

GUEST EDITORIAL

The functions of the Forest Service have been under review of one sort or another for the past five years. Proposals to alternatively dismember and merge the organisation raise an important question for the profession — what is the appropriate role of the government's forestry agency? The answer given by the Forest Service, its sheet anchor in these conflicting currents, has been the broad role of providing all that New Zealanders require of their public forest lands and the products thereof. The holistic approach to forestry expressed in the philosophy of "balanced use" is, however, still under challenge from those to whom it represents no more than an untidy assemblage of conflicting objectives.

I am frequently alarmed but now seldom surprised at the resultant pressures to divide, to narrow objectives and to portray the most complex of social, economic and environmental problems in shades of black and white only. The pressure to cast issues in either/or terms is evident in various supposed conflicts, farming vs forestry, conservation vs development, introduced vs indigenous. I would like to elaborate on these.

In 1978 the Controller and Auditor-General found with considerable justification that the financial affairs of departments were mediocre and lacked positive management. Accountability for resources used was inadequate. That clearly was and is true of the Forest Service. We are doing our best to effect improvements. Subsequently a subcommittee of the Public Expenditure Committee investigating the Forest Service and seeking a solution to poor financial management recommended that the Government consider a limited liability company for the commercial activities of sawmilling and exotic production forestry. Had this somewhat radical solution to poor accounts proceeded, the non-commercial activities would have been placed with a number of other government departments. The Forest Service would have been subdivided and part of it returned to the rather narrow mandate that it had been given 60 years earlier. The unstated thesis is that efficient and effective commercial management is only possible in government organisations by separating commercial from non-commercial functions and freeing the former from traditional departmental controls. The unspoken concern, presumably, is that commercial results will always be "fudged" within an organisation that simultaneously seeks to provide services of a non-commercial nature.

Early in the conservation debate of the 1970s the concept of a "Nature Conservancy" was strongly pressed upon parliamentarians through the petitions of conservation groups. It has been recently resurrected. The aim was to place all reserved areas of indigenous forest and other vegetation under a single preservation agency. A further and unstated aim was to eventually reserve most indigenous forest. The thesis was that agencies with a commercial role cannot be entrusted to administer non-commercial conservation-oriented objectives.

The desire for simplicity, or administrative monoculture, thus brings together rather unlikely bed fellows — those who tend to deplore development and commercialism, commonly equating it with greed, and those who are content to measure progress largely through the bottom line. Does either view represent the most enlightened pathway to the administration of natural resources and the public lands?

The answer is perhaps clearer on the global scene where problems of conservation and development are inextricably linked. It is most evident in the third world countries of the tropics. A little over half of the world's forest is tropical. It is being reduced annually by an area equivalent to all of the forests and associated wildlands of New Zealand. The pressure on the tropical forests is first a result of the need for food for burgeoning populations; in drier lands, the need for daily supplies of fuelwood; and in some countries, of the perceived need for foreign exchange in the form of wood, beef or cash crops — the losing battle to retain some parity with the developed economies. Physically there is enough arable land to feed the world — half is not at present cultivated. There is enough degraded land which, by rehabilitation in trees, could ultimately take the pressure off virgin forests. There are 44 million hectares in Indonesia alone. The constraints to so rationalise social and land use aims are not therefore physical but economic, historical and political. The problem is enormously difficult but the solution most certainly does not lie in the arbitrary separation of conservation and development strategies or promotion of organisational apartheid of the agencies involved. Conservation of forests in these lands is utterly dependent on the right development strategy.

The direct link between development and conservation programmes commonly goes unrecognised in our own country. If we wish to take the pressure off marginal lands and thus conserve them, incentives should be directed to better development of quality lands. There is little point in clearing and reclearing

land that is so tenuously held in the developed estate that it slips back to scrub and fern at every depression of markets. It should also be recognised that in New Zealand the oft despised alien from Monterey has conserved the respectably native survivors from Gondwanaland thus making possible the current debate on options for lowland indigenous forests. It is my hope that there will be a maturing recognition of the complete interdependence of conservation and development aims in forestry and land use generally and a retreat from simplistic polarisation. It is a hope and not a prediction. The balanced use concept which is now central to the Forests Act and thus to the *raison d'être* of the Forest Service as currently constituted remains an impediment to the advocates for strict preservation and uncomplicated commercialism. I am not suggesting that we should dispense with excellence at either end of the spectrum but that it is more likely to be achieved by synthesis than by confrontation — by integration and not division.

Let me turn to the argument that has arisen in many district schemes, "agriculture vs forestry". A national goal of "attaining the potential sustainable production of the land and enhancing the quality of the physical and cultural environment" was enunciated by the now defunct Land Use Advisory Council. This goal, and the guidelines suggested in its publication *Land Use in New Zealand* are not likely to generate passionate argument. This is because the fundamental question of how to simultaneously accommodate the aspirations of various claimants for a finite land area was largely skirted around. Trite or even misleading maxims for land use are an inevitable outcome of lack of rigorous analysis. The answers to the issues are not intuitive, as some planners might suggest, but are complex and require thorough consideration of fact. The seminars conducted by the Land Use Advisory Council simply confirmed that land use cannot be isolated as a field of study in its own right but is part of the complex interweaving of the social, economic, environmental, attitudinal and institutional fabric of this country — as it is around the globe. Much of the current planning for land use under New Zealand law is defensive and restrictive. It is based on "either/or" propositions. The Forest Service continues to receive requests to resolve the competing claims of forestry and farming for a given area of land by economic analysis to determine the "best" use. We cannot get enthusiastic about doing so. The much more interesting problem, of course, is concerned with how these two land uses — as technologically advanced in New

Zealand as anywhere — might be more effectively rendered complementary; how the land use apartheid between forester and farmer might be further broken down. The work of researchers and managers of some forests shows that there are no technical reasons for maintaining a barrier and several which might favour its accelerated removal. Further, it is difficult in the light of experience in other countries to justify the dogma that production forestry must be corporate and farming the exclusive privilege of the individual owner/operator.

Eventually the distinction between forestry, agroforestry and pastoral farming must become progressively eroded. A wider range of institutional arrangements will be needed to consummate the various combinations of advice, ownership and investment. A fine tuning of the land will result and will provide more flexibility in adapting to markets. I would like to see the incentives, the taxes, the borrowing arrangements and the regional planning processes placed on an equal footing for farming and forestry. Above all I would like to see some rigorous analysis replace seat of pants opinion in guiding land use options and strategies for incentives, etc. You can get all the technical data you want on the enhancement of hill country productivity but where can you get the synthesis of production/processing/market as a range of options? Where is the broad strategy for the future of our developed hill country? Where is the research on the prime constraints to adopting known technology — the economic, attitudinal and social factors impinging on the manager? Analysis of the social, economic and environmental effects of *past* and *current* land use patterns is remarkably rare in a country as dependent on land-based industry as New Zealand. Some of the little work that has been done originated at the Forest Research Institute, in the need to objectively deal with the supposed ill-effects of afforestation on rural communities. I suggest there is still a substantial vacuum in this area because the purely technical aspects of land use are more comfortably dealt with. The future of our hill country would seem to me of national significance.

As a final example of either/or thinking let me touch briefly on introduced feral animals. We have passed through stages of desirable introduction, despised vermin, and *de facto* asset in official policy. It would seem that like it or not we in New Zealand live in a permanently mixed ecosystem of natural and introduced elements. The ecological process is certainly played out in a way that is blind to the origin of its actors. The elimination of introduced animals from National Parks would doubtless

improve their floristic diversity but it will not bring back the pristine condition. The challenge, again, is not to arbitrarily divide the countryside into that which is by edict "natural" and that which may be modified but to manage the mix that we have to best advantage for the full range of human demands. The equilibria of the entire mixed ecosystem need to be better understood if this is to be done intelligently and sensitively.

The common theme in these examples of land use and organisational issues is that we need less compartmentised thinking. The pathway to more enlightened management of natural resources and public lands is not in my view likely to be simply a series of ruts trod by single-purpose managers. This is contrary to the popular view outside forestry circles but I hope it finds support within the profession because I believe that foresters, despite the batterings of recent years, can still show the way.

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