

Peter Casey

The positive role that forests play in our community should not be understated and is well articulated in the Forest Policy framework that the New Zealand Institute of Forestry (NZIF) issued in 2018.

*Forests, more than other land uses, provide society with significant public benefits in addition to those that accrue to the owner of the forest. Public benefits include carbon sequestration and storage, erosion and flood mitigation, maintenance of water quality, biodiversity, recreation, landscape, spiritual and cultural factors and more.*

In our role as forestry professionals, we owe it to the community to ensure all current and future forests in this country contribute to the long-term success of New Zealand.

The application of good management and stewardship of all forests for the benefit of the owners and the wider New Zealand community is at the heart of what the NZIF is all about. The NZIF Registration Scheme, in place since 1966, is the key platform for professional services quality assurance.

The objectives of the Institute we belong to and support include:

- The advancement of the profession of forestry within New Zealand by means including but not limited to:
  - establishing, maintaining and improving standards of professional forestry
  - contributing to the development and recognition of good forestry practice
  - recognising, regulating and supporting those demonstrating competence in the forestry profession
  - acting as an independent advocate for forestry.

The theme of this edition of the Journal is 'Carbon forestry', which as Sean Weaver notes is underpinned by the 'climate emergency our planet faces.' The role of forestry was clearly spelt out by the Climate Change Commission in 2021, which recommended the establishment by 2035 of 380,000 ha of new plantation forest in order to rapidly sequester carbon now, and 300,000 ha of new native forest to provide permanent forest sinks beyond 2050.

As a profession, how can our skills be applied to the pressing topic of climate change? The paper by Michael Watt and Mark Kimberley discusses the role an exotic species other than radiata could play. Sean Weaver advocates for continuous canopy cover forest of both exotics and natives and the need for active management across all types of forests. Phil Taylor reflects on the past and then looks forward suggesting

12 actions, challenges and commitments to realise the full potential for all New Zealand forests. He extols the role that fast-growing exotics can play in addressing the short-term challenges we face as part of our climate change mitigation plans.

Our profession needs to enhance community support for the expansion of the exotic estate and provide leadership on the development of native forests. This is a significant challenge. But Andrew McEwen demonstrated in 'History Repeating a Century Later', a 'Members voice' article in the 28 March 2022 NZIF Newsletter, that professional foresters have tackled large challenges before:

*In the 1920s, the newly established State Forest Service (SFS) conducted a national forest inventory that showed the indigenous forest would be unable to supply the domestic timber needs of the country beyond the 1950s. A goal of establishing 300,000 acres of new plantation forest by 1935 was announced as part of a national forest policy to ensure NZ remained self-sufficient in timber after 1965, when it would be largely dependent on exotic plantations. The goal was achieved by 1931, when SFS plantations amounted to 307,000 acres.*

*By the 1950s, availability of native timber was, as predicted, running short and exotic timber was increasingly being used – 50% of total production by 1955 and 80% by 1967. By the early 1970s NZ was exporting over 40% of the volume harvested. Clearly, the target of producing enough to be self-sufficient had been achieved, attesting to the foresight of those early SFS forestry professionals!*

*The Commission has recommended the government embark on a major forest project with clearly defined long term objectives, just as was proposed 100 years ago.*

The challenge Andrew put to members was:

*... to see if we can rise to the challenge to expand the forest area by 680,000 ha, with 44% of it in native forest. The professionals a century ago achieved success with the challenges they were given. Do we, as today's professionals, have the courage and stamina that will be required if we are going to be able to match those that came before us?*

I am heartened by the energy and passion that our younger foresters bring to the profession and the contribution from members to growing professionalism. I believe we are up to this challenge to enhance the wise long-term management of all forests in New Zealand to assist with the climate emergency.

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