



Research for profit

At the AGM a number of members commented on the role of the Institute in relation to the Royal Society and the impression that, over the past five years, we have not participated in matters concerned with Science. The reshaping of the Royal Society has taken place at a time when Government introduced a major change to the way public good Science is administered.

Since the passage of the Crown Research Institute Act there has been a perceived fundamental shift in the way research is conducted in New Zealand. This has been due to the appreciation of fund providers that there has to be an identifiable return from research investment. This has long been seen as a natural requirement of private sector funded research. It is only recently that this has become evident in Government funded work and the Crown Research Institutes are now expected to show a return on assets employed, a profit on the research activity, a subsequent dividend to Government and of course pay tax, as does any company in business for pecuniary profit. Thus the SOE mindset is imported into research.

In seeking funds from whatever source, research providers comprehend the contestable quality of the process and therefore the need to be competitive. Therefore they do not tell the competition what they are up to with consequent derogation of the importance placed on cooperation between institutes and other providers. With the entry of the universities into the race for Public Good Science Funds this will be accentuated.

In commercial competition you could expect an output to be provided at a measured cost. However even in products such as electric power or telecommunications, this "cost per unit" is difficult to measure, as parts of the system of provision are more costly than others. For example, the urban/rural cost differential is well understood. In research the measure of output cost/benefit ratio is even more difficult to measure, as it is determined more by quality of output which could well reflect more efficient or experienced researchers but is hard to quantify in a commercialised research environment with constraints as seen in the business concerns over publication of papers.

At this stage it is worthwhile to consider in a quasi-cartel environment the so-called competitive process of provision of either petrol outlets or banking facilities. At some stage of competitive selection of the fittest (i.e. more profitable) provider, the players come to the conclusion that it is not sensible to cut prices which merely reduce margins and do not increase market share. Internationally airlines are the classic example of taking this process too far. Thus we can presume this process must eventually affect research providers with a similar process of rationalisation. In a small country such as New Zealand with as much demand for a diverse range of research capability as any developed country, we should seek to avoid waste of research capability and duplication. The recent MRST move to replace the STEPS process with a New Priorities Panel suggests that the Ministry has recognised that any doctrinaire adherence to competition is "unscientific" and that some better process of ensuring funding levels, allocation and quality of research provision to meet New Zealand needs is required. We have nominated Colin O'Loughlin for this new panel.



Peter Olsen

The Institute's involvement via the Royal Society has been reinforced by Colin O'Loughlin's membership of the standing committees on:

- (a) Primary production sciences and technologies, and
- (b) Science of the NZ environment.

There is now an opportunity to examine the current research provision model and adopt a more open, less competitive coordinated use of research capability.

The involvement with the Royal Society on a more active basis will enable our profession to have a significant input to this processes of research priority setting.

P.F. Olsen
President

Obituary

John A. Hayward – 1938-1993

John Hayward, a man whose love of the land brought him into contact with many foresters and others in disciplines associated with forestry, died in Christchurch on December 9, 1993.

John was a man with eclectic interests. He began his career as a soil conservator in Otago, but took up a post at Lincoln College in 1964 with the Tussock Grasslands and Mountain Lands Institute, then under the leadership of Lance McCaskill (an Honorary member of the Institute), who had a major influence on several generations of New Zealand mountain land managers, conservationists and agriculturists. John was in due course to have the same reputation and the same effect on young men and women; they came to him as students and they left as citizens, possessing understanding of, and motivated

to care for, the land.

John's passion was the high country, the pastoral sheep stations and the land that we now know as 'conservation estate', a bureaucratic title for the tussock hills and forests which provided him with a reason for being – a reason he was always willing to share with his fellow men, for he was not averse to thinking and exploring the relationships between the land and the spiritual dimension of the human condition. It was this characteristic that perhaps above all others made him an outstanding leader, and teacher, able to question and explore issues with confidence and display an absolute conviction that, despite the problems that perforce comprised his daily teaching material, there were solutions to them, and a meaning to life. This characteristic he shared