

# Andrew Kirkland's speech at farewell from NZ Forestry Corporation

Despite the increasing pressures of the last five years I have enjoyed my 39 years in forestry. The camaraderie of National Forest Survey and the Australian Forestry School were early highlights. The immediate post-war trainees were our role models. The six years on the West Coast was a marvellous training ground in people as well as forestry and when I left for Nelson I was of course joined soon after by Jocelyn as my wife. The five years in Kaingaroa were amongst our happiest and, for me, as professionally satisfying as anything I have done. Our sons were born in that pleasant community. The effort put into mensuration doubled the allowable cut and the build up of contractors really tightened up the operations. All that has been recently done in the interests of an improved bottom line could have been done then, except of course that the winds of change were blowing in a different direction.

The effort put into the indigenous forestry issues of the 1970s was enormous and might seem wasted viewed in the light of subsequent events. However, people and nations have to follow their own learning curve and there are no short cuts to doing so.

As a consequence of those issues but increasingly the concern with financial management, the last decade has been one of continuing review – with new agendas coming at approximately 18 month intervals throughout. First came the audit/review of Forest Service Management, then the Public Expenditure Committee's recommendation of the early 1980s to establish a limited liability company. It was followed by the New

Zealand Forest Service Review Committee's recommendation for a Forestry Commission and then by a Government Caucus Agreement to merge Forest Service and Lands and Survey. In 1983 that proposal in turn was scrapped. In 1985 the great split commenced, only to be reversed in 1988 when the intended corporatisation of commercial forestry was superseded by the plans for accelerated privatisation. I can confidently say therefore that any form of organisation for state forestry you can possibly conceive of, I have reviewed at some time in this decade. However, I am not negative about the changes themselves. I believe many had an inevitability about them which could be forestalled but not eventually arrested. This will be shown in other places. If I am critical it is about the handling of certain key decisions but I am not going to carp about that on an occasion like this.

I have served in two apparently quite different organisations – the Forest Service and the Corporation. The difference in the major objectives of the two has been significant but other differences less so. I can do no better in giving you my impressions than by drawing on the foreword I was asked to write recently for an anecdotal book on the Forest Service to come out early in 1991.

The New Zealand Forest Service was, for most of my working life, teacher, livelihood and source of common values and friendships. It expected from its long-serving employees the sort of loyalty that a few short years of public sector reorientation has rendered curiously old-fashioned. In return it gave

security, a sense of shared accomplishment and a kind of patriarchal benevolence.

The strength of the Forest Service was in the quality of the people it recruited and nurtured. In my experience, the worth and all-round competence of that resource has been consistently undervalued by the system itself. The many accomplishments were achieved despite meagre delegations and centralised "controls" and not because of them. However, if anything, the external wrestling with the rigidities of a bureaucracy added to the coherence and esprit de corps that came from the common stock of values and perceptions built up over the years by many determined and colourful characters.

The transition to the new organisation has been, in turn, built upon the solid foundation of the Forest Service years. The ability of well-trained managers to respond well to sensible commercial delegations has been demonstrated. That should be a source of satisfaction not only to those who were given the chance to take up the challenge but to those who laid the foundation. Such ability was always latent. The saddest reflection on the system, as it was, is without doubt the squandering of the talent, the training and the experience that is implicit in putting trust in an external centralised system of controls rather than in managers who are allowed to manage and who are judged on their results. I can assure you that the excellent bottom line results, improving literally to the last day of the Corporation, could not have been achieved without the professional underpinning of a magnificently trained and vocation orientated management.

My Chairman has been fond of saying that forestry is a simple business. My response is that, as in any activity or sport, professionals make it look easy. I hope that the depth of forestry skill needed is fully appreciated by the new entrants in both State and private sectors. As a sector we are to some extent coasting on the generous inheritance of the past and it must be recharged sooner or later. The forest resource is only as good as the human resource which manages it.

In 1920 when the proposals for a New Zealand Forest Policy were laid on the table of the House of Representatives it was envisaged that:

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"the men employed in the Forest Service should be alert and active on every occasion on which promptitude demanded, of sound judgement and with a high sense of duty . . . . Those who hold appointment . . . are required to be honest, industrious, sober and courteous".

With occasional defections from the penultimate characteristic, the expectations were largely fulfilled. Under the men and women of the Service New Zealand forestry was taken through adolescence to maturity. I have attempted to recognise this in an historical insert in our last half-year report. Few State agencies so thoroughly permeated, moulded and left their mark on any sector of the New Zealand economy. The Corporation has built upon that base and the new owners will continue to benefit from the legacy. Circumstances change, ideologies wax and wane and soon the State's presence as an owner of forests will be over or at least heavily reduced. But the characteristics stamped upon its people by fine and dedicated state organisations will endure and I believe they will continue to influence New Zealand forestry for many years to come. I wish to thank all of my staff and mentors past and present, and colleagues in the sector, which is of course one bright light in the economic gloom, for the privilege of working with them over the past 39 years.



At a function held in the Tea House at the Lady Norwood Rose Garden in Wellington Botanical Gardens a presentation was made to Andrew Kirkland (second from left) by Institute President Wink Sutton. On the right is Mrs Kirkland and on the left the Hon. Doug Kidd.

## 1991 ANZIF Conference

The third combined conference of the Australian and New Zealand Institutes of Forestry will be held in Christchurch between September 30 and October 5.

There are already over 40 abstracts from New Zealand and the interest from Australia is keen. There have been requests for registration forms from as far away as Finland. Instructions to authors will be sent out in the next few weeks. However, if there are any queries on the technical programme contact Graeme Whyte at the School of Forestry; fax (03) 642-124.

Plans are underway to hold reunions of graduates from forestry schools on both sides of the Tasman – you should plan to be there to catch up with colleagues.

Registration forms will be enclosed in the May journal but if you would like further information read the blue flyer from the May 1990 issue of your journal or contact Dudley Franklin or Russell Coker. Phone (03) 351-7099 or fax (03) 351-7091.

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