

An editor's swansong

I have greatly enjoyed my three years as editor of the NZ Journal of Forestry, and it is now time for me to step down.

While being editor is hard work, it is also immensely satisfying. My favorite issue was one on bio-ethics in February 2007, an issue that many of you also appreciated, judging by the congratulations you sent me. Your congratulations were duly passed on to the authors and the publisher.

The Journal has changed somewhat with the advent of the NZIF Newsletter. We live in an immediate age, of fast trips, of immediate deliveries from web-based orders, and our society's perspective has shortened in line with heightened expectations of short-term gratification. How then should a quarterly, hard copy journal respond, particularly one that addresses a long-term enterprise? Firstly, the Journal has ceded lots of immediate stuff to the Newsletter, such as reactions to passing issues, schedules of meetings, job advertisements, news from NZIF sections, and on-going chatter between members. Secondly, it has developed a web presence, thanks to Andrew McEwen who organised and solicited contributions from those members who financed the project and Jon Sullivan and Steve Pawson who largely implemented it. Thirdly, the Journal has been refocused on articles that record new research, discuss issues of lasting importance, or that contain other information the really needs to be recorded in hardcopy for posterity. Fourthly, I have tried to speed up the publication process, so that authors could realistically hope to see their articles in print within two months of submission. This has not always been possible, but for many articles we have achieved it.

Inevitably I have received a small number of brickbats during my tenure, and I've always published those. Generally the authors made valid points and I've done my best to improve where possible.

Probably the greatest misconception about the editor's role is that I sifted through large volumes of submitted papers, rejecting many and selecting those that fitted my preconceptions. The reality is that I decided on a theme for an issue, and then tapped some shoulders to try to get a broad, professional coverage of the topic. In addition, some material was sent to me that was first rate but off-topic, and that is why a journal theme rarely filled an entire issue. From time to time I received articles that really didn't belong in the Journal. Sometimes they were miles off-topic (my favorite was one about mushroom culture in a tropical country - I know, I'll now be flooded with letters from readers who would have appreciated that!), and in other cases they didn't pass the refereeing process. I retained the "Professional Paper" category for unrefereed articles, because NZIF members are mostly non-scientists and that format was more accessible to them. Ostensibly



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it was my prerogative to either accept or reject those, and I rejected less than a handful during my tenure (if there was any question about them then I either sent them to the editorial board or to referees).

I would like to thank many people for your help and support with the journal: All the fine authors who generously committed their time to write articles; the reviewers who spent valuable hours vetting authors' efforts; the Editorial Board that comprised Hugh Bigsby, Bruce Manley, Piers Maclaren and Colin O'Loughlin; those who advertised in the Journal; and those responsible for placing it on-line. Special thanks need to go to the Publisher, Mike Smith. Mike is absolutely committed to the Journal, and frequently goes beyond the call of duty in accommodating format changes, designing layouts, coping with last-minute changes, and proposing improvements. He also greatly expanded advertising in recent issues so that readers do not end up supporting the entire cost of publication. Finally, I would like to thank you, readers of the Journal, for your loyalty, your trust, and your commentary.

Given that I am so committed to the Journal and that I enjoyed being editor, you might be wondering why I am relinquishing the role. Two factors motivate me. Firstly, "Editor for life" would be as destabilising and destructive as any "President for life". I know of a society with a firmly entrenched "President for life", and the results are not pretty. A new editor can bring new ideas to the task and keep the journal from becoming a "same old". Secondly, I am blessed with a rich and demanding career as an academic, with many postgraduate students, rewarding undergraduate teaching, and a long list of research papers that really need to be published. If I continued as editor then some of them might never be published. Nevertheless, I'll miss editing the Journal, and I'll happily continue to support my replacement by being on the Editorial Board if he and the NZIF Council so wishes.

Piers Maclaren has agreed to take up the role of editor. Piers is a great writer, a deep thinker, and he is as committed to forestry as I am. He will do a superb job, and so I know I'm leaving the journal in good hands.

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