First Indigenous Standards meeting

Roger May
ISTC Interim Coordinator and FSC Member

The first meeting of the Indigenous Standards Technical Committee (ISTC) was held in late October at Canterbury University School of Forestry, five months after the inaugural National Initiative meeting in Rotorua agreed to establish an Interim National Initiative Working Group and two Technical Committees – Plantation Management Standards and Indigenous Forest Management Standards.

The ISTC meeting was attended by seven of the eight elected representatives from the Maori, Economic, and Social Chambers together with members of the Indigenous Forest Certification Steering Group (IFCSG) and other stakeholders. (Since the middle of 1998, the IFCSG has worked to develop indigenous forest management standards and is now the channel for Sustainable Farming Fund funding for the ISTC.)

The ISTC Social Chamber representatives are Tony Newton, Clive Anstey, and Colin O'Loughlin. The ISTC Economic Chamber representatives are Iain Macdonald, Kit Richards, and Roger May. The Maori Chamber has two interim representatives selected for the ISTC and is looking for a third. The two are Nigel Scott and John Southerwood. As yet, there are no Environmental Chamber representatives to the ISTC.

Key Environmental Groups Decline to Participate on ISTC

The first meeting of the ISTC took place with no representation from the Environmental Chamber despite advanced invitations. A month before, in a letter to the National Initiative Working Group (the Technical Committee's parent body), dated 5 September 2001, the Environmental Chamber outlined its position:

"The environment chamber will not be putting forward representatives to an indigenous forest management technical committee.

Three issues in particular relate to this:

a) *While there is a desire by some of the environment groups to engage in debate over indigenous forests, the general feeling is that this debate should focus on restoration.*
b) *There is support by some eNGOs for plantation native species, but this would be dealt with under the plantation standards.*
c) *The timing for discussion of further logging of native forests is wrong. The Timberlands WC debate is still fresh in peoples mind, (the certification of TWC plantation forests last month threatened to derail the whole FSC process and has resulted in a formal objection to the certification). With this degree of controversy a national standards setting process for indigenous forest management would likely get bogged down and not be a productive process or a good use of the limited time and resources of the eNGOs which are currently focused on the plantation process."*

Despite this explanation, many stakeholders with an interest in indigenous forestry are still at pains to understand why Forest & Bird and other key eNGO's are not taking the opportunity to discuss and debate meaningful standards for indigenous forestry.

Their position seems at odds with their conservation ethic given that there are over 500,000 hectares of indigenous forests in private ownership throughout the country with a legal option for sustainable productive management. This stance is even more paradoxical given that such forests under certified management are bound, in specific terms, to maintain ecosystem values and functions and to adhere to a comprehensive range of conservation, protection and restoration management principles, criteria and practices.

Irrespective of their reasons, the ISTC and other stakeholders hold serious concerns about the Environmental Chamber's handling of this decision in relation to Forest Stewardship Council National Initiative Guidelines and the eNGO's collective approach to vetoing participation in the ISTC by any environmental stakeholder.

These concerns have been documented and relayed to the NI Working Group and are being followed up. As a result, the ISTC is now considering conciliation in an effort to bring about meaningful dialogue with these stakeholders. The involvement of Environmental Chamber stakeholders in developing indigenous Standards under FSC is critical to the endorsement of those Standards by FSC.

Draft Standards

The Indigenous Forest Certification Steering Group agreed in June 2001 to sponsor the preparation of a discussion draft of Indigenous Forest Management Standards. This was done with support from the Indigenous Forest Section of the New Zealand Farm Forestry Association. The draft document was tabled at the first meeting of the Indigenous Standards Technical Committee. While copies have been sent to members of the National Initiative Working Group and both Standards Technical Committees, the ISTC is presently preparing a set of procedures for distributing the document more widely, soliciting comment, and for dealing with stakeholders comment as part of a comprehensive consultation process.

The Plantation Standards Technical Committee released its first public version of the draft Plantation Standards in early November. Comments on this draft were to be submitted to the PSTC by early December however, this deadline has now been extended to the end of April 2002.

A copy of both draft Standards is available on the NZIF website at www.forestry.org.nz under "news".

Application for Registration

The following have applied to have their five-yearly consultant review:

Jon Finlay Dey
Paul Malloy
Robert Roy Miller
Robert Forrest Pocknall

The Registrar, NZIF Restration Board,
PO Box 1860, WHANGAREI