

# International forestry and the need for forest policy

Chris Goulding

It is one year since the Journal had as its theme the 1913 Royal Commission on Forestry that led to a New Zealand Forest Policy and the 1921 Forest Act. Over the last year, New Zealand became the largest exporter of raw unprocessed logs in the world, overtaking Russia or, in different words, the absolute worst developed country for processing its own forest products. The President of the Institute of Forestry repeated his call for a forest policy applicable to today – to no avail.

This May 2014 issue of the Journal has a theme of New Zealand's place in international forestry. Of the wide range in subject matter that this theme could cover, the six papers concentrate on the need for forest policy to improve sustainable management, particularly in the South East Asia and Pacific regions. Jim Carle describes the FAO's global role, while Alan Reid provides a view on how New Zealand contributes to international conventions and processes in its engagement with international forest policy. Chris Brown and Patrick Durst write that international forestry dialogues are carried out under a broader umbrella of sustainable development. Ian Armitage describes the influences on the management of forests in national development within the Asia-Pacific region, suggesting that a forest policy covering all New Zealand's forests would strengthen its long-term sustainable management.

John Halkett writes about the importance of South East Asian tropical jungles and the need for policies and practices that create circumstances where natural forests are seen as an economic asset, not a liability, with everyone having a vested interest in keeping the trees standing. The role of forest certification in improving on-the-ground performance and reducing loss and degradation of forests is James Griffiths' topic, echoed by Kit Richards' last word on forest cover reducing the erosion effects of storms. Kit also points out that over half of New Zealand's production forests are already certified under the Forest Stewardship Council.

Sustainable forests are of international concern and the wood products market is global. The clearance of forests affects us, whether the destruction of tropical natural forest jungles or the replacement of pine trees by dairy pasture. Similarly, the state of the new housing market in the United States or China is of concern, as

is the ability of the Nordic countries to competitively sell timber into Australia. New Zealand needs to be well aware of the forest environment, wood processing demand and capabilities, and the forest policies of other countries.

Despite the experience evident in this issue's papers, and the overseas ownership of much of the sector, is New Zealand forestry becoming insular? This country long ago lost its leadership in intensive forest management. Sub-tropical forest plantations managed on rotations of as little as five or six years have mean annual increments that are double ours.

A thriving School of Forestry at Canterbury has replaced the need to go abroad for a forestry degree. Students at the School have the opportunity to spend a year studying at a foreign university and this practice should be encouraged. How many practising forestry professionals with a New Zealand bachelor's degree have overseas postgraduate qualifications? Providing the time and the funds to do this is something the government and industry need to do more of.

Forest policy is required that will take this country through the next decade at least. The Hon Jo Goodhew, Associate Minister for Primary Industries, has stated that New Zealand is different to other countries. This is indeed true and it requires its own policy. What is the forest policy that will enable the government to provide the political, economic and social environment where the forest sector can thrive, process its own logs, and greatly increase the country's export revenue while improving the environment (and becoming safe)? The government does not necessarily have to adopt the proposals of the Institute's President as to what should be incorporated in a policy. They may disagree with him, I often do, but in the need for a current policy, Dr Andrew McEwen is totally correct.

There should be no criticism of the Hon Jo Goodhew as a Minister for a lack of forestry qualifications or experience, provided advice is given by neutral senior government officials who do have such skills. Any advice that a policy is unnecessary is akin to a 'she'll be right' attitude reliant on No 8 fencing wire and is inadequate in this day and age.