



Editorial

Multiple use – alive or dead?

The New Zealand forestry industry has gone through a revolution in the last decade, and many would say that the forestry profession has changed in parallel. Changed it has, as it must if it is to maintain its position in a changing society, but one can't help wondering whether the pendulum has swung a little too far, or whether society will tolerate our present position where we hear more and more acceptance of single financial objectives. A forest is not a simple system and the use of simple decision criteria must be approached with extreme caution.

Efficiency and Accountability

The debate about the profession's need to change with society's values has filled the overseas journals over the last few years. Overseas in the developed world it is driven principally by society placing an increasing value on the non-market outputs of the forest, from both State forests and the corporate estate. The emphasis on the principles of a forest producing multiple benefits is growing, though not without debate about the appropriate application of these principles. Some commentators (Roche 1992) have been at pains to argue against any differentiation between the 'social' and 'production' estate when considering the relevance of these principles.

The irony is that, in New Zealand, the change was from the opposite direction, in response to the Treasury-inspired re-emphasis on single objectives with their belief that focusing on one objective leads to more accountability and efficiency. Many feel that this has been to the detriment of non-market values, and we have yet to see any proof that greater efficiency was related to this re-emphasis (see Bilek and Mead 1991).

Accountability is another story. Most would agree that this has improved. Intangible resources don't provide easy beans to count, and separating the quantitative from the qualitative seems, on the face of it, a simple if not 'ideal' solution. However, easier measurement does not necessarily equate with better management, and that may be the crux of the issue. Treasury are in danger of confusing the objective of financial control with the objective of effective government and, like a self-ful-

filling prophecy, perhaps Treasury have proved their favourite ideological maxim that Governments do make bad managers!

That an improvement in efficiency was needed in the State sector is not in question, but the particular tactic of providing simple quantitative objectives in an environment that is, by its very nature, complex and fraught with intangible and difficult to measure elements, both ecological and social, must remain open to question.

Many foresters from both the State and private sectors are disturbed by this real or perceived over-simplification of the forest manager's role. But it may be helpful to consider that we are just another part of an overall trend. The emphasis on single objectives is another example of mankind's love of reductionism; breaking everything down into its smallest component part to such an extent that we risk losing overall understanding.

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The science restructuring is another case in point. A restructuring may well have been due, but there did not seem too much consideration of what motivates science, or of the synergies that exist in any system (or ecosystem) with complex inter-relationships. Gordon Hosking mentioned just one such synergy in his letter to NZ Forestry (May 1993). There will be more. Our growing export of forestry scientists might help draw attention to this issue.

The Profession's Roots

Behan (1990) neatly paraphrased foresters' roots when he wrote that the profession revolves around the two paradigms of sustainable yield and multiple use. He went on to argue that multiple use was too reductionist! He proposed a more holistic ecosystem approach to adjust to society's changing expectations. He termed his 'new' paradigm 'Multi-resource Forest Management'. Other writers talk about 'New Forestry' (Shepard 1990), and 'Managing for Distinctive Values' (Shands

1988), but these have been criticised as merely variations on the theme of multiple use (O'Keefe 1990). The principle of multiple forest outputs remains the same; only the application of the principle varies as social values change. You have to admit, the irony between this debate and our local experience is sweet.

But where does this debate leave the paradigm of multiple use in New Zealand forestry? These concepts, and our training, are founded on the study of ecology in its broadest sense. This extends beyond the forest to the human communities and ecosystems beyond: "Touch a flower, disturb a star..." It does not preclude the management for a primary objective, nor is timber production necessarily that primary, but it does teach us that the other forest outputs should affect our decisions.

Future Options – Proactive or Reactive?

What we should remain aware of is that the profession is responsible to all society. If we attempt to maximise a single objective without considering society's values and expectations from the forest, and without voluntarily applying constraints or sub-objectives to accommodate these requirements, then we risk society imposing them for us.

This is no less important in New Zealand than it is in any other developed country with a system of democracy and a press that is even remotely interested in digging out stories. (Just because irresponsibility is easier to get away with in the Third World doesn't make it any more acceptable there either.)

We cannot treat a forest as if it is a factory down some back street. Our forests are highly visible, both in a physical sense and as some of New Zealand's major publicly listed corporates in terms of capitalised value. We also have to remember that we live in a country of 3.5 million people (smaller than Moldova) with an extremely high media presence relative to significant events. Some days nothing much happens and the lead story on the national news may be a choice between a forest grower's indiscretion, or perceived indiscretion, and the latest nationally celebrated birth (if the baby belongs to some popular disk jockey, we won't have to worry).

A recent survey of American businesses found that most corporates were amoral; they acted neither morally, nor immorally. Forest growers and managers, with their high profile, might not be able to afford such a luxury in our changing society. Many of our private forestry companies realise this. The Forest Accord and the efforts by Tasman Forestry to accommodate landscape principles into their more highly visible felling programmes are examples.

Andrew Ezell highlighted the profession's choices in his excellent address at the Napier Conference. The regulatory option involves inflexibility, higher costs and an inherent attitude of mistrust. The option of voluntarily imposed standards using a code of practice or best management practices will, in the long run (the perspective we are trained to adopt), produce the opposite. But the voluntary approach does rely on an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect and, dare I say it, a re-acceptance that the paradigm of multiple use is still infinitely more relevant than the focus on single objectives recently imposed from outside the profession.

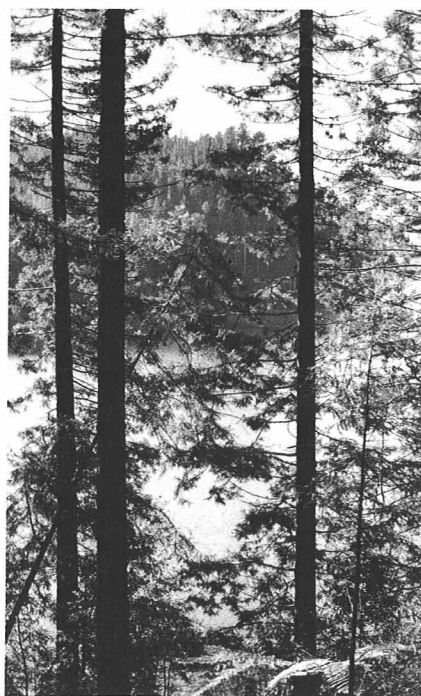
The Resource Management Act and the recently passed Health and Safety in Employment Act, are recent examples of society's standards being imposed. The Biosecurity Bill (see page 4—O'Loughlin article) may yet become another example.

Given that these standards of environmental and human health were not considered high profile 30 short years ago, what might the next 30 years bring: wildlife or recreational management provisions; access rights; species diversity by decree; no more CCA? Too alarmist perhaps ... or perhaps not?

Some New Zealand corporate foresters believe that we should anticipate society's future wants and needs and provide for them. Such a proactive approach would prevent some of the finger pointing of the past and the accusations of insensitivity and reactionary behaviour.

Rationality versus Realism

It is far too easy to assume that the paradigm of multiple use (or even sustained yield) has a diminished role in our 'new age' of forestry management. Principles that have stood the test of time since the 1700s cannot be discarded lightly. It is, regrettably, too easy for the integrity inherent within these paradigms to be rationalised away. Both require a long-term perspective, and a poorly applied discount rate can make mincemeat of them — on paper. This concern may explain the reason why the Institute has such a lively debate about over-cutting, particularly with regard to the State-owned forests. The concern is probably based on a



Douglas fir overlooking Green Lake, Whakarewarewa Forest, Rotorua. There are more issues than just profit.

healthy suspicion by foresters of politicians, their short-sighted agenda and their 'rational' advisers.

Rationality sometimes makes an uncomfortable bed fellow. Under a single financial objective at a particular discount rate it is irrational to be concerned about the site productivity potential for the next rotation let alone the rotations beyond that. Where a non-forester might argue for a 'rational' approach (i.e. mining the resource) a trained forester would argue intuitively for a more balanced approach based on the paradigms of multiple use and sustainable yield. Society is on the forester's side.

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This brings to mind a maxim that Alf Leslie introduced while Reader of Forest Economics at Canterbury University: "Economics, by definition, should reflect reality. If it doesn't reflect reality it is the economics that's wrong ... not the reality". Perhaps this is the difference between pragmatism and ideology. Pragmatism is interested in what works in the real world not in some ideal society (say where people can't impose their irrational will).

What Focus the Profession?

All this discussion raises another question. Given that one of the Institute's main focuses is excellence in forest management, should we confine ourselves to excellence in 'crop' management (where maximising some wood production value is the sole, as opposed to the primary, aim), or should we be concerned with excellence in the broadest ecological setting — including society? I would argue that the former approach is short-sighted, and potentially counterproductive to continued forest profitability and to the profession itself; a case perhaps of the profession knowing more and more about less and less (mind you, this has been given before as the definition of an 'expert'). The latter approach, however, will provide diversity and strength into the future.

Foresters are trained to view forests as complex and requiring a long-term view. The Treasury-inspired approach over-simplifies forests and applies a short-term view. This may yet prove to be an economic (and ideological?) fashion. If the forestry profession is to consider its own future, as well as that of the forests, in a rapidly changing society, then we cannot abandon the reality of forest complexity and, with it, the broad focus of multiple use forestry in its many variations. It is as relevant to the new forestry graduates as it was to the old. As society is changing more rapidly, its relevance is probably increasing.

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