

# Sustainable management of forests: current international debate

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During the next six months there will be a number of major international meetings discussing sustainable forest management. These include a meeting of Ministers of Forestry convened by the FAO in March and the third session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development in April. A key item of discussion at these meetings is expected to be the criteria and indicators (C&I) of sustainable management of forests. A number of countries are currently preparing C&I for their forests to be presented to the CSD meeting. The two key groups of partners in this are the Europeans who have formed into the Helsinki Group and the non-European temperate countries, including New Zealand, via the so called Montreal Process, all working toward the same objective. New Zealand has much to gain because of the opportunities it offers to identify our forest management within internationally recognised sustainability criteria.

An important outcome of the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992 was the agreement that all forests need to be managed in a sustainable manner. However, the current surge in interest has arisen more from market considerations than through a commitment to the UNCED Forest Principles.

The issue that triggered the current scale of activity for an internationally agreed set of C&I was action taken by some European countries to introduce labelling to identify timber from sustainably managed forests that enter their markets. The measure, when first introduced by Austria in 1992, was strongly objected to by major tropical timber producers, and was subsequently withdrawn. The Netherlands now seem to be moving in a similar direction. There is a growing concern among major timber producers that this trend toward certification is likely to continue and will have a major impact on their trade.

Whatever the reasons, the development of measures of sustainability for all forests is a landmark step in the effort toward stemming centuries of forest exploitation.

## The Montreal Process

Over the past 12 months New Zealand has been involved in the Montreal Process to develop criteria and indicators for sustainable management for temperate forests. So far, there have been five major meetings of the group and a sixth one, expected to be the final, was scheduled for February 2-4, 1995

in Santiago, Chile. If agreement is reached, the Montreal C&I document will be forwarded to the April session of the CSD.

The Montreal Group output contains seven criteria and associated indicators of sustainable management. The criteria cover conservation of biological diversity, maintenance of productive capacity of forest ecosystems, maintenance of forest ecosystem health and vitality, conservation and maintenance of soil and water resources, forest contribution to global carbon cycles, maintenance and enhancement of long-term multiple socio-economic benefits of forests, and the existence of an institutional and economic framework.

The following aspects of the C&I are worth noting:

- The C&I are intended to provide a common understanding of what is meant by sustainable management of temperate and boreal forests.
- They provide an international reference for policy makers for the formulation of national policies and a basis for international cooperation, especially in relation to trade in products from sustainably managed forests.
- The set of C&I is intended to apply at country level and not at a sub-national basis.
- No single criterion or indicator taken alone is an indication of sustainability: rather individual C&I should be considered in the context of other C&I.
- It is recognised that each country is unique in terms of quantity, quality and characteristics of forests as well as in relation to other key variables such as forests per capita and ownership.
- It is recognised that while it may be desirable to have quantitative indicators, such indicators alone are insufficient to measure sustainability. Some important indicators may require gathering of new or additional data or even basic research.

In cases where there are no reasonable quantitative measures for indicators, qualitative or descriptive indicators are important.

- Concepts of forest management evolve over time, based on new experiences and scientific research. As such, the criteria and indicators also need to be reviewed periodically.

It is significant that the C&I of the Helsinki Group are largely similar to those of the Montreal Process. It is expected that the UN Commission on Sustainable Development will initiate follow up which could lead in the long term to a single set of criteria and indicators which all countries could use. That should help in making valid comparisons of sustainable management between countries. It could also form the basis for a binding forestry convention or a similar international agreement. New Zealand officials have had wide-ranging discussions with the industry and environmental NGOs. These discussions have identified areas of improvement of the C&I.

## Importance for New Zealand

New Zealand has taken a different path from most other countries to sustainable management. Its protection of the vast majority of natural forests, reliance on planted forests for virtually all wood needs, the legislative framework relating to natural production forests and voluntary agreements reflect this unique character. The Montreal Group criteria of sustainable management provide us with a useful measurement at country level. They should, however, be seen as the beginning of a process rather than the final word in sustainable management. There is much that needs to be done. Subscribing to the process is futile unless the forest growers, processors and users appreciate the implications. Market opportunities for the future will increasingly be for sustainably managed wood.



## Black truffles

**"The Black Truffle" by Ian Hall, Gordon Brown and James Byars with the cooperation of Nelson Dimas. 107 p. 2nd edition 1994. ISBN 0-478-04670-7. Price \$49.95. Published by New Zealand Institute for Crop & Food Research Ltd, Christchurch.**

The authors and publisher must be highly complimented for producing this excellent book. Joint authorship by a research scientist, a journalist and a gourmet chef is most unusual, and has resulted in an unusually satisfying book which must appeal to a wide audience. The quality of the printing is first-class and the subject matter is well illustrated by numerous colour plates. The book sets out to summarise everything known about the Périgord black truffle – a delicacy familiar to those who saw the recent TV programme 'A year in Provence'. That it

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