

UNFORTUNATE DECISIONS?

Western Southland beech forests

Research and experience over the last 40 years by the old NZ Forest Service had demonstrated that silver beech can be effectively regenerated and managed for quality timber production. The recent Government decision, as announced by the Hon. Philip Woollaston on June 9, 1988, to allocate only 'cutover' beech forests for beech management (an area of 12,000 ha) has major consequences. One is that it will no longer be possible for the Forestry Corporation to manage forests for a sustained yield of silver beech timber. There will now be at least a 40-year break until the first of the regenerated, thinned and pruned stands are ready for harvesting. There is a danger that the management expertise and experience will be lost. The Southland utilization industry that relies on these beech forests for raw material may also disappear.

Mr Woollaston, in making the announcement, said: "The allocation would ensure that a proposal for a World Heritage Park in Western Southland could still be considered." Unfortunately this may not be possible because many of the stands going into the Department of Conservation have had wood harvested from them.

This unsatisfactory decision stems directly from the original decision to split forests and forestry into two contrasting camps – a solely profit-oriented Corporation and a preservation minded Department of Conservation. The consequence was that the Corporation in search for cash flow had altered the carefully researched silvicultural management for beech into a short-term revenue generating operation with minimum silviculture. This poor silvicultural alternative is difficult to defend and the politicians were correct in recognizing this. However, the decision to curtail further cutting and regeneration of other areas of beech forests is equally difficult to support. The decision demonstrates a lack of flexibility and imagination, and an unwillingness to consider the long-term needs of the forestry industry, the region and New Zealand. It suggests that the politicians believe that the taxpayers in New Zealand

are unwilling to pay for adequate silviculture to ensure a sustained supply of high-quality beech timber for future generations to enjoy and perhaps prefer to see the money go towards social relief.

Departmental funding

The Department of Conservation has effective control of about one-third of New Zealand's land area. Its staff of about 1000 have responsibilities that extend to almost every land-based activity. While there may be disagreement with some of its activities it is important that it is adequately funded.

In looking at the question of DOC funding it should be realized that the department was never adequately funded in the first place. In addition the new department took on additional functions not covered by the old departments – for example coastal and marine management. The 'user pays' philosophy has also increased costs in that the department now has to pay for services which, in earlier times, would have been provided at no cost by other government bodies. 'User pays' may be

a reasonable philosophy but only if it is recognized in setting budgets. It now has to do all this with a reduced budget.

Part of the Government's problem lies in its policy that the 80% it spends on health, education and welfare cannot be pruned. Consequently the savings must come from the remaining 20% and DOC is an obvious target. For DOC the problem is that most of its costs are 'fixed'; so the only way to save money will be to reduce people and management. This is to be regretted particularly if it is impossible for DOC to carry out its statutory functions on the reduced budget which it has now been allocated.

Perhaps the fundamental questions not faced up to by the 'conservation lobby' and the politicians are two articulated by Max Peterson at the Institute's AGM (see keynote addresses, this issue). They were: "At some point the world will be completely dependent on sustainable renewable resources. What are the implications of this for future land use in New Zealand?" And, "Can one-third of New Zealand really be placed in protected status and still meet its future economic need?"

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Editor

NZ Institute of Forestry Presidential Address – 1988

During last year's presidential address I spent time discussing the supposed parlous state of the profession at a time when "forestry", as it had been known for over 60 years in New Zealand, was being dismembered (see NZ Forestry, August 1987). I also traced the history of the Institute during this period, pointing out that for many years Councillors and Presidents had grappled with the question, "What is the major role of the Institute?" This Council had addressed the subject in detail prior to the 1987 AGM and had decided that there were two roles. They were "to be a professional organization of foresters, preferably with legal status" and "be an advocate for forestry". I chose to view them in that order for the occasion but this obviously did not entirely suit the membership.

The end result of the ensuing discussions was the passing of a motion proposed by Peter McKelvey:

"That members of this Institute endorse the intention of the Council to raise the level of professionalism in the Institute to make it more effective. In this respect they support the intention of Council to investigate the option of obtaining a charter for the Institute and request that the full implications of this, and those of other options, be reported to members during the coming year, with the aim of the whole matter being debated and a decision made at the 1988 AGM."

You have already heard from me that it has not been possible to fulfil the