

CSIRO research receives high marks

An independent evaluation of CSIRO research for the forestry, wood and paper industries sector has found the economic benefits from a range of projects far outweigh costs. It also reported consistently positive feedback from research users.

Dr Noel Sullivan of the consultancy Sultech conducted the study earlier this year. Research areas and topics covered were: fire behaviour and management; genetic improvement of radiata pine; waste management using plantation systems; hardwood utilisation; pulpwood quality; intensive management of regrowth forests; and carbon and energy from wood residues.

Interviews with clients and collaborators provided qualitative assessments of research activities within each area. Benefit/cost analyses were undertaken for five projects; others were not amenable to such quantitative analysis because the benefits, mostly social or environmental, cannot be readily measured.

Dr Sullivan reported that assessments of the significance, quality and impact of the research by clients and collaborators were consistently positive. "Several examples were given where the CSIRO contribution was rated as vital, with comment that the objective would not have been attained without CSIRO's contribution," he wrote.

Comments on research on fire behaviour and management, for example, included: "The CSIRO research on grassland fire behaviour has been recognised internationally as providing vitally important new information on fire spread rates" and "Research conducted by CSIRO on the safety and effectiveness of fire-fighting with hand tools has had a major impact both nationally and internationally."

The benefit/cost studies found that, when the five research projects examined were taken together, the most likely scenarios saw benefits outstripping costs by a factor of 22.

Research on irrigation of tree plantations with treated sewage effluent was the star performer, with a most probable benefit/cost ratio of 44. Qualitative assessments of this work included comment that the research team's commitment to, and engagement with, potential users had been exemplary and of major benefit. "The outcome has been a wide-scale acceptance of the results with significant uptake already taking place within the Murray-Darling Basin."

All the quantitative assessments produced benefit/cost ratios of 15 or greater. For the other four projects the figures were: use of molecular markers to select for desirable traits in radiata pine breeding - 31; production of high quality metallurgical charcoal from jarrah wood - 24; radiata pine breeding leading to higher-volume harvests - 16; and development of technologies enabling use of Victorian hardwoods in furniture - 15.

Details of the research considered, the responses from clients and collaborators and the benefit/cost analyses are presented in the recently published report of the study, which is available free of charge from CSIRO Forestry and Forest Products.

Members invited to enter awards

Members are invited to consider making nominations and/or applications for the following awards and scholarships.

Applications

Please forward these to the National Secretariat by the closing date of Monday 20th March, 2000.

Chavasse (travel)

Availability - Honorary, Registered or Full members interested in travelling overseas (or bringing overseas speakers to NZ)

Procedure - written applications detailing country, timing, interests, itinerary and budget. Determined by NZIF panel. Up to \$3,500. Travel to take place prior to 31 March of the following year.

Balneaves (travel)

Availability - Open to anyone in forestry sector who is of good integrity, active in plantation research, with 10 years of professional activity ahead of them, in possession of good communication skills and with an interest and ability in establishing relationships.

Procedure - Determined by NZIF, NZFOA and Forest Research on application. Minimum \$5,000 for travel in year of being awarded.

Forester of the Year (excellence)

Availability - Open to anyone in forestry sector with 10 years' professional experience, integrity, communications skills and enthusiasm.

Procedure - Awarded on the basis of material delivered on any topic within the broad field of forestry using tangible communication techniques. Entries judged on ability to communicate the subject. Name engraved on (ex-Forest Service) carving and certificate.

Scholarships

As well as the above awards, there are two forestry scholarships available as follows:

Frank Hutchinson

Availability - Any NZ University

Procedure - post graduate application for \$1000

Mary Sutherland

Availability - NZ Polytechnic

Procedure - forest student application for \$1000

Applications close 31 March. There are no formal application forms. Selection is based on a 3 page submission by each candidate. Criteria for selection are aptitude, personality, community service, financial need and relevance of the course to the profession of forestry.

The awards' referees committee will make its selection in time for the recipients to be announced at AGM/Conference in April but the recipients will receive their awards at an appropriate local section meeting following the AGM. Further information can be obtained from the National Secretariat.