

# 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?"

**D.J. Mead**  
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

requirements of this motion during the past year because of the other pressing commitments of Council members. The maintenance of existing directions and services by the Council of the day is difficult enough without the same people pursuing new directions.

You will also be interested to hear that after six years of administration through the Royal Society it now appears very likely that they will get on with doing what was originally promised but never delivered. During all this time the Institute's Council has developed systems and trained staff within the Royal Society to the detriment, of course, of pursuing the wider interests that were desirable. The task was becoming so onerous that Council very seriously entertained the idea of pulling out again. However, a change of executive director looks to be having promising results.

The ready acceptance of a name change from New Zealand Institute of Foresters to New Zealand Institute of Forestry suggests to me that the two roles of the Institute mentioned above are in fact of equal significance for members. The name change further indicates that you firmly believe that advocacy of forestry (i.e. that trees are good for human society) is an important role for the Institute. I believe this to be so, but also believe that this can be best achieved by an organization with high professional standards. Registration and/or chartering is, in my opinion, the surest way to achieve this.

The part-time, voluntary make-up of the Council and the level of funding

available to the Institute will continue to produce what are perceived by many to be inadequate responses to fulfilling the Institute's roles. A need to belong through a registration process would assist in this, and would lead us away from the current situation where a small core of enthusiasts do their best to run the show.

I wish to turn now to wider matters. The 1987 AGM and Conference was held at a time when employing organizations had just been dismembered and people were very unsure of their own futures, never mind that of the Institute. With some notable exceptions the dust is now settling. Personal lives and the directions of the new organizations are in a clearer view. People as a consequence are beginning to look ahead to the needs of the future.

Forestry in its widest sense, including the multiple use management of resources, took a severe hammering during the changes of the old organizations. The new organizations, ostensibly designed, among other things, to solve the problems associated with internally made value judgements, have run into the inevitable need to manage land for multiple uses. In my opinion the results of this will be a growing realization that the skills afforded by a "forestry education" in land management are as relevant as ever. Foresters, I believe, are not doomed. They, as people often do to their cost, forgot the need to involve the public and take note of public concerns when making management decisions. We can look at other organizations and professions, e.g. health/doc-

tors who seem to have similar problems and are likely to have similar solutions imposed upon them.

In New Zealand the need to consider forest establishment (reforestation) for more than one purpose is nowhere more evident than on the East Coast of the North Island. Nature, in the form of Cyclone Bola, amply demonstrated to the Government and Treasury theorists that apparently uneconomic and "useless" forests had a role in soil conservation and water management that far outweighed their use for timber.

I do not believe there could have been enough words uttered in favour of multiple use in dusty select committee rooms, to convince people who readily did not wish to listen. Truly, in this case, one picture was worth a thousand words. The Prime Minister's comments that trees were of no consequence in mitigating the East Coast disaster were made after a look at very young trees. He apparently did not see the original plantings at Mangatu where the erosion control achieved was better than anybody could have expected and vindicated earlier decisions to plant. Time and proper study will show the politicians the error of their pronouncements and for the good of the nation tree planting on a major scale will surely begin again.

The need for forestry in a wide sense and a role or roles for this Institute in that need are as relevant today as they have ever been. The future awaits us with a need for hard work and dedication.

**Peter J. Thode**

## The privatization issue

Privatizing the Forestry Corporation differs from privatizing other State Owned Enterprises in that it would involve the sale of large areas of state land, i.e. land that is wholly owned by the people of New Zealand and thus able to be managed in perpetuity for the benefit of all the people of New Zealand. The areas at stake are considerable – over 600,000 hectares – or 2.5% of the total land area of the country. The implications of alienating such a large area of publicly owned land, particularly if the sale is to overseas interests, are frightening. They should be most carefully analysed and debated with full public participation before any decision is reached. It is probable that the public reaction would be extremely adverse.

Many leaders of the forestry profes-

sion are opposed to the large-scale sale of public land, whether to New Zealand, to multi-national partly New Zealand, or wholly overseas companies; and whether or not it is forest land or farming land or conservation land. It is equally concerned with the implications of selling the forests on these public lands. This paper explains the reasons why.

It is first necessary to consider why the state's plantation forests were established. They were not planted just to make the greatest profit, although this was always one valid and important reason. There was far more to it than this. The state-owned forests have always been important tools of government policy irrespective of the party in power. They were planted in order:

- (a) to provide alternative supplies of building and other timbers in order to conserve indigenous forests;
- (b) to ensure self-sufficiency in wood and wood-based products for future generations of New Zealanders;

- (c) to create a resource large enough to sustain export-oriented forest industries;
- (d) to sponsor regional development and to promote regional self-sufficiency in wood supplies by the establishment of local plantations and industries;
- (e) to use forests as a Government tool to create employment opportunities and to ameliorate local unemployment problems;
- (f) to encourage private and Maori lease afforestation programmes;
- (g) to conserve soil and water, regulate water flow, and ameliorate flooding;
- (h) to provide forest-based recreation in the wide variety of forms which the public demands.

The very large private plantation forests of New Zealand cater for many of these needs and their contribution in some important aspects is as great as that of the State. Their record, particularly in recent years, is generally good in such matters as environmental protection, and recreation and public use. However,

**Footnote:** This comment was written by A.P. Thomson after consultation with A.L. Poole, G.M. O'Neill, M.J. Conway, A.K. Farnilton, J.S. Reid, T.A. Foley, P.J. McKelvey, P.F. Olsen and P.C. Crequer. – Editor.