

Māori forestry – more than landlords and labourers?

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This issue has the theme 'Māori forestry'. Currently about 25 per cent of the plantation resource is established on Māori-owned land. Geoff Thorp suggests that following future successful Treaty claims this might rise to almost 700,000 hectares, 40 per cent of the current 1.7 million hectares. This area would have a long-term sustainable yield of some 12 million cubic metres per year if a mean annual increment (MAI) of 17 cubic metres per hectare per year was used (derived from the National Exotic Forest Description, NEFD, for those stands recently harvested). It could be considerably more if one shares my view that the MAI will rise when the younger stands mature.

Multiply this yield by whatever gross unit value you believe will be achieved at mill or port gate and the contribution to the New Zealand economy is substantial. Moreover, two-thirds of forest sector workers are Māori. Production forestry provides employment to Māori in rural areas and cultural and spiritual links to the land. The use of independent contractors offers Māori workers opportunities to develop as small business owners, perhaps not so small when a mechanised operation has several million dollars of equipment.

But is there any real difference between Māori forestry and New Zealand 'conventional' forestry? For the larger forest estates with a high percentage of radiata, such as Lake Taupo and Kaingaroa, perhaps not much – spiritual links, multiple shareholders and permanent land ownership notwithstanding. After all, seedlings need to be planted well regardless of who plants them and logging carried out as efficiently as possible.

However if you read the four articles carefully then I would suggest that for the smaller Māori trusts at least, with high percentages of indigenous reserves, there will be a substantial difference should the landowners decide to own the trees as well as the land. Whereas the likes of a Timber Investment Management Organization (TIMO) or a vertically-integrated forest management company regards the indigenous reserves as constraints on the economic management of the exotics, Māori owners aspire to manage the whole of the forest, indigenous and exotic, in an all-inclusive holistic way. This might include harvesting indigenous trees sustainably with continuous forest cover and a long rotation for an economic return.

Mānuka Hēnare says the ideal would be to greatly reduce dependence on radiata, creating a new forest system incorporating culturally important species. His suggested 100-year planning horizon may be too short, given the constraints incurred by the Crown Forest Licences and the economic reality described by Geoff Thorp and Mark Forman. The need for economies of scale should encourage the Māori smaller-scale forest owners to cooperate, in the

way of Scandinavian forest owners or of New Zealand dairy farmers. Södra, the South Swedish forestry cooperative, has over 50,000 forest owners and owns 10 sawmills and three pulpmills, providing dividend income additional to that from the sale of logs. Would their experience be of value to Māori?

Lania Holt and Peter Bennett describe research needs for Māori forestry, emphasising research into a wider range of species and silvicultural systems than clear felling radiata pine, especially the need for indigenous species. They comment that the Māori research priorities of 2007 are clearly different to those of the New Zealand forest industry, highlighted by the unfortunate decision of the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment not to fund Future Forests Research/Scion's 'emerging species' research bid that included indigenous species.

Māori forestry is concerned with the employment and the welfare of its landowners working in their forests. The current number of forestry fatalities is too high, regardless of whether the rate per million tonnes harvested is not increasing. If this continues, then within the term of the next government there will be as many deaths as in the Pike River Mine tragedy. It is not acceptable to use 'human error' as an excuse. Harvesting work on the ground is physically demanding and during a long day the potential for mistakes or downright foolishness is high.

Much has been done to raise safety awareness. While not discounting the benefits of daily tail-gate meetings, hazard identification, manuals and records, safety apparel and the like, the only way to now make the forest workplace substantially safer is to get the workers 'off the ground', to mechanise logging, placing a worker in the comparative safety of a strong cab. Currently it is not understood how to do this across all of New Zealand, especially in steep country. The amount that government and industry fund research into harvesting mechanisation is risible, the career of a harvesting researcher uncertain, and the funding model unstable.

Finally, the Journal is a key method for transferring research to professionals. This issue contains three welcome, submitted technical papers. While none of these articles have been refereed, the Journal is prepared to peer review papers when asked and encourages such requests. Perhaps research funding agencies and the likes of Scion, Landcare and universities might recognise that publishing in this Journal *in a form that is enjoyably readable* is likely to have a greater impact on New Zealand practice than in some prestigious 'high impact factor' international journal read by a couple of Kiwi academics.