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Development Conference recommended that Northland should aim for a target exotic forest resource of 100 000 ha with a consequent planting rate of 4800 ha/yr.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Obviously with all this discussion on Northland's forest development potential, coupled with the actual annual planting rate achieved over the last decade, there has been considerable public comment on the possible desirable and undesirable social effects of forestry development in Northland, and more particularly in rural areas. A wide range of people in different disciplines have made public comment or submissions on this matter. Some town planners have noted that forestry is seen by the rural community as a threat to the established rural life style which has its basis in agriculture. They have noted that the employment patterns of forestry are different. Forest establishment in rural areas will depopulate the farming community with a resultant decline in rural services. Workers employed by the forest companies will not have a stake in the community and will replace the family-owned and -worked farm (Edmonds, 1981).

Federated Farmers have been particularly vocal on this matter and have made it clear that they oppose the expansion in Northland of commercial forestry on to developed farmland or that land with a potential for agricultural development. It is their belief that forestry should confine its development programmes to those wasteland areas which are unsuitable for pastoral production. More particularly, the present patterns of land use should be retained with those areas in pasture remaining in livestock production, especially where there is a substantial rural community and where a servicing sector has been built around that land use. Foresters have countered with statements that forestry development programmes could reinforce the social structure of small communities and would encourage the repatriation and consolidation of population levels which have been declining under present land uses. They have noted that rural depopulation is occurring in many small communities and there are no data available to demonstrate that forestry directly leads to a decline in rural services (Smith, 1980). Olsen (1981) also noted that in many communities there has been unfavourable comment on what might be the undesirable social effects of forestry in rural areas. He points out that there is no evidence of any net labour loss to the rural community when forestry is introduced.

There is, however, evidence of support for existing social and education facilities by forest-based communities.

Two agricultural economists, McIntosh and Durbin (1981), in a review of the farming/forestry land-use debate, observed that, although a number of studies have been attempted to document social and environmental effects, except in the area of direct and indirect employment created by forestry, these studies are largely restricted to the identification of issues. Thus, while the social disruption and change arising from alteration in land use is stressed, it is not documented in detail and they pointed to the need for a number of social impacts to be distinguished, namely the delayed effects of sustained rural depopulation; the adjustment to a new socio-economic environment during the change in land use, and the on-going costs of that change. Happily, as these comments were being published, initial recognisances and studies have been instigated on the very lines suggested. (Smith and Wilson, 1980; White, 1980).

Smith and Wilson in their case study concluded that forestry tends to contravene a number of the values and norms by which life is organised within New Zealand rural communities. They found four conflict factors:

- (1) Forestry as a large-scale land user immediately transgresses the traditional position of privately owned packets of land.
- (2) There is a tendency for the local political elite to be sensitive to new business and the different sort of professional being brought into the region by forestry. A conflict of economic interests and planning intent gives rise to a feeling of political insecurity on the part of the former group.
- (3) Forestry introduces a new style of work that implies greater routine and less flexibility.
- (4) Forestry is seen to promote a loss of autonomy in local decision-making.

Smith (1980, 1981) in his work on the social impact of forestry has noted that he has found that in terms of settlement patterns commercial forestry has given a hint of evidence that forestry predisposes people to live in district centres and small towns rather than in dispersed residential patterns displayed in many pastoral areas. In his preliminary research he indicated that perhaps there is little to choose between farming and forestry as job providers, although it must be recognised that the present employment data for rural localities make employment demand

and supply for various sectors difficult to predict. Smith went on to note that the use of national¹ and regional figures to concoct studies such as persons employed per hectare or per export dollar is of dubious value for anything but flag-waving exchanges through the media.

PLANNING AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Because of the change forestry is bringing to the social environment and more particularly because of potential change it may bring, the planning institutions of Northland, both on the regional level and at the individual county level, are paying close attention to forest development. Fairgray (1981) has pointed out that afforestation has emerged as a two-edged sword for many local authorities. It offers the promise of employment and the prospects of repopulating rural areas; it may be a resource with which to expand the regional economic base and protect the environment on the one hand; or it may be seen to displace agriculture, disrupt farming communities, and impose high infrastructure costs, particularly related to roading, on the other. The draft first section of the Northland Regional Planning Scheme has ranked forestry as its second most important planning priority. This document states as an objective of production forestry "to support and encourage production forests at different scales in relation to established agricultural land use so that it complements associated farming communities within the region".

Throughout the draft first section the need to support and maintain existing rural communities is noted under a number of different headings — *e.g.*, "People:— To provide for and reinforce the continuing viability of various lifestyles within the region . . . To investigate the means to repopulate rural areas and reinforce existing rural communities in the region . . . Rural Settlement and Development — To promote and facilitate where possible the repopulation of rural areas within the region. To foster and reinforce existing rural communities within the region."

¹ The official New Zealand census data for Northland (Mangonui County to Otamatea County) lists under employment those employed in agriculture and forestry in the same category, for example, for males over 15 in the 1981 census there were 8013 employed in this primary sector category; this was 26.14% of the combined total of all those employed in the different employment categories. Similarly, for the 1976 census and 1971 census there were 7163 or 25.19%, and 7339 or 29.09%, respectively.

The Northland counties have also entered the debate about the future of forestry and some of the local councils have been under pressure from some sections of their ratepayers to block forestry through the exercise of their powers to control land use under the district planning scheme. Forestry would be confined by giving it a conditional land-use status. A conditional use application would then give a community the opportunity to comment on the social and economic implications of forestry.

Hobson County is one of the first Northland counties to bring down a district scheme change to make forestry a conditional use in many parts of the county. In bringing down this scheme change, the County noted²: "The effect that large scale production would have on existing rural lifestyles enjoyed by the County's residents, and the concern was expressed for the need to protect and conserve good agricultural land and land in well established agricultural use in the district and to allow for public comment on large scale afforestation that may have detrimental repercussions on the existing farming communities". The forest industry through the Forest Owners Association opposed this change; however, the appeal hearing before the Planning Tribunal resulted in a decision to uphold the scheme change.

The Planning Tribunal noted³ that "further expansion of large scale forestry would have a different impact on the social and economic fabric of the Hobson County district than traditional farming has had. Forestry is likely to have many positive effects, social as well as economic, and its impact will not necessarily be adverse on the balance. However, the importance of encouraging more forestry in the district does not require unhindered liberty for new afforestation wherever in the district market forces may lead it."

Other counties are also in the process of changing their district scheme in relation to forestry, and it is obvious that on the local level (and the regional level) there is considerable concern about the possible effects of the social change forestry will bring.

CASE STUDY

In order to illustrate some of the social changes which can accompany a single forestry development, the development of

² Hobson County Council 1979 District Scheme proposed Change No. 9 — Forestry. 10 pp.

³ Planning Tribunal Decision No. A116/82, 8 October 1982.

Pouto Forest Farm Ltd is outlined. More particularly, an examination has been made of the changes in the social structure of the land which the company has purchased, comprising a section of the area serviced by the former Pouto telephone exchange, and from which the Pouto School draws its pupils. It is the writer's opinion, after living in the area for 12 years, that this district forms a relatively isolated social community in which all residents tend to interact.

During the period May 1970 to October 1973, the company purchased 8 individual land holdings. As a result of these purchases, a total of 4 resident rural families were displaced. In all a total of 5 full-time and 5 part-time labour units were displaced.⁴ To counterbalance this displacement, the forest farm development programme has ultimately resulted in an increase in the number of resident family units — *i.e.*, 7 families are now resident on the land, a net increase of 3 resident family units. However, the characteristics of the present family units are somewhat different from the former family units.

Before the adoption of forest farming all the resident family units had the following characteristics:

- (1) Individual families owned and operated a single block.
- (2) The wives played an active part in running the block.
- (3) All the families were involved in agricultural pursuits.
- (4) Most of the families were middle-aged, with children ending their time at the local school. The average number of children per family was four.
- (5) Most of the families had been resident on the land over 10 years.

Forest farming has resulted in families with the following characteristics:

- (1) All the families work for a single company which has produced a "pecking order" amongst the resident families according to their relative position in the company hierarchy. It has been observed that this "pecking order" can flow on to social events.
- (2) The wife plays a passive role in the running of the block and is not actively involved in the day-to-day operation unless she is specifically employed to carry out a listed task.

⁴ Full-time labour units were defined as those persons who worked more than 40 hours a week. Part-time labour units were defined as those persons who worked less than 40 hours a week.

- (3) Not all the resident family units are involved in agriculture. In April 1983, the job functions of the family units were 30% agriculture, 30% forestry, 30% general servicing, 10% management.
- (4) Most families are younger than the former residents with 66% of the now resident families having children under the age of five. The average number of children per family is two.
- (5) The average family has worked for the company for five years. However it has been noted that resident families associated with particular job functions are subjected to high staff turnover rates — *i.e.*, general hands and shepherd generals.

It must be noted that the actual number of family units associated with agricultural pursuits — 3 units — is only one unit less than the total number of family units associated with agricultural pursuits before the adoption of forest farming.

This area of the Pouto Peninsula in the late sixties had been characterised by a large resident Maori population which could find only a limited amount of seasonal agricultural work. As a result, many of the active labour units had moved out of the area in order to seek steady work. With the setting up of the Pouto Forest Farm project, new job opportunities were created and by 1972 the job impetus created by the forest/farm project had resulted in many of these former residents moving back to the district. This job impetus was further reinforced by the setting up of the Lands and Survey Farm Forest Scheme and the development of Pouto State Forest.

TRENDS IN POPULATION MOVEMENT SOUTH OF MOSQUITO GULLY

Smit (1975) in a case study on the processes of farm enlargement in southern Northland noted that the scale of operation on farms in New Zealand has been increasing continuously in recent decades.

Most farmers expand production by intensifying their operation on a relatively constant farm area. However, a considerable number of farmers achieve increases in production by enlarging their properties as well. Although some farmers have more than doubled the size of their farms since 1964 most increases have largely been consistent with the individual's abilities to manage large enterprises. Smit observed that technological developments and changes in economic conditions have been associated with the growth in the area and output of farms. The expansion in pro-

ductivity has been realised mainly by adding capital to a relatively fixed labour supply made up largely of the farm operator and his family. Smit indicated that farm amalgamation was responsible for over 60% of the changes occurring in the number of farm holdings.

In the period January 1970 to January 1980, a similar trend was in operation in the study area. Half of the occupied holdings changing hands went to farm amalgamation; a further 25% went into land amalgamation in the form of forest farming. With the rate of farm amalgamation during this period there was a noticeable decline in the number of resident, agriculturally based, rural family units, with a subsequent abandonment of domestic dwellings. However, since 1976 with the job impetus generated by the three forest development programmes, there has been a strong demand for accommodation — a demand which has led to the building of new residences, and with some of the recently abandoned rural dwellings being leased and/or rented by those working in the forestry environment. Forest development has also been directly responsible for an increase in the number of permanent residents living in the holiday/retirement settlement of Kelly's Bay.

Although the rate of farm amalgamation in the study area slowed down, it has been obvious that the three forest development programmes have arrested and reversed a trend of rural depopulation in the area. They have resulted in an increased, diverse local community which contains a higher percentage of young married couples. This increased population will do much to help prevent any further erosion of rural services, especially the viability of the local school.

It can be argued quite rightly that forest development has caused some social upheaval in the local community by bringing change. It has also been noted that there has been a rise in the amount of small crime reports from the area. This rise in crime rate would appear to coincide with the influx of single mobile labour units working and living in the area in response to the job impetus created by forest development and the temporary employment schemes operating on the Government run blocks.

The forest development programmes are currently in the establishment phases and require high inputs of labour; as the work programmes progress it is projected that the job requirement will stabilise, and as a result it could be expected that in this area many of the single labour units will be replaced by those associated with resident families.

SUMMARY

The major social impact of forestry development in Northland is the change it brings, not only to the rurally based communities, but also to the small town centres which have traditionally serviced agricultural hinterlands. The degree of this change will be dependent on the type of forest regime carried out and the attitudes adopted by the region's planners. Only time and study will give us a clear picture of the full social impact of forest development and finally resolve the issue of social conflict which has clouded around Northland forestry development.

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