

been primarily motivated by some perceived problems with the new wood coming onto the market, but these changes in log export prices provide a powerful support to their arguments.

Log input grades also need some changes. Many sawmills are still purchasing as "run of bush", making optimising grade out-turn all the more difficult. Taking advantage of the Employment

Contracts Act to better utilise the capital of their plant is another obvious strategy, provided they have access to the wood required.

Some of these changes do not require significant capital investment. One investment that does is the necessary new plant technology to get the best value from their log resource. Here the independent sawmillers face a catch 22.

In order to raise debt capital they often need proof of long-term supply security, and they can't obtain this log security unless they can match the export price, or they have their own forests. Another fundamental change within the industry is that "long term" is now tending to be measured in months, rather than years.

Chris Perley

The year in retrospect – a comment on New Zealand's recent snowstorms*

Much has been said and written in New Zealand over the last few months about the standard of management by farmers in times of extreme weather conditions. Some of the criticism is ill founded, but the redeeming factor, which is very apparent in the criticism, is concern for the stock. The word cruel has been used and unfortunately been expanded by isolated television clips. I would like to state here that in a lifetime of farming I have never met a farmer who was wantonly cruel – negligent yes. For to be a farmer of any account one must have feeling for the stock, which encompasses care and understanding. For it is obvious in the returns from farming today that those who do not have these feelings do not survive – if farming is their only source of income.

As farming, like forestry, requires long-term thinking, we must go back to the winter of 1991.

That winter was reasonable and we had a good spring. Lambing percentages were good and rainfall adequate to promote growth. Hay was plentiful but difficult to make because of the rain. However those who wanted to, filled their barns, and in fact quite a few farmers calculated that they had enough hay and silage for two years.

Where did it all go wrong?

January and February were very dry and cold months, and so farmers trying to put a little more weight on their lambs had to hold on to them longer. Turnip crops failed, due to the climatic conditions – the first time in 40 years that I'd had such a failure on my farm. There was no significant rainfall until June. The result of these conditions meant that farmers had to supplementary feed from the beginning of March and were still doing so in mid September.

The normal winter dormancy period

in much of the inland Canterbury Plains is three to three and a half months (that is when stock require supplementary feed). This year, however, the period was seven months, which in reality means that farmers had to cope with the equivalent of two winters in one year. This is the reason for a lot of sheep in poor condition.

Add to that a heavy snowfall in July followed by the disastrous snowfall in late August when the farmers were lambing or about to lamb. These are the factors which resulted in heavy losses.

On the controversial subject of pre-lamb shearing: I am a keen advocate of this form of management, the proviso being that you have shelter and feed. When I first took my farm over I used to blade shear in October. Eleven years later I began pre-lamb shearing with machines after having established reasonable shelter. I never sustain a loss of any account. The benefits I have received were that the ewes moved into shelter, the lambs had much easier

access to the teats, and the ewes did not get cast. I contend this resulted in a 10% increase in lamb survival. In addition, the wool sold at competitive prices.

There are three vital ingredients when pre-lamb shearing – feed, shelter and management. Feed with no shelter, and shelter with no feed is useless and of course these two have to be brought together by management.

The practice we followed over the years was always to have feed, i.e. grass, turnips and giant rape, adjacent to shelter.

Shearing started around the first Monday in August with new combs. The sheep released from the counting-out pens went down a sheltered lane to where there was tucker.

At all times after shearing the sheep are considered to be at risk from the elements, and so they were never away from immediate shelter. This practice was followed for two weeks after shearing, by which times the hides had hardened.



Photo 1: Dense SW shelter with snow piled up on windward side. July 1992. Photo: D.J. Mead.

*It has been estimated that 1.2 million sheep were lost during these storms, largely in the Canterbury region.

Regarding shelter: it is well recognised that in Canterbury, where we have the hot desiccating nor-west winds, the permeable type of shelter is preferable, as it filters the wind. For cold sou'west conditions we use what I call a higher density shelter (photos 1 and 2).

The greatest form of shelter, I consider, is an agroforestry block, thinned to 240 stems per hectare and planted 25 m or so in the lee of an existing shelterbelt. The marginal trees of the agroforestry block should have their branches down to the ground, thus eliminating draft. Under each tree is an area that remains clear of snow (photo 3).

I was recently invited to return to the farm and it was very humbling to stand before the rows of shelter provided by the much maligned radiata trees. They stood erect, defiant, fulfilling their function of providing the very subsistence for farmer and stock alike.

Canterbury is not the only province to suffer badly this year, and one of the good things that has come out of this is the wonderful rallying of people from all walks of life, in support of the farming community.

Perhaps much of the cruelty lay with the elements.

P.W. Smail

(**Editor's Note:** Peter Smail is an Honorary member of the NZ Institute of Forestry and is recognised for his development and promotion of shelter on farms. Peter recently retired from farming.)

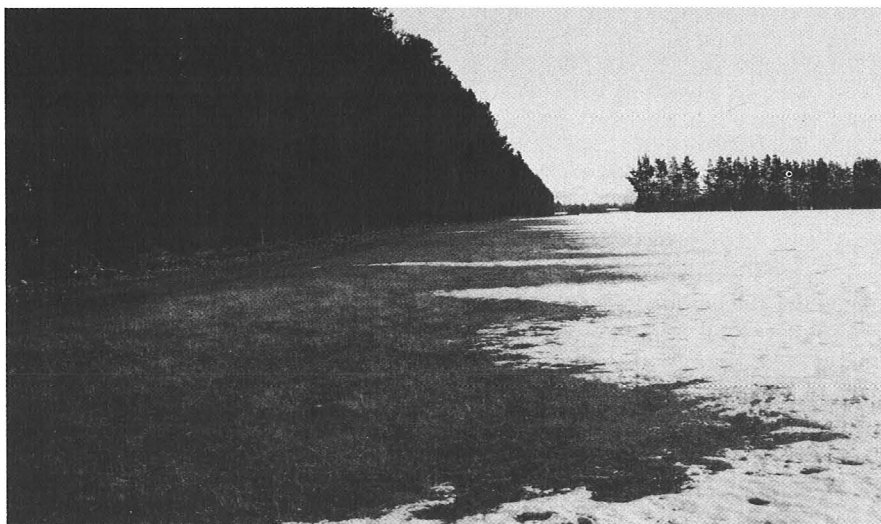


Photo 2: Dense SW shelter with snow-free area in lee. July 1992. Photo: D.J. Mead.



Photo 3: Sheep sheltering under radiata pine trees. July 1992. Photo: D.J. Mead.

Forests Amendment Bill – (un)sustainable management?

The Forests Amendment Bill is one of those wonderful exercises in double-speak so in favour with the "politically correct" these days. Its purported objective is to "promote the sustainable management of New Zealand's indigenous forests" but it sets out a system of controls, sanctions and policing that will not only defeat all attempts at rational sustainable management of most forests but will almost inevitably lead to an increase in the land area cleared of indigenous forests.

Role of the State in Sustainable Management

The State owns the most suitable forests for indigenous production but has made no attempt either to demonstrate the efficacy of the prescriptions or to carry out any ongoing research into sustainable management. Indeed the impression is that the State would rather the industry died so that it is not forced to make a conscious decision to continue

production. It is important to remember that these forests are almost the only ones in the country with a history of any form of sustainable management.

Research

There is little or no research to back up the proposed silvicultural regimes for management. A review of what is known about indigenous forest management done in 1991 by the Forest Research Institute was remarkable for its brevity. It was long on ecology but short on proven management techniques and even shorter on economics and commercial viability of proposed management systems.

The State owes it to the private owners of indigenous forests to carry out adequate research before it imposes requirements on their management. The State must demonstrate that what it is proposing will work and is not some fantasy based on wishful thinking and political influence of the extremely powerful environmental lobby.

Property Rights

There is no mention of the Treaty of Waitangi in the Bill. Perhaps this is because the Bill abrogates Treaty rights. The Minister has suggested that the Bill is not an infringement of the property rights of forest owners. Nothing could be further from the truth: this is a direct attack on property rights. Normally planning legislation preserves an existing use. The Bill takes away an existing legitimate use and replaces it with an unproven unresearched controlled use. To compound the injury, the Government does not offer any compensation or assistance for the change. Indeed they are increasing the costs of private ownership and charging the forest owner for the privilege.

An attack on property rights of this nature hasn't been seen in this country since the wholesale confiscations of Maori land last century.

The penalties for non-compliance prescribed in the Bill are excessive in the extreme, particularly since felling indi-