

Comment from the President

Visionary government

At our 1988 AGM Peter Brown responded to Treasury spokesperson Geoff Dangerfield's general claim "that we should only invest in those activities which make a specified rate of return" with the question: "If this was 1930 and we had applied that criteria would we, on the basis of information available then, have invested anything in plantation forestry?" As I recall, Dangerfield did not really have an answer.

This present Government has said that it is not in the business of "picking winners". Its role is to provide "a level playing field" by which industry will make the investment decisions. If this really was 1930 and industry only had the information available to it which it could get from its own efforts, would industry independently invest in plantation forestry? Would it also have underpinned this with a major investment in research?

With the advantage of hindsight the answer must be an unequivocal "no". Industry could not, on the basis of information available to it, have decided to plant without Government encouragement. There would now be very little plantation forestry in New Zealand. There certainly would not be an industry with export potential and neither would there have been the research effort that has improved efficiency and identified new opportunities.

It is a cruel irony that the very same politicians who have forced user pay on everything, reduced research funding, and imposed a discriminatory and disincentive taxation regime on forestry, are those who now see plantation forestry as one of the great future hopes for New Zealand. The paradox is that had plantation forestry been so treated since 1930 New Zealand would not now have a forest industry. Our plantation forestry resource only exists now because of the vision of past Governments. They encouraged and supported a strategic policy approach, and provided the funds and incentives to ensure that the policy was implemented. This was all supplemented by the encouragement of a programme of innovative research. That approach also identified the need for tending, especially pruning, on a large scale.

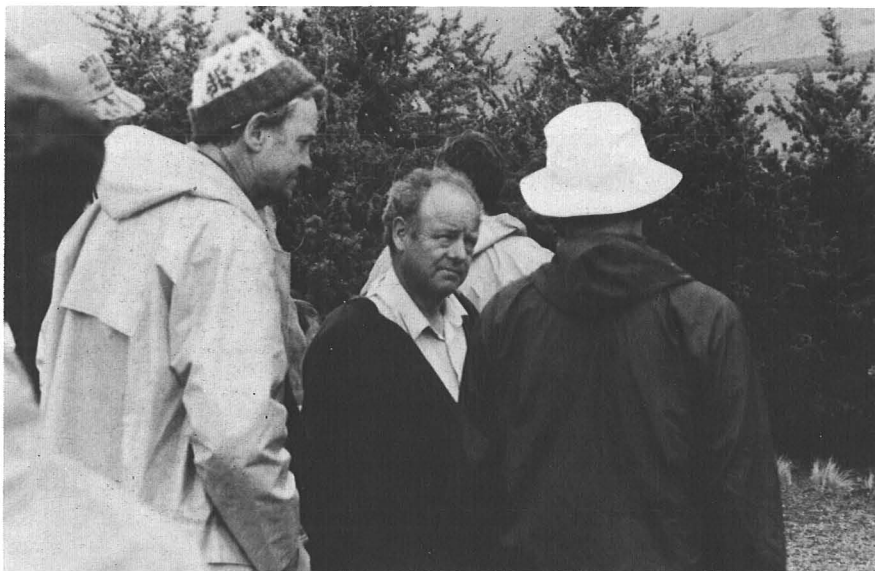
Since few companies or individuals in our country could afford to take the long-term strategic view we must conclude that this is a legitimate role for Government.

Plantation forestry will now survive

and be successful but this is only because we had 70 years of visionary Government. What opportunities will New Zea-

land now miss because our Government sees no role in being visionary?

W.R.J. Sutton



Institute President Wink Sutton discusses the merits of pines at Molesworth with Nelson/Marlborough members.



Well known for his love of the outdoors, Barry Crump was only too happy to be the voice behind this summer's Fire Prevention Campaign being run by the New Zealand Forest Owners' Association.

"A lot of forest fires are caused by people who just don't think," he said.

"Simple things like making sure camp fires are built clear of scrub and grass, making sure they're out properly as well as commonsense things like using lighters instead of matches and checking that your cigarette butts are completely stubbed out - they're all very basic.

"The trouble is people don't realise just how fast these fires can take hold in really dry summer weather. That's why the theme of this campaign is 'take time to think about the little things'. I reckon if people just thought and used their heads a bit we wouldn't have nearly so many problems".