

The planner's perspective¹

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Introduction

The keynote speaker at the Green and Growing Seminar, Professor Wayne Cartwright presented a timely and well-focused paper on "the future conditions in which the forestry industry will operate". The "natural environment" has been identified as one of three broad picture foresight matters. Professor Cartwright suggests that Governments "remain in a curious state of denial and/or inertia" about adverse change in the natural environment.

Professor Cartwright's key concern is identified as being global warming. He argues that the forest industry cannot afford to be complacent on this and on other matters.

My experience, as a local government implementor of the Resource Management Act, is that the forest industry has been anything but complacent. A strong, usually positive but sometimes heated relationship exists between the industry and local government.

Local government is often cast as draconian and anti-forestry in their attitudes. This is both unfortunate and inappropriate. There are examples where practice could be improved. But at the same time the industry must acknowledge that local government has a duty to protect the public good and the interests of future generations. This is recognised in the Resource Management Act. It is within this Act that the interests of local government and the industry come together.

I was previously employed by the Taranaki Regional Council. A principle role of both regional and district councils is that of promoting the sustainable management of natural and physical resources. Forestry has a strong role to play in achieving that goal.

I am also a partner in a small specialist timber-growing company – mostly *Eucalyptus* and macrocarpa. The other side of the fence provides a useful perspective when judging the merit of regulatory options – whether proposed district plan provisions about amenity and landscape protection have value, whether the

cost of road upgrade is excessive or equitable, and whether we should be entitled to put logging tracks where and when it would suit our interests.

I am conscious too of the attitude of "neighbours" who, in our instance, could not believe that we would want to put the flat paddocks near the rail track in trees. I am also very conscious and have personally experienced the overlap between the resource consent responsibilities of regional and district councils.

My previous employer, the Taranaki Regional Council, had the dubious pleasure of being the first council to be involved in a 'called in' resource consent application – that being for the Taranaki Combined Cycle Power Station. The issue that justified the consent being considered by the Minister for the Environment, and not the local councillors, was a concern about the effect of additional CO₂, discharged to air from the proposed plant, on our international responsibilities under the Framework Convention for Climate Control.

I now work for Local Government New Zealand. We are a lobbyist organisation established to promote the national interests of local government – to be the national voice for local leaders. At the same time we have a responsibility to encourage collaboration and information sharing between units of local government, as a method of enhancing performance. We have developed a number of strategic goals to guide our activities. These include:

- to promote the autonomy, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness of local government;
- to enhance sector performance through collective development.

As part of the above role Local Government New Zealand contributed to the guideline document 'Commercial Forestry and the RMA' and associated works.

My principal role in this paper is to provide commentary from the local government/planner perspective. I would like to comment on other areas of the natural and physical environment where exercise of 'foresight' may expose issues and opportunities for the forestry industry.

These other areas include:

- the contribution of the forestry industry to the achievement of sustainable land use;
- the equitable contribution of the forestry industry to transport costs;
- the effect of forestry on amenity and landscape values;
- the contribution of the forestry industry to local communities.

Sustainable land use

A key issue is the contribution that forestry makes to sustaining the potential of soils to remain on hill slopes and to thereby enable future generations to have the options that the current generation has.

The fact is – gravity works. The steeper a hillside the more rapid (post clearance) the soil loss. MAF and Landcare conducted extensive research in Taranaki in the 1980s to establish a defensible relationship between slope, erosion rates, pasture production and other sustainable land-use options. A total of 56% of the Taranaki land area is subject to erosion rates categorised as severe or extreme. This land requires careful management. Forestry is a very versatile contributor to that management.

The Taranaki Regional Council is now monitoring the match between land uses that are deemed to be sustainable and actual land use. A comparison of aerial photos taken in 1974 with those taken in 1994 reveals that there has been an incremental movement away from pastoral land uses towards retirement and production forestry. Certainly the decline in the percentage of land that was being used sustainably in the period between 1974 and 1984 (approximately -4%) has been arrested.

There is significant progress still to be made. The study reveals that at least 25% of Taranaki land use is still not sustainable. Forestry will play an ongoing role in the achievement of that goal.

Sedimentation

Having stored up 28 years of erosion, through the judicious planting of trees, there is no point in then letting it all run back into the creek at year 29. There is a strong likelihood that this may occur during logging, tracking and the preparation

¹ Paper presented at the Green and Growing Seminars, Christchurch and Rotorua, February, 1997.

for replanting. The two to three years after harvesting have been shown by LIRO to contribute up to 70% of the sediment of the entire crop rotation and roads and landing contribute 80% of this load. Most in the industry recognise the need for sensible and practical strategies during these operations including:

- appropriate use of riparian buffer strips;
- planned revegetation and retirement of problem sites;
- planned tracking, loading and landing areas.

District and regional plans

With the adoption of appropriate codes of practice by the industry it could be argued that a local council should have no need to know any more about a forestry operation than they would want to know about a sheep and beef farm. Sadly, that is not the case.

I say "sadly" because I feel that there is potential for equity in treatment that hasn't yet been realised. Concerns remain about the ability of the industry to adhere to appropriate codes of practice. Concerns arise about landscape impacts and concerns arise about the impact of logging trucks on roads.

The presumption toward land use, that underpins the RMA, is that use is permitted unless it is prevented by the Act itself or by a rule in a plan. The opposite presumption applies to the activity of discharging contaminants to the environment as well as to the allocation of water and to the occupation of the bed of the coastal marine area.

These presumptions pay cognisance to traditional public and private use rights. It is only when the effects of resource use impact upon the environment, in a way that affects other values, that intervention is called for.

Local government is still going through the transition from the old Town and Country Planning Act regime to the new order entrenched within the RMA. For example, the RMA refers to the life-sustaining capacity of soils whereas the old Act talked about protecting their food-production potential. Add to that some entrenched attitudes about what constitutes 'appropriate' land use (the 'pastoral protection league') then you have a problem.

The old league are gradually being won over. The fuel for this change is mainly the market, although the effect of the advocacy of forestry associations should not be underestimated. In the hill country of Taranaki, for example, it has been suggested that after an initial period of approximately 12 years of income loss,

under current market conditions a quadrupling of income can eventually be expected from a forest farm regime.

My reading of a host of newspaper articles, recently supplied by a clipping service, suggests that the concerns of the forest industry really start to bite when forestry planting or logging is categorised as either "controlled" or "discretionary" in a district or regional plan. As a 'discretionary' activity, a council retains the right not to grant the consent or, alternatively, to grant it with additional conditions.

If the industry continues to actively participate in the development of codes of practice, and equally develops a self-policing system to provide assurance of adherence to the conditions listed in that code, then permitted use status should become more of the norm than the exception.

Landscape and amenity

The protection of valued landscapes is one of the matters of concern to district councils. You may regard the appearance of a well-tended *Pinus radiata* forest as being close to beautiful, but whether that beauty deserves to be present across the Mackenzie Country is another question. In recognition of this type of concern the Proposed Hastings District Plan has recommended that forestry be designated as a controlled activity. Various councillors have stated that forestry "camouflages the landscape" and "absorbs light rather than reflecting it". Ken Shirley, in response, argued that the plan was based on a preference to "return to an eroded landform". Ken stated that he personally "could not get excited about the bare bold hills that excited the landscape architect".

Both perspectives demonstrate that landscape judgements are value-laden. Councils are obliged to conduct processes that ensure that majority attitudes are reflected in their decision making. However, these decisions may impact on individual property owners. Land-use options may be foreclosed upon. Compensation issues arise. This point is increasingly being recognised by councils.

As part of this process, my organisation has recently, in partnership with the Department of Conservation, developed a protocol defining the respective roles of the two organisations under the RMA and urging open and early exchange of information about the values that may wish to be protected within a district plan.

The forestry industry has demonstrated that it is conscious of landscape concerns. Increasingly, pine plantations are being fronted with a cloak of more diverse species. At other locations a move away from monoculture forests is evident, with the added benefit that the risk of species –

specific diseases and pests, such as the gypsy and tussock moths – is reduced.

Roading

Concern about the impact of logging trucks on roads is another reason why many councils designate forestry as a controlled or discretionary activity. Often this designation is simply so the council can know when logs will come on stream and what the likely route of transport will be. There are simpler ways of obtaining that information. Aerial or satellite imagery can expose a wondrous array of sins.

Logging trucks can and do have more impact on roads than the 'usual' rural traffic. Differential rating options have been suggested as one means of ensuring that an equitable contribution is made to the costs of establishing that roading.

There are also examples where roading costs have been inappropriately imposed on the forestry industry. In Taranaki, for example, it seems a little unfair to hit the forestry industry with the cost of road upgrade, for 500 truck movements in 30 years, when that same road is used twice daily, every year, by the local milk tanker, without cost penalty.

Additional transport issues arise. Safety and noise are most common, particularly when the log transport route passes through small communities. Bypasses and passing lanes provide a solution. There is evidence that Transit NZ (and now Transfund) have some distance to go in developing systems that make provision for impacts in advance of them occurring. The benefit/cost approach adopted by them is not a planning instrument – rather it is used for determining the priority between competing projects. Additional tools are required, including the more extensive use of the infamous section 3D of the Transit Act.

This provision should allow the rail option to be more fully utilised. This option is also attractive from an energy efficiency perspective. Rail is four times more energy efficient than the trucking alternative. However, rail is short on essential infrastructure, is sometimes located at distance from preferred destinations and often involves double handling. As Professor Cartwright has noted: "It is difficult to perceive significant signals of change in physical transportation."

District and regional plans

There is an additional concern, about the RMA, that is well recognised by councils. This relates to the boundary of responsibility for land-use control between regional and district councils. A regional council is entitled to control land use for specified purposes including soil conservation and water quality. District councils –

are entitled to control the effects of land use. The last thing that these councils want is that each will demand a resource consent for the same aspect of a resource use activity. Opportunities exist to transfer or delegate responsibility between councils. These opportunities are being increasingly taken up.

In addition, councils are recognising the need for higher levels of cross regional and district standardisation in regard to RMA consultation, plan preparation and consent administration. I know it will be too late for some, but I can assure you that the second generation of plans will be very much more user-friendly than the first.

Additional issues

Three additional but less significant 'foresight' issues deserve passing comment. These are first, a concern about the effects of forestry on water yields, second a concern about employment opportunities and third, a concern about contaminated sites.

Research is now confirming that in

areas with a water deficit, forestry is a land use that needs to be carefully planned for. Market trade-offs are required to recognise that the planting of trees is, in effect, tantamount to the granting of a resource consent to extract water, with consequent effects on other water users.

The second issue concerns the optimising of employment opportunities. To small communities, the option of simply exporting logs without adding value seems a dreadful waste. These communities would welcome the industry taking up "techno opportunities" based upon the exercise of the "foresight about economic conditions" noted by Professor Cartwright.

The third issue concerns contaminated sites. The exercise of foresight will have the current problems avoided in the future. A recent discussion paper suggested that New Zealand has in excess of 8000 contaminated sites. About 5% of these are associated with the forestry industry. We should be planning now not only to clean

up the problems from the past but also to prevent these problems occurring in the future.

Conclusion

Global warming is an issue that we cannot put our heads in the sand about. There are additional broad picture foresight matters that may affect our natural environment. We cannot afford to deny the existence of those as well – particularly the opportunity to promote the value of forestry as a means of achieving sustainable land use. Nor should attention be diverted away from the task of establishing a value set that provides for the fair and equitable treatment of forestry within the planning instruments promulgated by local authorities.

From a 'planner's' perspective the forestry industry has much to contribute to our environment and our communities. The exercise of 'foresight' will ensure that opportunities are maximised and risks and threats are minimised.

INSTITUTE NEWS

President's comment

A sense of destiny

Attending the ANZIF Conference in Canberra in April left me with a huge sense of future destiny for both the NZIF and the IFA moving into the 21st century.

The current plantation forest area in New Zealand already occupies about 5% of the country's productive land area and its harvest will lift forest products into the number one export-earning slot. If current new land planting rates are sustained, plantations in the future could occupy up to one-quarter of the productive land by 2030 with all of the additional harvest adding to export earnings.

Australia is currently exploring the feasibility of expanding its plantation forest area from around one million ha of mainly softwoods, to around three million ha of both softwood and hardwood by 2020. That area of plantation would be capable of meeting a large part of the domestic wood demand and generating a substantial level of wood export. How much export will presumably depend on what happens to native forest harvesting in the meantime. Compared to the declining viability of pastoral farming and the withdrawal of a major area of land from productive use due to salination and other

effects, forestry across the Tasman is also likely to become an increasingly significant force in rural land use and in the economy in general.

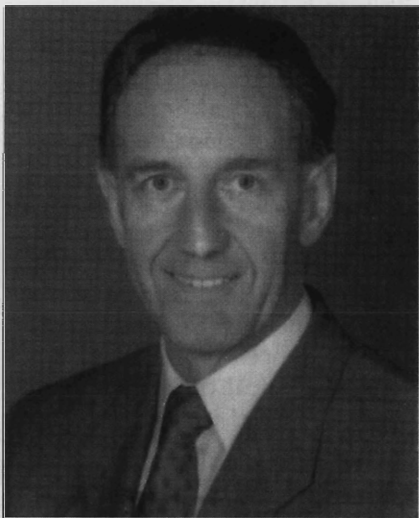
So our relatively small professional associations on each side of the Tasman (about 2000 members in total) are set to represent the basis to very significant parts of our economy and future growth. From this we need to form a mental vision of our future role and start acting and positioning ourselves to assume that leading role.

As one commentator at the conference noted: "We are what we think ourselves to be".

The NZIF has a strong and growing membership base and will exert an increasing influence in its sector and in the community through various initiatives, professional representations and local activities. Through 1997 the NZIF Council will put additional effort into promotion of its "products" (including the new registration scheme as exhorted by our Editor in the November journal).

Planning ahead

Most of the New Zealand delegates to the ANZIF Conference met briefly at the end



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of the conference and supported the propositions that:

- The next ANZIF Conference be held in Rotorua in 2001, and
- NZIF should explore opportunities for possible joint development of programmes and initiatives with IFA, including the work on standards for promotion of forestry investments, professional registration and encouragement of student interaction.

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