



NZIF and the State Forest Assets Sale

Does the NZIF have a role in the State forest assets sale? What is the role of the NZIF in an issue which strikes so deeply into the heart of forestry in New Zealand? Council has debated this issue since it arose. Individual members as well as councillors have strong feelings both for and against the issue. It is difficult for Council to get a feeling for our membership's views when clearly there is no consensus on the issue.

At the last meeting, Council agreed that the Institute does have a role to play and a subcommittee was assembled consisting of Don Mead, Ted Bilek, and Wink Sutton to act on this issue. The committee wrote the following position statement:

As the organisation for professionals involved in forestry, the Institute has a role to play as an independent and objective observer of the process. We are not a political organisation and do not take a position for or against any political party. We do take a position, however, that is pro-professional management in forestry, provided that forestry is in the best long-term interest of the nation.

Our Objectives

We wish to ensure . . .

- that the people of New Zealand receive the best return possible for their long-term investment in forestry;
- that the forests continue to be professionally managed for the long-term benefit of New Zealand.

Our Goals

- to ensure that the entire policy regarding the Crown's involvement in plantation forestry is well considered.

Who will manage the Crown forest leases? Who will administer the covenants? What powers will the administrators have? These are some of the issues which have not yet been considered.

- to ensure that the purchaser(s) of the Crown forest assets are required to submit management plans which must be approved by Government before any harvest of the Crown forests takes place.

Management plans should contain provisions regarding regeneration of the

next forest crop, if there is to be one. If the land is not to be maintained as forest land, the management plans should contain provisions to ensure that at minimum, soil and water values are maintained, and that the inflation adjusted land value will not decline.

There is no mechanism or organisation within Government at present to administer the leases, the covenants, or any management plans. This issue must be addressed. And it should be settled before the leases are granted.

- to ensure that the covenants on the forest land are adequate to maintain historic, cultural, ecological, and research values.
- to stimulate public and professional discussion of the asset sales issue.

Will the people of New Zealand get the best return on their investment if the forests are sold *in toto* now? There are very few people or organisations in a position to publicly express independent opinions about the sale. The Institute is

one of those few groups. The Institute will act as a focal point and centre for discussion.

The committee cannot accomplish these objectives by itself. We believe that regional members know most about the forests in their regions. The problem faced by members is lack of legitimate access to information about the sale. Council has overcome this problem by asking for and obtaining copies of the sales documents for all the regions. We have distributed these to the regional chairpeople. We will distribute the covenants if/when they become available.

In order to make comments, we need help. We need to know if the forests are being well managed. We need to know if the covenants are adequate. We need to know your opinions on the sale.

Contact: Your local section officers, or Dr Ted Bilek or Dr Don Mead, School of Forestry, University of Canterbury, Christchurch. Phone (03) 667-001, Fax (03) 642-999.

From the President

The travel award – a reassessment

When he retired, Geoff Chavasse gave the Institute a substantial sum which was subsequently increased (by donation and a membership levy) to form sufficient capital, the interest from which is presented each year as the annual travel award.

Although the award is substantial (up to \$5000 per year) successive Councils have been a little disappointed that these funds have not been more eagerly sought after. Also, there are doubts on the equity of the award. The Institute gives a large sum (which could be well in excess of the amount that member would pay in Institute fees over a whole lifetime) to one member each year.

Although New Zealand forestry gains from the travel experience, benefits to other members are at best indirect and in most cases negligible.

Council is proposing a major change. It wants to award something akin to

the Visiting Fellow Award of Appita. The award would be given to a suitable person (who could be an Institute member) who is a good public speaker with ability and expertise in a topical area. The award is to assist travel throughout New Zealand so the recipient can address Local Sections. Such an award could provide the incentive for more Local Section activity. It would increase the dissemination of forestry knowledge as well as being a more equitable distribution of the revenue earned from our investments.

Council members would welcome feedback on this proposal. Is there another alternative we should consider? Are there other and more equitable ways the travel fund could be used? How might such a scheme operate in practice?

W.R.J. Sutton
President