

# The Ministry's view of forestry

time for productive research and (as in Bangor and Lae) the successful operation of a consulting enterprise. Before the war, in many British universities, professional departments comprised a Professor, a lowly assistant and an "Amanuensis". Be that as it may, does the Probine Committee have no views on the calculation of staff/student ratios in universities? And does it consider that the University Grants Committee (a kind of Treasury) is better able than itself to evaluate professional education?

Finally, the committee expressed surprise at the fledgling Department of Conservation's "coolness" towards the recruitment of graduates in forestry. My own emotion is one of sadness, but not surprise. Four years ago, I took issue with the President of our Institute for stating that the subject of native forests "is simply not a major issue in New Zealand forestry". It appeared to me to be the major issue. The need for management of native forest lands will not disappear with the formation of the Department of Conservation. There will always be a need for people with a broad forestry education to be involved in these forests. The forestry degree should surely complement the Lincoln courses which are also thought to be providing people for the Department of Conservation. The real requirements in this area were not addressed by the Committee.

## University Role

It is my impression that the Committee sets little store by university education and the pursuit of knowledge as formative and civilizing processes in themselves. Rather, it sees the role of the university as imparting technology in accord with short-term market pressures (the perceptions of rich experienced peasants?). To suggest that education has broader aims is not to argue for irrelevance. Bertrand Russell once exclaimed, "How nice it is to know things!", but nicer to know some things than others. Education according to Ashby (in a quotation given to me many years ago by John Walker) is the path to "technological humanism . . . the habit of apprehending a technology in its completeness". It can be achieved by making specialist studies the core around which are grouped liberal studies which are relevant to them. "But they must be relevant; the path to culture should be through a man's specialism, not bypassing it . . . a student who can weave his technology into the fabric of society can claim to have a liberal education; the student who cannot weave his technology into the fabric of society cannot claim even to be a good technologist!".

S.D. Richardson

The Secretary for Forestry has released the briefing papers that his Department prepared for the incoming Minister of Forests, Mr Peter Tapsell, to acquaint him with the main aspects of the forest sector in New Zealand. Such a release, which represents a break in the traditional confidentiality imposed on such documents, is to be welcomed. An effort has also been made to keep up with the times in terms of the changing commercial and economic climate: this overwhelming emphasis may be welcomed at least in parts by some, while others will be disappointed by the contents of the presentation as well as the neglect of other matters such as native forests and education. I find myself gravitating to the latter group for reasons that will be explained later.

The briefing is in five sections:

- I background data on the sector;
- II analysis of the nature and performance of three major forest companies;
- III the changed operating environment for the sector today;
- IV the role of the Ministry of Forestry;
- V key issues identified that need resolving.

The text identifies problems, but often no indication of the Ministry's views or criteria for assessing them is given. This stance is unfortunate, as it is uninformative for some, it may mislead others (particularly those with a little prior knowledge) and raises more questions than answers.

The first section could have been much more helpful than it has turned out to be. Diagrammatic representation of trends and comparative characteristics is to be encouraged provided that it is helpful. In many cases, it is not. Other aspects found wanting included no reference to any forest policy, nor indeed for any need for one, an inadequate explanation of the role of forests and forestry in New Zealand and a surprising view of the sector's acknowledged "distinctive features". One notable statistic that was presented without any comment was the low valuation of wood-processing assets throughout the country - 114, 667 and 65 million dollars for all sawmills, pulp + paper + paper board, and plywood + veneer + board plants respectively. Surely the implication of this low figure, relative to the \$800 to \$3500 million talked about for just the Corporation plantations, was worthy of some comment on accounting policies and level of investment, or even just acknowledge-

ment of the replacement values for processing plants.

An interesting but somewhat slanted set of performance figures for Fletcher Challenge, NZ Forest Products Ltd, Carter Holt Harvey and, to a lesser extent, the Forestry Corporation is set out. The analysis is, however, far from penetrating; as a reader, I was left wondering what the writers of the report were trying to convey. One could look in vain, for example, to discover possible reasons why New Zealand forestry companies are investing off-shore, what could be done to promote more on-shore, why there is so much inter-company jostling, what might be the Forestry Corporation's future role in industrial processing and what are the implications of CER for our forestry companies.

Section III addresses the impact of Government policies on deregulation and liberalization of the economy on the operation of the forest industry. My main concern in this section is the apparent conflict and possible lack of direction in discussing marketing of forest products. For example, the report says "Australia and Japan can be expected to continue to be primary markets" yet goes on to list a whole series of depressing reverse trends, and fails to offer any positive suggestions on how to promote markets, confining remarks to comments like this:

"New Zealand's relatively static wood supply over the next five years will make market developments difficult as it will constrain the ability to:

- (a) develop an acceptance of *Pinus radiata* in new markets,
- (b) promote correct utilization and new uses of this species,
- (c) encourage confidence in New Zealand's ability to provide quality products at a competitive price, and
- (d) develop effective distribution systems."

Surely if there are these constraints on such an important sector development, the Ministry should be making loud calls for specific actions that need to be taken; but no, there is no later follow-up except a number of platitudes in the same vein. The sector will rue the day the New Zealand Forestry Council was dissolved, unless the Ministry of Forestry starts to encourage a really vibrant and co-operative national marketing promotion, one that the Forestry Council was indeed in the process of fostering most strongly.

The four impediments that the Ministry sees to efficiency of the sector are the labour market, the transport sector, the Commerce Act and the Town and Country Planning Act. I think I'd add to that list and certainly lower the priority for some of the four. People can make things work if they have the will to do so; thus, making legislative changes is **not** the important prerequisite that this document would have us believe – such patching of the latest loophole is never-ending.

Policy matters raised cover Maori leases, the East Coast Project, South Westland Management, Conservation of Native Forest, Taxation and resource use statutes. Only the first gives clear guidelines as to the Ministry's position, the views on which, in this case, I would lend my wholehearted support to. Discussion of the others lacks clarity and direction.

Section IV deals with the role of the Ministry of Forests and shows how it's spending the taxpayer's money. That is always contentious, and readers will themselves need to read the Ministry's own view of itself rather than rely on any reviewer's personal assessment. Curiously, the last section, comprising three pages and a diagram, was the bit that really sets the scene for what the briefing might have contained. I agree wholeheartedly with the sentiment expressed on page 51:

"The nature of the industry with its extensive plantations, huge capital investment and long time frame means that strategic rather than incremental decision making is required."

But the earlier main thrust of the briefing seems to favour the reverse, highlighting how the Corporation should be monitored rather than setting guidelines on how it should perform, bemoans the legislative impediments to efficiency of the sector rather than suggesting a forest sector policy to work to, and emphasizes the precariousness of New Zealand's share of the international and domestic markets for forest products while at the same time demonstrating how the Ministry can earn its keep in terms of budgeting rather than how the taxpayers' money should be spent efficaciously to the benefit of the nation. I agree with the writers, however, that time is running out for the sector in terms of real political support as against incremental propping up. This long-winded, repetitious and neutral briefing may not be the answer to such a prayer, but it is essential reading, nevertheless, for everyone involved in the sector, and also, let us hope, for the Minister, so that at least he has some prior knowledge to call upon in this age of intense lobbying.

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# Department of Conservation's ministerial brief August 1987

This document of 100 pages gives a good superficial overview of what this very new government department is all about and the main issues it faces. Despite the document's size, there is no summary of key points and many of the statements have so little elaboration that they can only be described as tantalizing.

The first 40 pages profile the Department, and a major part of this is concerned with finance. In a budget of about \$100 m for this financial year, \$32.5 m is allocated to personnel, \$48 m to operating costs, \$13 m to capital and \$6 m to grants and loans. There is no discussion on why the ratio of operating costs to personnel costs is so high, whether the figure for capital is considered normal or whether there are special circumstances this first year, and where the grants and loans are going to. Half the latter are allocated under Science and Research, so presumably they include payments to FRI and others for research, but this is not mentioned.

An equally large section of the departmental profile is devoted to senior staff (with photos) and is very informative.

The next dozen pages are devoted to profiles of the component directorates. These profiles are brief but adequate, and are followed by a one page description of the general functions of a region.

The final section, almost one-half of the document, is given over to 'issues'. These are listed under the appropriate directorate, but are otherwise a very mixed bag. Of almost 100 issues listed, one-third are really only statements of function. Of the remainder, only half a dozen have clear position statements indicating the Department's views, although in many others opposition to changes in existing land use is implied. One of the clear statements expresses opposition to removal of export controls on indigenous timber, but again the issue is not discussed.

## Other Issues

Other issues of direct concern to forestry which are mentioned include the proposal for a port at Shakespeare Bay to allow export of timber from the Marlborough Sounds, and protection of indigenous forest on private land (mentioned twice by different directorates).

One of the major issues facing FRI is

the future of research (and its funding) presently being carried out for DOC under a loop funding arrangement which expires in 1990. Apparently this is not even considered to be an issue by DOC, let alone discussed.

In short, this document is too long to be a useful summary, and too short to be an adequate statement of what the Department's current concerns are; what it intends doing about them, and why. However, it is well presented and looks impressive – perhaps it is an ideal ministerial brief.

**Dudley Franklin**

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## The QE II National Trust's ministerial brief

This short document very adequately describes the Trust's background, its functions, its achievements and its problems. The latter consist mainly of a greatly increasing workload (33% increase last year), a huge backlog of applications for open space covenants (currently six years' delay in processing to completion), the loss of goodwill with prospective clients these delays could engender, and grossly inadequate resources. The document would have been enhanced by a concise punchy summary and a slicker presentation, but perhaps their resources were already overstretched!

## Pertinent Questions

Few people could question the worth of having the Trust work efficiently and effectively. In view of this, perhaps the brief could have asked the Minister a few pertinent questions such as: "Does the Government accept the value of the Trust?" "Is it content to accept the present situation?" "Will it do anything about it?" Perhaps the Opposition could be prompted to raise these issues.

**Dudley Franklin**