biotechnology research they are involved in will have an adverse effect on human health, as conifers are rarely part of the human diet. In terms of potential environmental impacts, Radiata pine is the main species targeted for genetic engineering. One concern raised about genetically engineered Radiata pine is transgene transfer through pollen, that would result in fertilisation of susceptible recipient plants, resulting in the formation of a novel plant that would have an adverse effect on the environment or biodiversity. Forest Research says that this is not a major concern for field trial experiments where the numbers involved are relatively low and successful transgene transfer through pollen appears highly unlikely. In general, Radiata pine when grown in New Zealand as an exotic plantation crop, does not hybridise with any native plant species and it can only cross naturally with one other species of pine (*Pinus attenuata*). Radiata pine pollen is usually distributed by wind and the majority of pollen does not travel further than about 500 meters. In the case of large scale plantations of genetically engineered trees there would need to be an assessment of the likelihood of pollen transfer, subsequent fertilization and formation of a novel organism posing a threat.

In a similar way, NZFIC states that the mix of costs, risks and benefits for each potential application of the technology means that there should be an individual assessment of each case (e.g. the product) rather than some blanket application of a policy. Greenpeace's reaction to the "responsive, case-by-case policy on genetic engineering" is that it in effect reflects an "absence of proactive, systems-based approaches to societal needs and problems, whereby all the options are considered, before a particular course of action is chosen." What is implied in this is that the case-by-case approach lacks any underlying societal consideration of the vision that we have for agriculture, forestry or medicine, and whether genetic engineering has a place in that vision. In other words, the interpretation of the case-by-case approach to genetic engineering, is that it operates in a moral vacuum and on the "erroneous operating principle" that the ends justify the means. The key concern here seems to be that case-by-case is identified as being synonymous with secrecy and an erosion of the "democratic rights of the public to shape society, and the role and activities of our scientific institutions." Two fundamentally different paradigms looking at the same issue.

One other issue identified by NZFIC was the effect of any domestic regulatory regime related to genetically modified organisms on New Zealand's international trade. The industry has been involved lowering impediments to trade, including tariff and non-tariff barriers. The industry's concern is that domestic regulations do not present a non-tariff barrier. NZFIC's view is that a domestic regulatory regime for genetically modified organisms should be consistent with WTO obligations, and as well as be developed through an internationally binding multi-lateral environment agreement covering trade in biotechnology and associated products. Domestic regulation of the import and export of the

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letters

Anegre affair highlights native timber quandary

Sir,

The Hon Jonathan Hunt's embarrassment during March about anegre, a hardwood from Africa, being used to replace tawa panelling in the Beehive reminds me of an incident of thirty years ago which had not been made public.

During 1969/70 while the Beehive was being built I was working as Private Secretary to the Minister of Forests.

Whilst sorting papers in preparation for a forthcoming meeting of Cabinet opportunity was given for me to ask the Minister why the Government architects were prescribing Malaysian hardwoods to panel the Beehive.

Hon Duncan McIntyre somewhat indignantly asked Cabinet what message would be given to the people of New Zealand by using overseas substitutes for our own beautiful indigenous timbers.

As a consequence the panelling which survived the first 30 years of the Beehive was tawa.

This time the desire to eschew our beautiful indigenous timbers for refurbishing the Beehive is being driven by our Prime Minister.

Concurrently sustainably certified silver beech, eminently suitable for panelling, is being exported to China to make tool handles for the UK market because no one in New Zealand is willing to buy it.

Peter Allan

Professorial wisdom recalled

Sir,

When reading the N.Z. Journal of Forestry 45(4) I was reminded of a favourite saying of my late Professor of Forestry. "On his first five year tour in India the graduate was worth nothing. On his second five-year tour he was worth half what they paid him. But on his third five-year tour he was worth four times what they paid him." Now, graduates think they are "instant" experts!

The forest models all contain the effects of variability: but do they also allow for edge effects, and effects of 'Acts of God'? When I first ran Forestry in the Solomons I was at the equivalent of the end of my second five-year tour in India, but when I ran Forestry again I was in the equivalent of my third five-year tour in India. So I understand my late Professor's adage.

K.D. Marten