

Looking back and forward

Peter Wilks

Well, the 2018 NZIF conference has been and gone in Nelson and it was a pleasure to be on the organising committee and be part of what was agreed to be a pretty good event. Actually, truth be told is that Angus Malcolm and outgoing Administrator Jay Mathes collectively did most of the donkey work so much of the kudos should go to them.

The last Nelson conference I was involved in as an organiser was back in 1994 and that was very different with no ‘head office’ to call on for support. Back then the theme was ‘sustainability’, and I guess that is what still concerns all foresters today with recent weather-related events such as at Tolaga Bay threatening our licence to operate as the current buzz word goes.

Of course, back in the mid-1990s we were in the middle of a planting boom and now we are harvesting those same trees with all the attendant growing pains that has produced – debris, safety, worker shortages etc. Ironically, we are also potentially witnessing another planting boom, this time government incentivised, whereas in the 1990s it was the private sector that led the way.

So I guess the question is just how far have we come since then, and is the current government’s planting initiative of the ‘one billion trees’ and the reincarnation of a mini Forest Service the sign of things to come? Certainly this government has taken a more hands-on approach to encourage forestry, but how much new planting can be encouraged without ‘distorting the market’ is debatable.

My own view is that price signals around log prices and land prices, combined with a stable political environment, are what drive good decisions around forest investment. The proposed NZIF Forest National Forest Policy, if picked up by the government, will be helpful in giving investors the confidence to own forests in New Zealand.

While thinking historically, I realised that the School of Forestry is close to 50 years old with it

opening at the University of Canterbury in 1970 under the direction of Professor Peter McKelvey. I am sure there will be some celebrations organised around that milestone in 2020.

One of my Forestry School colleagues (we graduated in 1981) wrote ‘The last word’ in the February 2017 edition of the Journal and it was a pleasure to catch up with Geoff Thorpe in Nelson at the conference. His article ‘Forestry Secret Services’ was on the subject of ecosystem services, and it was a reminder that we had our own issue here in Nelson about a year back when the local council put the Rabbit Island Management Plan up for review. This forest has about 1000 ha of plantation forests and is intensively used by the public for recreation. The value of mountain biking in Whakarewarewa Forest to the Rotorua economy that Geoff referred to was provided as a case study to successfully argue in support of proposals to open up the island to more public access. Expect more demand to use our forests for recreation in the future.

One trend that I constantly get reminded about around our house is the need to reduce plastic. It seems this is a worldwide movement that is gaining a lot of momentum and not before time. Anyone who has been to the Pacific Islands, or for that matter just about any developing country in the world, is shocked by plastic littering beaches and anywhere off the tourist trails.

It might seem too good to be true but biodegradable plastic could be a reality after scientists at the University of Warwick in the UK found that the lignin, which holds cellulose wood fibres together, is a ‘natural glue’ that can be turned into a strong, mouldable and biodegradable plastic. The remarkable properties of wood are still being discovered.

As a young forester in the 1980s I would have never dreamed that 30 years on so many new uses for wood were yet to be discovered. Who could have foreseen back then that the iconic ‘4 by 2’ would be challenged by reconstituted wood in the form of laminated veneer (LVL)? We saw LVL being produced at Nelson Pine

Table 1: Production statistics – Chile versus NZ

2016 FAO data	Annual harvest m ³	Logs exported m ³	Sawn export m ³	Pulp export tonnes	Total value of forestry exports \$US billion
Chile	33 million	34,000 (!)	3,170,000	9,300,000	7.51
NZ	30 million	17 million	1,730,000	1,400,000	4.04



Solid radiata 100*50 mm at \$6.45/m



LVL 100*50 mm at \$6.20/m

Industries during the conference field trip. I was in the local Mitre 10 recently and took these two photos. If you were a builder what would you choose?

Despite the increasing use of wood for niche engineering uses, one issue that we often hear about is the lack of 'added value', with the public perception that we should be processing more logs domestically. If there is one thing I would like to see in the future is that we get to where Chile is in this regard. Take a look at the figures in Table 1 and make up your own mind about whether we could do more.

And finally on the theme of looking at the value of history, there is a Māori saying that I think is very apt for us as foresters:

Ka mua

Ka muri

(Walk backwards into the future).

Peter Wilks is a Forest Consultant based in Nelson. Email: peter@foreststat.co.nz.



The NZIF Foundation was established in 2011 to support forestry education, research and training through the provision of grants, scholarships and prizes, promoting the acquisition, development and dissemination of forestry-related knowledge and information, and other activities.

The Foundation's capital has come from donations by the NZ Institute of Forestry and NZIF members. With this, the Board has been able to offer three student scholarships and a travel award each year. It has also offered prizes for student poster competitions at NZIF conferences.

To make a real difference to New Zealand forestry, including being able to offer more and bigger

scholarships and grants, the Board needs to grow the Foundation's funds. Consequently it is appealing for donations, large and small, from individuals, companies and organisations.

The Board will consider donations tagged for a specific purpose that meets the charitable requirements of the trust deed. A recent example has seen funds raised to create an award in memory of Jon Dey who was known to many in New Zealand forestry.

The Foundation is a registered charity (CC47691) and donations to it are eligible for tax credits.

To make a donation, to discuss proposals for a targeted award or for further information, please email foundation@nzif.org.nz or phone +64 4 974 8421.

Please help us to support NZ forestry education, research and training

