

LETTERS

Forestry growing pains

Sir,

Your February issue (Vol. 40 No. 4) was most interesting and almost makes me want to challenge J. Purey-Cust and invoke the scriptures! Just as Hamlet questioned the state of Denmark at that time I wonder if everything is OK with the state of forestry in New Zealand? I think not, but it is fascinating all the same. Is it really "greening the NZ forest industry" as noted by Peter Olsen, or perhaps the "green (backing) of the forest industry" or even the "groaning of the industry"? Never before have I heard such a lot of weeping and wailing by NZ foresters and associates. Now all of this could be a healthy sign, a sign of active debate and consideration, growing pains perhaps? Maybe. In fact, I think what we have seen in recent issues and especially in the February one was the result of much uncertainty, confusion and division in the forestry sector.

The recent tit-for-tat exchanges between Wink Sutton and Grant Rosoman reflect rather precious positions adopted by each. On the one hand that New Zealand's plantations were the single-handed saviours, yet biodiverse equals, of the indigenous forests. On the other that plantation forest management is ecologically bankrupt and likely to bring us all to our knees. Most sensible people know that neither of these extreme positions is true, but that somewhere in the middle is actually correct, and reasonable.

The "greening of the industry", to which the President refers, and which is being promoted at speed by the Forest Owners Association, Ministry of Forestry and others, seems to me to be very commercially and ego-driven rather than eco-driven. It is nice to be able to join the world clubs of sustainable forestry protocols like the Montreal Process. It is another thing to actually "get it together" in New Zealand forestry. Why do we need to obtain green accreditation? Quite clearly to secure and maintain our international marketing credibility. So, I am suggesting that the principal motive for greening the industry is for commercial gain. I don't object to that, as long as it is transparently stated. I do object to riding some greenwash of sustainability and international conventions for the real purpose of shareholders' profits.

I believe that New Zealand has lost its sense of forestry direction and we now have a whole bunch of Government agencies, enterprising collations like Forest Owners, Farm Forestry Association and

Indigenous Forest Owners, as well as individual forest companies, all heading off in different directions, without the benefit of overriding policy or even communication. The Government has its own short-term programmes, and some of the old hands wonder where it will all lead? The environmental and economic reforms of 1987 achieved some good and some bad outcomes. Good for efficiency, clarity and productivity. Bad for comprehensive understanding, direction and sustainability. I don't pine for the old Forest Service, though I have as many roots there as anyone. That department did at least have some notions of the future, balance in forest management, and seriously addressed a comprehensive oversight and outlook on national forestry. Once the Government separated out production from conservation forestry we started to lose the comprehensive view of national forestry that most countries still enjoy. Plantation forest managers by and large were satisfied to leave conservation to the Department set up to administer indigenous State forests. The latter, in turn, hasn't yet grasped the notion that it too is in the business of forestry. It manages more forests than anyone else in New Zealand, yet plays a very small role in discussion on New Zealand's forestry policy and protocols. The NZ Forest Owners established an Accord with environmental groups, but the plantation owners it represents do not include some new overseas owners who won't subscribe to the Forest Accord. Off to the sides, the Farm Forestry Association grows in size and stature as farmers plant more and more, mostly introduced, tree species, and an Indigenous Forest Owners association grapples with the right to harvest wood from forests of private owners. It is a surprise to me that the Ministry of Forestry, which surely has a policy and advisory role to Government, hasn't attempted to grasp the nettle of national policy and coordination, which it is quite able to do under the Resource Management Act at least. In fact, I understood that it produced a paper for the last incoming Government, saying that this is what it intended to do.

It is possible that the Institute of Forestry could make a major effort to refocus forestry in New Zealand, if the Ministry of Forestry won't address the issue. I am quite certain that the discrete organisations and associations presently pursuing their own specific forestry needs will grow further apart unless someone attempts a synthesis. We don't need private forest owners following separate directions, narrow concepts of sustainable forestry in "band-aid" statutes, conservation being thought of separately from production, or state agencies talking past each other. We do need common goals and objectives, communication, understanding and direction. A comprehensive

and strong national forestry policy which embraces the diversity of conservation, production, culture, use and profit is vital. Without it the forestry sector will continue to be divided and ruled, reduced to fighting within itself and mounting rearguard actions against farmers, local government, conservation groups and other detractors.

David Field
Rotorua

MOF response

Sir,

I agree with Dave Field's thrust.

My team's 1990 Forest Policy for New Zealand was ahead of its time. That is a commentary on our immaturity as a forestry nation – our colonial legacy. As foresters we have become defensive. Yet we are the envy of the forestry world!

It's time to look ahead.

John Valentine
Chief Executive
Ministry of Forestry

Sand forests

Sir,

I am researching the development of sand forestry in New Zealand, i.e. the stabilisation and afforestation of moving coastal dunes. I believe that an interesting story can be told of: (1) the early build-up of concern in New Zealand because of the encroachment onto farmland etc; (2) the adoption here of techniques developed by the French, Danes etc in the 18th and 19th centuries; (3) the efforts of first the Lands Department, then the Public Works Department and finally the Forest Service to tackle the problems; and (4) the current stage when the cutting rights of former State sand forests are held by companies.

In order to make the final product readable and to provide a truly comprehensive account, I would like to include human interest aspects, for instance anecdotes of humorous episodes and descriptions of some of the personalities involved.

If any members have a tale to tell about this distinctive facet of New Zealand forestry I would be most grateful for them to get in touch with me. Any such contributions used would, of course, be formally acknowledged.

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I have been thinking, too!

Sir,

Your February 1996 issue gave me more than usual interest through the juxtaposition of three articles. First, how good