

EDITORIAL COMMENT

FOREST ADMINISTRATION IN NEW ZEALAND

The question of the governmental structure for the administration and management of the bulk of the lands of the Crown in New Zealand, which comprises some 50% of the land area of the country, and includes practically all of the national forests, more than half the plantation forest estate, and vast areas of tussock grassland, and mountain lands, has been under scrutiny and debate for several years. This debate has featured in the *Journal* over the past few issues. The debate is now reaching a climax as this issue is prepared; the following "open letter" to the Prime Minister from a distinguished member of the Institute, A. L. Poole, encapsulates the attitude of the Institute itself, and of most members, to the proposals for the administrative separation of so-called "development" functions from so-called "conservation" functions.

The word "conservation" is used by the protagonists for the separation to mean almost exclusively preservation. It is the view of the Institute that "conservation" is an ethic which must properly apply to all forms of land use.

The next issue of the *Journal* will endeavour to provide a review of the debate, and a commentary on the governmental decisions made. While this commentary will lack the perspective which can only come with elapse of time, it is necessary that some effort be made to record the events of the past year or so while they remain fresh. Much is unwritten; the issue is nevertheless the most important in New Zealand forestry for many decades.



AN OPEN LETTER

6 August, 1985

Dear Prime Minister,

My whole official career, spanning 50 years, has been spent on matters related to environmental issues in New Zealand. I therefore asked to attend the Environmental Forum 1985, which was to set the pattern for proposed changes, and I produced a contribution as asked. I was not invited because people were

selected — and I quote from the reply — “to bring to the Forum as wide a range of knowledge and experience as possible”.

This was a body blow to one who has been Director of the Botany Division, Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, Scientific Liaison Officer, London, Assistant Director of the Forest Service for 10 years and Director-General for 10 years, and Chairman of the Soil, Conservation and Rivers Control Council for 8 years (and author of a published account of that organisation's work and performance). In other words, 50 years dealing with biological science and forests, especially native forests, governments and politicians, the production of three books and numerous scientific publications was insufficient experience.

The Forum was clearly one-sided and resulted in harsh criticism of people and organisations who would be affected by changes but who had been given no voice at the meeting. The gathering contained a majority who think along the lines of: “Yes, we are on the brink of achieving one of the most important conservation victories of all time — taking New Zealand's State native forests off the Forest Service and giving them to a new, truly conservation-oriented department”. (Contained in a message from Gwenny Davis, National President, Native Forests Action Council, in newsletter to members, 17 July 1985 — written after the Forum. The message conveyed to members was — be in for the kill.)

It would be possible to produce a dossier of quotes with a similar aim containing many half-truths, distortions and deliberate inaccuracies which, for the past decade, have been aimed at pillorying the Forest Service.

You are undoubtedly well aware of the broad policies — all set by governments, not by the Forest Service — which have guided the Department in its administration of native forests. I will repeat the original ones here briefly in order to provide a background to some points I wish to make.

Recognition of the great importance of native forests to New Zealand led in part to the formation of the Forest Service in 1919. Three specific policies affecting these forests were set out by Government at that time and were the basis for the first Forests Act. These were:

- (1) The reservation of protection forest by creating Permanent State forest which could not be revoked except by Parliament.

- (2) The delineation of Provisional State forest, or forest that could be cleared for agriculture, but before doing so milling of indigenous timber in it had to be carried out in an orderly manner.
- (3) The establishment of an exotic plantation forest estate — already well under way in the Department of Lands and Survey — to provide timber when native timber resources were depleted.

The whole world knows the phenomenal success achieved under the last of these three policies.

The second has been equally successful in that a well-established sawmilling industry was built up on native timbers that could transfer across to the milling and additional utilisation of exotic timbers. The aim was always to foster a strongly-based industry, hence the building up of long-term sales to provide the necessary economic basis. This was particularly important on the West Coast.

The greatest and nationally most important success of all was achieved in administering the first policy. Protection forests are essential for many parts of New Zealand. The first Forests Act provided the basis for permanent reservation of the most important of these forests, and halted further major encroachments even though there were concerted attempts to make additional inroads into forests. All the major protection forests were reserved.

Reservation in itself, however, was insufficient in the face of threats from fires lit by settlers clearing land all along the forest's lower edges, and against the depredations of wild animals when their numbers reached high levels after about 1930. An alarming proportion of protection forests were severely degraded, in particular the Ruahine, Urewera, and some West Coast forests. Animal control, commenced by the Department of Internal Affairs, was passed to the Forest Service in the 1950s. Control campaigns were increased and their effects, along with studies of the animals themselves, became subjects of major research.

Fire control was carried out by the Forest Service itself and became increasingly more efficient. Without this control, large areas of protection forests, if not the majority, would have been destroyed by fires.

Having achieved the reservation of the major protection forests, the distinction between Permanent and Provisional

forests was eliminated because of changing circumstances and the impossibility of adhering to strict dividing lines. About this time people — not just the conservation movement — were becoming much more aware of the value, particularly the protection value, of native forests. For example, proposed logging by the owners of forest on Maori land in the heart of the Urewera raised an early storm in the 1950s, particularly in the Bay of Plenty where the rivers flowed across the flood-prone Rangitaiki Plains. The Forest Service was given the task of producing a formula for safe logging. This was provided and supervised to the satisfaction of all parties.

Logging of kauri in Waipoua State Forest was also controversial. Government agreed to make a permanent reservation and I, personally, persuaded the Minister of Forests at the time to enlarge the proposed reserve about threefold to allow for ample buffer zones.

In the 1960s N.Z. Forest Products Ltd laid claim to all the State forest, mostly prime timber forest, on the Mamaku Plateau, because it wanted the land for exotic afforestation. It was left to the Forest Service — in this furore politicians went “bush” — to conduct the ensuing very bitter battle to reserve as much as possible of this important production and protection forest. Even after this action the Forest Service was accused by some environment groups of liquidating the forests of the Mamaku Plateau.

In seeking land for government-approved exotic planting programmes, the Forest Service has, on one hand, been told by farmers to keep away from farm land — “There is plenty of cutover bush to plant” — and, on the other, it has been constantly warned off cutover forest by environmentalists.

Some of the most vigorous environmental contests have surrounded areas with long-term cutting rights granted under the policies of earlier governments. The Forest Service has had to act as policeman protecting those rights against conservationists lobbying for reservation. Nobody loves a policeman and such a situation is a “no-win” one. The Pureora and Waihaha forests fall into this category. In these forests the incumbent government nullified long-term sales made by another.

While the Native Forests Action Council on the western side of Lake Taupo were claiming great victories in getting these forests closed against any form of timber management the Forest Service was engaged in achieving a vastly more important conservation feat in helping to preserve the waters of Lake Taupo by persuading the Maori land-owners on the other side of the

lake, and government, to plant up the Maori land in the catchment thus helping to control run-off into the lake.

In West Coast rimu forest and western Southland silver beech forest the Forest Service, from the time it was established, did not willingly accept clearfelling of these potentially manageable forests and it set to work to plan and introduce sustainable management systems. A great deal of long-term research and experimentation was conducted but stable policies which would remain in force for at least a century were needed. The schemes were supported by all members of Parliament at the time but subsequently excision of forest by later governments reduced the effectiveness of the plans.

In 1931 I was a member of the first government (Internal Affairs Department) deer control party shooting deer on the edge of the Urewera, including the Whirinaki valley. The forest was at that time difficult to penetrate. In the space of a few years all the Urewera was eaten out by deer and wild cattle. Severe erosion developed in parts and in the famous Totara stand many trees died. Whirinaki Forest could not ever be paraded as completely unmodified, as is claimed by environmentalists and the "woolly" botanist, Bellamy, who contradicted, through the media, the New Zealand professor who had made a detailed study of the Urewera. Bellamy then immediately left our shores but because of his television image and captive media audience was probably believed by many New Zealanders.

Sawmilling has been one of the industrial mainstays of the West Coast but there had to be an end some time to the extensive cutting of native timbers. In an endeavour to provide stability and a degree of permanence government agreed, in the 1950s, to expand exotic afforestation in the region. Suitable land on the West Coast is, however, desperately short and growing conditions difficult. The only suitable available land where success could be assured was cutover low hill land. The Forest Service had to turn to that. The Native Forests Action Council conducted a strident campaign against these operations. While this campaign was being waged the Forest Service was conducting extremely difficult operations in surveying the nature of the extensive protection forest on the western flanks of the Southern Alps and conducting control operations which affect all the West Coast against introduced browsing animals which had caused significant damage in these forests. Any credit given to the Forest Service for these operations which are now proving to be of

great benefit, was drowned out by the plaintive cries of the conservationists over matters affecting a few hundred hectares.

For the past 30 or more years the Forest Service has pursued a plan of carefully designed joint development of native protection forest and exotic plantation forest by establishing the latter at the face of the former. By this means timber is produced, the native forest is protected. The joint administration ensures that enough staff and funds become available for animal and fire control throughout the whole area and provision can be made for public use. Such developments should be seen and analysed before changes to present forest administration and management systems are proposed.

In the face of this outstanding record and the accomplishment of all the original policies laid down by Act of Parliament, is the Forest Service now to be executed as well as pilloried? The only crime it has committed is to conscientiously carry out government policies. The dilemma has been that these can change during periods as short as three years, whereas forest management always needs much longer periods to be effective.

The setting up of a nature conservancy as some are proposing is an ideal formula for creating confrontation and it is safe to predict that most of this would be between government and preservationists who would expect and fight for government to abdicate its powers to them on matters of protection.

The views expressed by Treasury, to turn the remainder of the Forest Service into a commercial corporation, are cause for equally great concern. In my experience Treasury is largely pre-occupied with relatively short-term financing. This type of background is singularly unfit to impose such a proposal (which Treasury likes to propose from time to time) on a long-term forest service. Forests are established and grown for a whole rotation, which could be 100 years or more. Wood is then sold bearing in mind that the foundation is being laid for the next rotation. Commercially oriented interests tend to ignore adverse biological and financial aspects that may occur during the long rotation period and the research needed in all aspects of the growing. Treasury's intervention in the timber sale to Tasman Pulp and Paper Company in 1955 produced highly unsatisfactory long-term financial results for government. Treasury also made a most determined effort to prevent the sale of wood from southern Kaingaroa Forest to Carter Holt. Less than twenty years later one sees the great benefits that this sale has had for the Hawke's Bay region and the nation.

It should not be forgotten that it has taken many years of trial and error and research into growing, timber use, pulping and marketing to get radiata pine, now our main timber tree, to reach the present satisfactory position and it will take as long again to improve this position. This work is sorely needed on the eve of a great expansion of wood supplies. For various reasons other trees must come along, but it will take an even longer period of nurturing to establish them. A commercial corporation would not undertake this activity.

To put it in its most favourable light, the current examination of this intricate and inter-related matter of forest administration has been ham-fisted and the slanted and diabolical crusade conducted by conservationists has made the public damn the Forest Service for every native tree cut down in this country, on private property or otherwise. If changes are wanted — to my mind few are needed — then the administration of more than half of the nation's natural land demands something much sounder.

Yours sincerely,

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ENVIRONMENTAL FORESTRY

*Environment 1986** and *Heritage New Zealand*, together with the retirement of the Forest Service's Director of Environmental Forestry, all for different reasons mark time for reflection on what we mean by environmental forestry.

Ken Mier's retirement is significant because it marks in a formal way the end of an era of attitudes and problems different from those which foresters face now. They were not any easier to resolve then, nor was the opposition any less intransigent, but

**Environment 1986*, Report of the Post-Environment Forum Working Party. State Services Commission, 1985.