

NZIF celebrates 75th anniversary

Bill Studholme*

The Institute History

The New Zealand Institute of Forestry was founded in 1927 to provide a forum where those involved in forest management, utilisation, research and consulting could exchange ideas and information and keep up to date with industry trends.

Seventeen prospective members interested in forming and discussing "preliminary matters regarding the formation of a Society of Professional Foresters in New Zealand." met in Wellington on the 27th April 1927. It is significant that all, apart from Charles Foweraker the lecturer in charge of the School of Forestry Canterbury College, were employees of the New Zealand State Forest Service. The issues addressed and debated included:

1. Has the time arrived when the formation of such a society is desirable?
2. The meaning of the term "Professional Forester"
3. The aims and objects of the Society.
4. Should there be five classes of membership: Honorary, Active, Associate, Student, Life.
5. The qualifications for election of candidates into the main three classes: Active, Associate, Student.

The following day, 28th April 1927, with the inclusion of five others, two from private plantation companies, the Professor of the Auckland School of Forestry, a lecturer from Canterbury School of Forestry and a further member of the State Forest Service, 17 Chapter members were appointed. Five of those at the meeting of the previous day declined Chapter Membership.

Development

As the industry developed so too did the vital role of the Institute, which in itself is a vital component to the very development of an industry that has continued to evolve and develop almost beyond recognition since its earliest days.

There have been quantum leaps in the quality and focus of silvicultural and general management practice since those early days. While the underlying principles remain the same, the achievement of those principles can be directed with a precision and accuracy that would have turned the MacIntosh Ellis, Arnold Hanssons, Mary Sutherlands, Fowerakers, Hutchinsons and Goudies green with envy.

I am convinced that in 75 years time the same will be said of the Thorpes, Sands, McLeans, Suttons, Bergs and Boyds. The gurus of today inevitably evolve into the legends of tomorrow.

Membership of the New Zealand Institute of Forestry is the professional acknowledgement of high levels of competence gained through education, experience and ability and is seen as evidence of a member's commitment



Lindsay Poole and Tim Thorpe cut the NZIF 75th Anniversary cake.

to professional practices and values.

Over the years, as well as the stimulus of debate with, and the fellowship of, colleagues, the Institute has encouraged the highest standards of ethical and professional performance amongst its members. Not always in a direction acceptable to all members.

In June 1973, Curt Gleason was one of the more energetic and thinking foresters of an age when energy, particularly intellectual energy coupled with a broad wave of general espousing of 'revolutionary ideals', was becoming the norm. At a time when the whole debate around "professionalism" was emerging, Curt posed the question: "were the criteria for admission to full membership ... far too severe on the general-division person?" In answering his own question, Curt felt that "the public is more likely to take note of a society made up of widely experienced men enthusiastic about forestry than it is of a lesser number of intellectual elite flashing letters behind their names."

By 1988, Curt's arguments were debated at the AGM where it was resolved that the name NZ Institute of Foresters be changed to the NZ Institute of Forestry. It was Curt's view that forestry, defined by the OED as "Wooded country. The science and art of forming and cultivating forests, management of growing timber", was more inclusive and appropriate of the function of the Institute, rather than identifying that function as embraced by the term forester, defined in the OED as "An officer having charge of a forest also one who looks after the growing timber on an estate", a term that carried elitist and constricting connotations.

I often wonder what far-reaching reforms Curt Gleason would have wrought had not a tragic accident cut short his most promising career and denied the Institute of a very energetic President and the industry of a most thoughtful forester.

As an organization, the Institute has continually

* Speech delivered at ANZIF Conference dinner in Queenstown on 29 April, 2003.

demonstrated its commitment to serve the practice of forestry and the wider community through education, accountability, and its codes of ethics and performance standards. Increasingly the Institute fulfils a quality assurance role, setting the benchmark for professionalism, quality of advice, and practice by which members and others in the profession may be measured.

Milestones

There have been a number and variety of the distinct phases in the rotation of the Institute, which in its formative years was very much an adjunct of the State Forest Service. At all times the Institute sought an independent stance, a sometimes difficult position given its closeness and dependence on the good offices of the Forest Service for its succour and survival for its formative first fifty years.

The 1980s were difficult times for the Institute as the New Zealand tree growing industry was carved up and the parts repositioned by the state which required the commercially productive bits to run in a purely commercial manner, while the conservation functions that had been so carefully nurtured by the Forest Service model were isolated from the contamination of commercialism and placed in DOC.

Policy functions were moved to a small Ministry which ultimately merged with Agriculture. Purest political treatment of the limited production from the extensive indigenous forests proved difficult to maintain and, in my view, that debate has not yet reached finality.

I wish to remind you of the prophetic editorial in the Journal Vol 30 (2) 1985 written in the wake of the then fresh reforms of the forest sector. The editor of the time, John Purey-Cust, observed in his indubitable manner the disquiet, concern, and dismay of a number of long standing members caught up in the reforms. Members, he observed, whose world had been turned upside down with no recognition for past battles fought or for the distance forestry had moved since the founding of the State Forest Service in 1920.

Purey-Cust observed that the flies of the winds of change have danced across the icing on the cake and that it has been thrown out, but there remains a strong foundation on which to build. He noted that the Institute had always been very concerned by its visible overlap with the Forest Service. Given the size of the industry and the dominance of the Forest Service within it, he felt that that was inevitable, but that it did appear to the outsider an incestuous relationship whose ending should not be regretted.

Forestry he claimed is a national matter so that the Institute is now free to work as it sees best for forestry in New Zealand. Forestry will not, Purey-Cust predicted, be such a cosy world but it will be a more challenging one, and it will be one where forestry has come of age. In his view, the changes had been based on vote pulling and economic theory, not on the worth of trees, a subject little understood but one that the Institute, he felt, needed

to address.

People

The names of the Presidents of old exemplify the old club atmosphere. From MacIntosh Ellis elected in 1927, to Bruce Childs in 1976, the NZIF was a very tight organisation. Forestry was for foresters and not explained well to, nor largely understood, by the person in the street. This tight club-like organisation can however be very proud of its achievements. It was responsible for the retention by 1985 of forests on 27% of New Zealand's land area, and laid the foundation for the increase to 31% of the total land area that is forested today.

I should really read you the list of all past Presidents of the Institute but time does not permit. Some of the people worthy of a mention are: Arnold Hansson, Charles E. Foweraker, A. N. Perham, C. M. Smith, M. R. Skipworth, Mary Sutherland - the only woman to become President of what was then a male dominated Club. I must mention my old sparing partner Arthur Cooney whose exploits at NZIF meetings with Dave Kennedy and A. P. Thomson were the stuff of legend, Frank E Hutchinson an educator and friend of all, and of course Lindsay Poole whose contribution to the understanding of plants, the profession of forestry, and indeed to the Nation have been as inspirational as they have been enormous. Lindsay is indeed a living legend.

John Groome, Tony Grayburn and Peter McKelvey have in their own ways made and are still making significant contributions to the professionalism of New Zealand forestry. John was the first of 7 members considered by the then Council qualified to become Forest Consultants and appointed at the 1966 AGM. John was the power behind the thrust to consultant recognition.

It is no coincidence that this initial recognition of professionalism took place at the same time that Tony Grayburn who, having cut his teeth on *Sciadopitys* in Japan and become one of the pillars of the profession and the industry, was elected President.

Peter McKelvey's efforts in the initial and continuing development of professional forestry education provides the tone for the industry that will still be felt generation from now.

Conclusions

It is good to wallow in nostalgia from time to time. It is as essential as it is to plan and position for the future too. The New Zealand Institute of Forestry will continue to be at the vanguard of the industry development. The future of forestry, given the quality of participants at this conference and given the myriad of opportunities and challenges that the industry continues to offer, is bright.