

Dunedin 2016 conference

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This November issue follows the NZIF conference in August/September and has papers based on presentations to the conference. There is a short report on the AGM, awards and speaker presentations later in the issue. Kent Chalmers, as Chair of the Conference Organising Committee, writes 'The last word' with two 'lightbulb moments': the industry isn't in crisis and has some great people, both of which this Editor heartily agrees with. I'd like to suggest that the country still has the opportunity for the sector to 'reach the dizzying heights that we thought it would in the mid-1990s', we now have substantial annual harvestable wood (more than 30 million tonnes/year), and WoodCo's vision of doubling wood product export revenue is eminently achievable, even if no longer by their target date.

Stuart Nash of Labour and Winston Peters of NZ First were enthusiastic enough about the New Zealand forest sector to attend the conference in Dunedin, while Michael Woodhouse of National addressed the conference field trip.

Stuart Nash made the suggestion that a Labour government would re-establish the Forest Service. Certainly many of the intangible benefits it used to provide were lost with it. I have always thought it ironic that the Labour government of David Lange was able to corporatise state plantation forests painstakingly created since the 1913 Royal Commission, that were then sold off with little protest from the general public, while the Conservative and Republican governments of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan privatised little if any of their state forests. Sweden went through the same market forces thought process as New Zealand with its Domänverket (the Swedish Forest Service) corporatised in 1992 and shares of its successor sold on the sharemarket. The shares were then re-purchased for the current, wholly state-owned Sveaskog that manages some four million ha of land. Whether New Zealand could follow Stuart Nash's proposal, or some variation on it, remains to be seen.

Nigel Williams provides a short update on progress with the Forest Policy Project. This has reached a 60 page draft, to be edited by a technical writer and then released for comment. Guy Watt, who has previously worked in forestry in New Zealand, presents experiences on evolving forest policy from Britain, including the suggestion that forest policies worldwide are increasingly being re-developed from the ideas of people other than professional foresters. Don Wijewardana's paper on the background to the negotiations on New Zealand's place in the international agreements for sustainable forest management makes the point that non-New Zealanders

did not view our management practices as favourably as was hoped, with a comment that forest plantations were compared to 19th century cotton and sugar cane plantations that used slave labour. New Zealand foresters' perceptions of the benefits of plantation forests are not shared by everyone. The Forest Policy Project, if it wishes to gain the support of politicians, may have to be prepared to make major modifications to its hard-worked draft.

Besides papers from the conference or related to forest policy, Farmery et al. present a paper on the gains and reduced variation in clonal stands. A key message must be that operational plantings are required to fully evaluate genetic gains, even if the statistical data utilised is non-orthogonal and unbalanced. Brionny Hooper's paper describes how research into forest workers' intuition, instinct and adaptive unconscious can lead to improved performance and safety in New Zealand forests.

This issue also sees update reports from Waiariki and the School of Forestry, Canterbury. Waiariki has merged with the Bay of Plenty Polytechnic to create Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology, still retaining Forestry and Wood Manufacturing as a centre of excellence. It is pleasing to see that the Institute now has four more simulators for machinery training to add to the original John Deere E-series harvester and forwarder simulator. These are two Cat FM log loaders and two Waratah harvesters/processors. Operator training in New Zealand has lagged far behind that of Scandinavia; these new acquisitions should go some way to catching up. The School of Forestry continues to thrive, especially with post-graduate and staff research.

Finally, several references at the Dunedin conference were made to the increasing height of tall wooden buildings. The world's tallest completed wooden building is 14 storeys in Bergen, Norway, except that on the UBC campus in Vancouver, Canada an 18 storey wooden building had its mass structure completed two weeks after the conference. Final completion is scheduled for May, with construction taking four months less than if built as a typical concrete/steel building. In London plans are afoot for 'The Toothpick', a slender 70+ storey wooden building. The designers suggested that wood will revolutionise 21st century construction. *The Economist* of 16 September devoted a full article to the subject. Perhaps New Zealand itself will return to the days when all its buildings were of wooden construction.



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