

Report of sustainability of exotic forest yield management practice

The Institute Committee on Sustainability of Exotic Forest Yield Management Practice has not formally met in the last 12 months, but several of its members attended and contributed to a workshop on August 18, 1994 on: (1) revising the NEFD yield tables; and (2) improving the collection of forest area data. As is set out in a little more detail later, members of the Institute can be assured that there is no available evidence at the national or regional level to suggest that the exotic forest resource is being managed in any way other than sustainably in terms of harvest yield. If such evidence did come to light (the Institute membership has already suggested where things might have been going astray and should continue to do so), I would be very happy to utilise the knowledge, skills and experiences of members of the original committee to explore specific issues, if the Council so directed.

Meanwhile, the watching brief requested by the NZIF Council is being maintained through the good offices of the NEFD Steering Committee and Ministry of Forestry staff in Wellington. The National Exotic Forest Description updated to April 1, 1994 was due to be published in December 1994, but is still held up somewhere in the publication process. I sought and received photocopies of some important pages of the document and have studied the 1994 figures, highlights of which are set out below:

- The total net stocked area has risen from 1,328,000 ha as at April 1, 1993 to 1,388,000 ha as at April 1, 1994.
- This increase corresponds well with the official estimate of 61,600 ha of new planting and shows that virtually all the harvested areas had been replanted.
- The areas in the 21 to 25, 26 to 30 and 31 to 35 years all increased in the year to March 31, 1994 over those to March 31, 1993 nationally overall and in all wood supply regions except in Otago/Southland in the 21 to 25 and 31 to 35 years age classes and in Northland in the 31 to 35 years age class.
- The total area in directly captured data greater than 35 years of age dropped

slightly, however, from 28,585 ha to 24,682 ha between April 1, 1993 and April 1, 1994.

- Standing volume increased from 253 million m³ as at April 1, 1993 to 270 million m³ as at April 1, 1994.

The continuing upward trend in areas and standing volumes without any reduction in average maturity of the national resource is evidence that there is no sign of a lack of sustainability in exotic forest management practice to date. There was, however, a concerted attack by Greenpeace New Zealand to the effect that there was "proof" that exotic forestry practice in New Zealand was unsustainable. Dr O'Loughlin's analysis of this claim (NZ Forestry Feb. 95) was, in my view, a generously mild refutation of that organisation's view. When challenged at a seminar at the School of Forestry, Mr Rosoman pleaded journalistic licence for overstating his case in order to capture the attention of the public. No convincing case was in fact made to substantiate such an ill-judged claim, as was revealed at a debate sponsored by Forest and Bird at which Mr Studholme demolished Mr Rosoman's claims, with Ms Lucas also adopting a viewpoint different from Mr Rosoman's.

Other Aspects

There are, however, some other aspects of sustainability with which the Institute should concern itself:

- Area and related NEFD data not directly captured.
- Ongoing revision of the NEFD yield tables.
- Crop maturity to be emphasised more in planning harvests.
- Extension of sustainability considerations to other than just wood yield.

The first two and the last of these were discussed at some length at the NEFD Workshop on August 18, 1994. Concerns are being raised that, with the surge in new planting – statistics about which are not being captured directly – too much exotic forest area will not be documented and recorded reliably enough. Statistics New Zealand has been commissioned to conduct a sample postal survey of forest owners with less than 40 ha. Results were

expected in July, and it is hoped that these and further information collected in the Agricultural Census will enhance the quality of the NEFD survey in 1995 and beyond.

Revision of the NEFD yield tables has commenced, and an early use of this will be to produce revised wood supply forecasts sometime in 1996. Revisions of the yield tables will no doubt produce discontinuities in the harvest volume statistics, about which analysts in the future should be aware when evaluating trends in sustained yield.

The fourth aspect was one that was raised in the original report of this committee in terms of restricting the extent to which sustainability of plantation forest resources other than just wood yield should be considered. Given the availability of NEFD statistics and their suitability for evaluating wood yields, and given the experience of the last three years of reviewing these statistics, it may now be the time to reconsider inclusion of these wider aspects.

I have left the third of the above four aspects till last, because it is one that, not having consulted other committee members about it, I myself take responsibility for. Age of harvest is not necessarily a good indicator of technical maturity of wood for specific purposes. If much of the additional wood harvest is destined for export, then at some point there will be other than visual grading of out-turn. But logs are offered for sale by grade classification that emphasises log dimensions, knot size (if any) and lack of undue sweep: there is no mention of quality or maturity of wood for particular purposes. If sustainable yield is to be judged properly, log maturity will have to be included to retain buyers' credibility in a species like radiata pine.

Feedback from members on how to proceed further in these matters is once again sought, so that the Council can determine what more needs to be done, and with what priority, in order to improve the evaluation of exotic forest sustainability.

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