

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

to see Andy Kirkland's Guest Editorial which gave positive and intelligent analysis in the usually polarised debate on the sale of State Forest assets. In particular, in a few words he encapsulated some of the real and creditable achievements of the Forest Service in its all-too-brief existence. Politicians of the day used NZFS as a whipping horse to justify reforms and sale of State assets (yes, I Have Been Thinking, too!), and never gave credit where it was due. Cheers, Andy.

Equally, Ian Spellerberg's thoughtful analysis on plantations and biodiversity was a good read. No doubt his cost-benefit table was not intended to be exhaustive, and I would add at least one further benefit of plantations to his list. This is the capacity to absorb and provide for public recreation, especially those pursuits of a nature less compatible with national parks and other more natural areas. I would include mountain biking, ORVs and other intensive and frequently motorised elements of the recreation spectrum. The value of plantations as a buffer to natural forests, and the value of artificial habitat to some wildlife, are probably understated.

The third item to catch my eye was the typically metaphor-rich prose of John Purey-Cust, which castigates Rosoman's audacity to challenge some of the shibboleths of plantation forestry. Rosoman's article was described as "... a sheet of pastry, flat and featureless ...", by contrast J.P.-C's note is a plum duff, rich in raisened metaphor, and equally bloating. Sorry, but this article, stripped to bare bones, seems to ask how dare an outsider challenge the modern maxims of foresters? While Rosoman's 1995 article was not perfect, it did generate useful debate which is not helped by *ad hominem* vituperation. One of the best roles New Zealand Forestry can play is to provide the forum for constructive debate on issues such as biodiversity, conservation and sustainability – issues which are of vital interest and concern to us all. More pastry and less plum duff, please.

Murray Hosking

Ministry's role in State asset sale

Sir,

It is a pity that the Ministry of Forestry appears to be so convinced that privatisation of State forests is the right course. It is hard to know how much of this is a real and deeply-felt emotion and how much it is just a reflection of the wishes of particular Ministers. Certainly it is almost

impossible to imagine that senior officers of the Ministry, who were recruited, trained and employed by the Forest Service, should now have no loyalty whatsoever to that organisation. We note though that never have Ministry of Forestry officers defended the Forest Service, even against such widely inaccurate and even vicious attacks as have been made recently by Mr Prebble.

The saddest part of the Ministry of Forestry's philosophy, or rather of the legislation underlining it, is that the Ministry does not seem to be able to give any independent political advice to the Government. The Government can, of course, seek the views of organisations such as the Forest Owners Association, the Timber Industry Federation, and the Farm Forestry Association, all of whom have their own axes to grind.

We have always thought that the Institute should have a role in this issue but we have been reluctant to recommend that the Institute take it up; there are too many Institute members with job or other affiliations to make this course practicable. There is still, though, a school of thought that believes that the Institute, without lessening its independence or its objectivity, could itself launch a committee of enquiry into the pros and cons of the sale and could perhaps establish some of the relevant facts which the Government cannot, or in some cases, will not, give us.

Priestley Thomson and Lindsay Poole

MOF response

Sir,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the letter from Priestley Thomson and Lindsay Poole.

In the policy arena the Ministry of Forestry's responsibility is very straightforward. The Ministry provides its best professional advice, consistent with its mission of working to ensure forestry makes the best possible contribution to New Zealand's sustainable development and economic growth. Accountability is equally straightforward – our advice is available for public scrutiny.

The Ministry's position on the sale of FCNZ was made perfectly clear in our 1993 election brief, "the sale of FCNZ needs to proceed". That was not the Government's position in the lead up to the 1993 election.

The New Zealand Forest Service's performance speaks for itself. Detractors simply can't deny what was achieved between 1919 and 1987.

I would welcome the views of the Institute, on any issue.

**John Valentine
Chief Executive
Ministry of Forestry**

INDIGENOUS FORESTRY CONSULTANTS – SEMINARS –

The Ministry of Forestry is inviting expressions of interest from Forestry Consultants in a Seminar on the Export and Sawmilling of Indigenous Timber and Sustainable Management of Indigenous Forests pursuant to the Forests Acts 1949 as amended in 1993.

Subject to sufficient interest, it is proposed that two Seminars (approx. 1/2 day in duration) be held, one in Rotorua and one in Christchurch, early in July.

Expressions of interest should be forwarded to:

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