

Indigenous Forest report to the AGM

As the nominated convenor of the Indigenous Forest working party, I have had to accept the slow pace of developments set by availability of data in pressing ahead on indigenous forest issues.

Colin O'Loughlin has built on the work commenced under Dave Field and circulated the draft Indigenous Forest policy document. Colin has only recently reached the stage where all documents were collated and amendments built into the final (approved by the AGM — Ed.).

Major change is necessary in the estimates of area of indigenous forest, as the impact of better mapping becomes apparent and work undertaken by MOF is carried forward under the new MAF. Steve Thompson of MAF hopes to have the North Island mapping to a scale of 1:25,000 completed soon time. The South Island is still "silva indigene incognita" for Canterbury, Westland and Southland. However, sufficient of the picture is clear enough for us to make estimates.

The area of scrub reversion, secondary forest and restocked partially-felled high forest has increased, in many cases by 20% above previous estimates. The data now coming to light indicate that the high forest area is of the order of 6.5 million ha, of which about 15% is in Maori ownership. There is approximately 2.6 million ha of reverting forest in various stages of scrub growth particularly on North Island hill country farms, secondary hardwood or emerging high forest and restocked areas of forest felled but not developed. The latter includes about 700,000 ha of farm development fellings from the 1982 – 84 Muldoon Government era and allowed to revert sometimes for the second time.

The condition of all of these forests needs definition. We have been concerned for the health of high forest, particularly in the sub-alpine and high-country South Island. Here in excess of one million hectares is claimed to be damaged to the point of likely forest collapse. The work being done on mapping will provide some data on the coarse stratification of areas into broad types of forest. These may provide a crude measure of vigour or health and thus enable management decisions to be implemented.

However, mapping quality will be barely adequate to provide a capacity to stratify by forest classes which can be used to provide a baseline to monitor health and increment changes and to give Government data to satisfy international interest in sustainability, biodiversity and protection of ecological forest values.

The 1946-1956 National Forest Survey measured 16,000 plots in most production forest and these could be used as a method of quantifying change in the past 50 years. In the forthcoming history of this survey, there is a report of three examples of South Island West Coast plots being revisited by Landcare scientists who were able to observe the current forest status and record change in species composition and dominant species condition over approximately 50 years.

We should cultivate a more mature attitude to forest use which should, when linked to a secure data base, enable the management of indigenous forest over all tenures to be revisited. A revision of the Forest Amendment Act 1993 is seen as a necessary change particularly since July 1997 when the full impact of the Act's provisions became evident. The subsequent temporary glut of indigenous timber has been worked through so that recognition by the market of the true value of fine timbers is becoming evident.

As these prices rise it should follow that intrinsically-sustainable, high-cost management techniques will be economically viable.

This will ensure that small forest blocks, Maori and farmer owned could be increasingly drawn into a nationally significant production network. This would reduce New Zealand dependence on unsustainable cutting of tropical rainforest for high-quality cabinet timber, while adhering domestically to internationally defensible sustainable practices.

The linkage of sustainability of timber

production to almost total reliance on plantation forests is recognised in the NZ forest industry approach to the post — Montreal international debate on forest management. Arguments with NGO's on auditing by ISO 14001 versus Forest Stewardship Council methods have been influenced by the global concern with over-cutting of mainly tropical rainforest and the need to institute and monitor methods of management of indigenous forest. There has been a tendency by some NZ protagonists to distance themselves from indigenous forest management, portraying a reliance on plantation forest as some protection from NGO strictures on management and audit methods. The current Forest Industries Council approach recognises how barren this approach may be and indeed the greater risks associated with falling into the trap of the "Tree Farm" as a category of agriculture. Their view is that the role of all forests should be part of a national sustainable management ethic.

Graham Whyte has for some time espoused a more holistic approach to New Zealand forest management protocol, whereby the interdependent role of all forests, irrespective of species or tenure, is recognised in any statement on national forest policy. Council has recognised this in its recommendations for the incoming Council.

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Vice President NZIF
(Slightly edited — Ed.)

NZIF Code of Ethics

At the 1998 Annual General Meeting in Wanganui changes to the code of ethics were ratified. The proposed revision had been sent to members and this version was accepted with the following alterations:

Section 1.5 and section 6.4:

The words "other documents" were included.

Section 1.7:

The words "independence and impartiality" were replaced by "integrity" in the first sentence and in section 1.7(a).

Section 8:

This was deleted.