



## Where is forestry going in New Zealand?

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The NZ forest scene has been changed forever by the Government action of selling off the State forests planted in exotic species through the process of Crown Forest Licences. This has meant that, whereas some 55% of the forest estate in production terms was previously run by a Forest Service with a community mission of providing both production, protection and recreation values in land acquired for exotic forest production, there is now only a small Ministry of Forestry with a mission of providing policy information and advice for Government and with an operational role restricted to phytosanitary requirements of imports and exports, forest health surveillance and education.

The previous heavy dependence by the smaller members of the private sector on the NZ Forest Service's capacity to provide both fire and forest health protection capability has meant an increasing demand on the statutory authorities who have in the past been in many respects only nominal custodians of protection functions at the regional and district level. They are now required to fairly shoulder their responsibilities to provide practical capability, in the rural fire sector. The transfer of central Government responsibilities for pest destruction, soil and water protection and similar community type activity has devolved on the regional councils with some learning processes still incomplete under the Resource Management Act.

In this context, the forestry profession has to consider its role in the light of increasing responsibility thrust on it as the community perceives these changes and the need for more personal involvement of individual members of the profession, as statutory agencies no longer have the same status and effectiveness as the old NZ Forest Service.

We can identify specific spheres of activity and the examples I give are merely indications of the depth of detail with which most executives and those with managerial responsibility have to cope.

- a) We can start with indigenous forest policy with which Government has

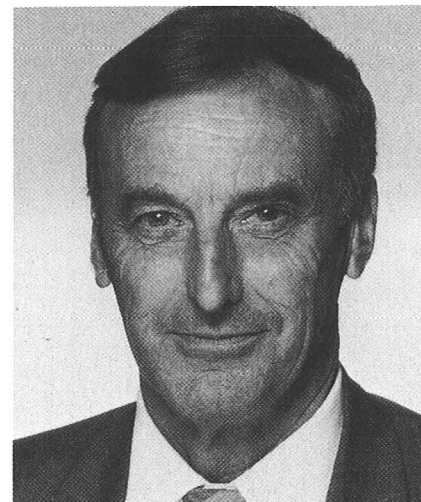
been grappling for some time as it endeavours to buy off environmental anger with perceived destruction of indigenous forests but at the same time accept the practicalities that responsible forest owners can manage their forests for sustainable indigenous forest production without the 'lockup' or preservation mentality having to be paramount.

The profession has not taken a proactive stance in this debate and the Accord achieved by the NZ Forest Owners' Association with the various environmental organisations merely set in place a policy which met the self interests of these two groups while not addressing the capacity of the forests to sustain production under technically competent management. There are many parallels outside of NZ where indigenous forests have been felled and have regenerated, often in species of less economic significance than the original stands. However, the condition of these forests is exposed to stresses by virtue of zero management activity and much of the northern hemisphere concern for acid rain impact stems from the benign neglect of their forests by societies over-blessed with forest riches.

NZ foresters should not allow ourselves to adopt a similar hands off approach as it is both unnecessary and unwise, for the continued health of forests is a significant concern for both the profession and the public.

- b) The new Resource Management Act and its application to forestry has the ability to shape both the trend of investment by new entrants into the industry and the quality of the capacity of forests to provide protection values.

Inherent in the Act is the need for evidential basis for outcomes which will arise as activities have their impact on the environment. The development of new regional rules will be central to the location and type of forest investment, and in many areas the pace of such investment will be jeopardised should planners maintain the mental atti-



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tude that they require powers to plan which are not based on 'outcomes' but on the bias inherited from previous planning legislation.

- c) Research and the impact of investment on the research process by both Government and the private sector is presently under scrutiny as the Crown Research Institutes Act is implemented. There is no doubt that industrial development using new technology for solid wood conversion will have the most significant impact on adding value to the roundwood successfully grown under current regimes and this is supported by the recent STEP priority exercise.

However, the emphasis also requires a shift of research on forest establishment and management practices to enhance the diversity of species and product that the NZ forests can produce. The recent Steps suggestion that the investment in growing forests research be reduced by 10% indicates some sort of bias in the thinking process which has perceived that there has been an over-investment in primary industry research in the past via MAF and DSIR.

There is an acceptance that processing research requires to be increased and of course this means that our profession needs to identify where the greatest community good and economic benefit will flow from

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forests already in the ground. This should be in relation to beneficiaries not yet identified and although assisted by the major corporates which dominate the present scene, it should allow for a process of research and technology transfer which enhances small players' capability to be inventive, innovative and aggressive in seeking out and satisfying market niches at present not yet perceived.

- d) The new planting wave, which is perceived now to be under way as investors realise that new taxation rules and requirements for superannuation quality investment cannot be ignored, has meant that there are many new players such as middle to late age salary earners entering the forest owning scene via partnerships and small investment vehicles.

Public confidence in such investment requires individual foresters who have a responsibility for providing data which is the basis for choice of species, site location and regime of new establishment, to have up-to-date skills and credibility to ensure that the 'rip-off risk' is restricted to those people who will proceed in any case without regard for technical advice of good quality.

As a profession we need to have independent capability, seen by the public as credible, to advise and 'blow the whistle' on projects where the bases portrayed are known to be invalid.

- e) In all of this increasing our planting rate activity the fashion for concern as to the rate of sequestration of CO<sup>2</sup> and greenhouse gases has been given some prominence during the global warming debate. We want to take on board the thought that NZ has an unusually advantageous position in this regard without presuming licence in our need, as part of the global community, to be sparing in our demands, particularly on fossil fuels.

The recent UNCED conference in Rio de Janeiro has created an expectation that the world can retain forests' bio diversity while still providing the world with its most essential commodity – wood. NZ's role in technology transfer and management techniques of plantation forests is perceived by many to be an export commodity to which we at present are not giving adequate prominence.

As foresters are we competent to advise, direct and shape opinion on the wide range of topics discussed as examples above?

In the future foresters will need to

have command of an increasingly complex range of skills. The demand of our industry for literate, technically competent, enquiring intellects will be driven by recognition of this aspect of the future. Already the major corporate forest companies have recognised that their recruitment policies must be biased by a demand for this quality of personnel if the needs to cope with the demands of the future are to be transmitted into effective management with a minimum of centralised prescriptive and restrictive supervision.

There will be more responsibility on individuals to exercise initiative within the confines of broad Codes of Practice such as developed by LIRO and the NZ Forest Owners Association for logging, establishment and pesticide application procedures.

Training and the activities of FITEC will have a considerable bearing on the ability of the present work force to

become more effective in application of new practice. The lack of institutional capacity for sub tertiary training is being addressed by FITEC through their regional boards. This is an area where our present tertiary capacity needs to link with the technical institutes, L&FITB and the various trade training centres so that some holistic quality can be given to the present rather inchoate process.

#### **'Position Statements'**

The NZIF through its Council is developing 'position statements' which are informed and reflect the views of the membership to the individual topics, some of which I have identified above. This process will be a growing and developing one which the whole profession is required to participate in if it is to be accepted as having credible quality by politicians at both central and regional government level.

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## **Is the exotic forest estate of New Zealand being overcut?**

### **Introduction**

Mr A.P. Thomson raised this issue at both the 1991 and 1992 Annual General Meetings of the New Zealand Institute of Forestry. He observed that export log volumes had increased five to seven fold since 1987. Was this regarded as overcutting the exotic forest estate and if so what effect would that have on the forestry sector and any future opportunities for the New Zealand forest industry? Others have raised similar questions. The Institute should investigate and advise the public and politicians of the results and raise any alarms considered necessary.

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### **A report to Council by Tony Grayburn with the help of Mick O'Neill and Bruce Childs**

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The Institute's new Council decided to address the question immediately by setting up a small sub-committee to investigate and report after all fellows and some senior members of the Institute were asked for their views. The response from circular letters to those people (42) has been very good. Council wanted early action but if more in-depth work was considered necessary, other people would be asked to do that later. This report has been prepared by A.W. Grayburn with the help of Mick O'Neill and

Bruce Childs. Detailed responses from 21 fellows and senior members have been received and used for this consensus report.

### **Definitions**

Most respondents agreed that "overcutting" meant little and should not be the focus. Overcutting assumes a national exotic forest policy, an accepted set of optimum rotation ages and to be meaningful would be better done on a regional basis or by a large grouping of forests, but certainly not nationally. In certain circumstances, increased approved periodic cuts are acceptable either annually or over a few years. Much will depend on the robustness of the forest mass and the maturity of the forest resource. All of these things are related to the age class distribution and the rotation age adopted by forest managers. There is an increasing tendency for rotation ages to be reduced, and for the average age of clearfell to come down below 30 years for radiata pine in many forests over the next five years. This removes many harvesting options and lowers the yield, quality and size of logs.

Therefore the real concern is to be able to sustain the periodic cut in the market place and meet the quality demands of the customers. Will the present level of cutting in many areas allow that to happen? While exotic forest