



Editorial

What's in a name?

The New Zealand Institute of Forestry is now well on the path to providing professional registration for its members. Most people will have heard or read of the benefits or objectives of registration and the reasons why the Institute has taken this step. The most prominent factor which has moved the Institute towards registration is probably the maintenance of forestry's reputation and, indirectly, consumer protection. Now that the mechanics of the new system have been determined and put in place, it is perhaps time to turn to the question of how, or if, registration will change the way that the forestry services are delivered in New Zealand, and meet the indirect objective of consumer protection.

It could be argued that the focus of registration to date has been on processes which will establish and maintain standards. The implied course of events is that consumer protection will then follow from registration. The big leap between the two is not assured though, since there is no direct link between registration and consumer protection or good forestry practice. In a marketing sense, a product has been created which has only a general market in mind, and no clear strategy for ensuring that the product is known by and can get to the consumer.

The consumer in this case is a range of individuals and organisations who are involved in forestry and by implication are in need of input from forestry professionals. Without a clear strategy for getting the product of registered professionals into the market, the Institute is relying on the existing network of those who are familiar with the NZIF. What may limit the success of this type of diffusion, though, is the large and growing proportion of the plantation estate which is owned by individuals or organisations which have no affiliation with the NZIF or are not large enough to employ individuals who are. In a sense, it is as if registration has been developed in a way which relies on the pre-asset sales pattern of ownership of plantation forests, where virtually all plantation forests were managed by forestry professionals employed by the New Zealand Forest Service or large corporates. In that environment it would be easier to provide some type of moral suasion to give relevance to

registered professionals.

The article on professional forestry in Canada by Gordon Weetman in this issue provides an interesting contrast to the New Zealand situation. In many Canadian provinces there is a legal requirement that only a registered professional forester can carry out certain types of forestry activities. This is similar to the statutory status of engineering or accountancy in New Zealand. Even in those provinces which do not have a statutory provision for registered professionals, the dominance of government ownership of commercial forests means that moral suasion can be applied to ensure the use of forestry professionals. The concentration in government ownership in Canada is perhaps a key difference from New Zealand which would make non-statutory forestry professionalism work.

A contrast to Canada is Finland, where much of the forest resource is held in small holdings by private individuals rather than by the public. In Finland, professional forestry practices are enforced by statutory requirements concerning reforestation and silviculture. Forest owners also have a statutory requirement to contribute to local forestry associations which deal with forestry issues, although membership in the association is voluntary. In combination, these statutory requirements for good practice provide a somewhat indirect route by which forestry professionals would ensure that their services were called upon.

How then does one ensure that the non-statutory forestry professionalism being promoted by the NZIF will dominate decisions being made by a disaggregated, private forest ownership with effectively no statutory requirements (the RMA aside) as is found in New Zealand? The success of NZIF forestry professionals in the market is essential for the long-term utility of the designation, its rate of uptake among its members and the recruitment of new members. The current registration process is required for only those members who are involved in directly selling their services to the public. While the element of compulsion for some of the membership to become registered will ensure that registered forestry professionals are available, the same can-

not be said for those members who may register voluntarily or for the buying public who may or may not choose to use the services of an NZIF registered professional.

The timing of the NZIF Registered Member designation is opportune, given the widespread and growing interest in forestry and the multitude of opportunities that are being provided for professional input from planting to marketing. With little established in the market as to where and how to best obtain forestry expertise, the opportunity is there to make an NZIF Registered Member the preferred choice of consumers. For this to happen though, it will have to be realised that the NZIF Registered Member designation is a product that must be marketed like any other. Although there is always some degree of resistance among professionals against the need for marketing something as self-evident as their skills, in reality, without a statutory requirement for someone to use your services and the presence of competing (e.g. unregistered consultants), the current situation is unlikely to change. To rely on members themselves to spread the word quietly will perhaps suffice for a segment of the market, but ultimately the wider market will only be reached by broad promotions and advertising activities which create some type of brand awareness.

The proactive development of brand awareness for an NZIF Registered Member will be crucial in creating demand for their services, and market success. This in turn will make the registration programme meet the NZIF's objectives of maintaining high standards for forestry, promoting forestry's reputation and protecting consumers. The question then comes down to what is in a name. The name "NZIF Registered Member" should provide a signal to consumers that an individual is a member of and accountable to a professional forestry association in New Zealand. It should also be the name that consumers look for when selecting forestry advice. So far the name is neither. Developing the name and the reputation is the next task.

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