

With change comes opportunity

Jeremy Keating

As a practitioner with day-to-day involvement in a range of primary sector land uses, it is encouraging to see Aotearoa New Zealand finally having a debate about what highest and best (sustainable) land use looks like on our temperate motu in the Pacific. While the debate is not always as well informed, scientifically grounded or 'grown up' as one might hope, the issue is of critical and enduring importance to our shared future. New Zealand is world leading at so much of our food and fibre production, and that remains an important lens through which to view the debate and what is best for the planet and humanity.

I often think of Garth Cumberland, a former Forester of the Year, who with others tirelessly spearheaded the drafting of a proposed National Forest Policy a number of years ago. It is an idea that did not get as much traction beyond forestry circles as it deserved, but whose time must surely now be coming and would benefit immensely from being incorporated into a wider rural land use policy with bi-partisan support.

We must commend and support those professionals and NZIF who freely volunteer their time to bring science, experience and reason to the debate – much more is needed at a time of unprecedented consultation and change.

The *New Zealand Journal of Forestry* is at the forefront of thoughtfully addressing the issues at hand with an evidence-based, scientific and peer-reviewed approach, and I congratulate contributors to this edition.

The role of production forest residues in developing a commercially viable and sustainable place in the New Zealand biofuels market is encouraging, as Brian Cox has articulated. It provides yet another destination for forest products, has the potential to increase returns, lower our gross emissions and support various industries to become more sustainable. These are easy things to say, but those tasked with 30-year CAPEX decisions to replace boilers and having confidence in the associated residue supply must surely have some sleepless nights, particularly as more and more forests' gates are shut as carbon prices outstrip harvest returns.

While many of the incoming changes to the ETS settings will be welcomed, which Dan Williams addressed at the national conference and explores in his paper, the seemingly constant tinkering, consultation and political media announcements (at times unsupported by policy) will ensure NZIF registered consultants remain in high demand. These can all be seen in the context of a maturing market, where the ETS is not voluntary, but embedded in our economy with a growing weight of domestic and foreign investment capital looking to be an enabler to more planting.

Oliver Hendrickson from Te Uru Rākau was instrumental in leading a CPD session at the conference and is making genuine efforts to engage with NZIF members. He recognises the crucial role that professionals play, where the vast majority of ETS participants actually have very small areas registered in the ETS and who, without expert guidance, would struggle to keep up with the pace of change and compliance obligations. Te Uru Rākau face the same labour challenges that the whole country is grappling with as they have tried to resource up to meet this year's flood of applications.

The NES-PF will benefit from further refinement and Mark Bloomberg has thoughtfully highlighted three areas he sees for improvement. There is also currently a consultation process to consider potentially widening the scope of the regulations for the NES-PF to also include permanent exotic afforestation (carbon forests), or whether they are deserving of their own bespoke framework, which is likely to have diverging views within NZIF.

The Forestry and Wood Processing Industry Transformation Plan was released by Minister Nash in August, and I confess to having not yet reviewed it, but have discussed it with many professionals who have. The overarching vision remains to generate more value through greater onshore processing, which has a range of side benefits, including lowering our emissions and growing the bioeconomy – hardly new ideas for long-time industry participants and it will be the resulting action from this refreshed strategy that ultimately counts. If you don't have time to

review the whole plan, then Elizabeth Heeg has done a good job summarising it for you.

The final professional paper in this issue is the result of a research project led by Bruce Manley et al., including BForSc final year students. It takes the Gisborne District small-scale forest estate (i.e. excluding corporately-owned) and evaluates the impact of varying carbon accounting treatments on harvesting and afforestation decisions. The conclusions correlate to the dynamics many will observe in the current market, where carbon is the driver of land values, forestry is out-competing pastoral farming (against an increasingly vocal opposition) and, somewhat ironically, it is the foreign buyers who must commit to rotational forestry in order to obtain OIA consent and will likely keep the gates open for future harvesting.

The mainstream enthusiasm for native planting and pest control is an exciting development which should be embraced, and NZIF professionals are well placed to bring their extensive experience from the exotic estate to support these initiatives. We will all be better off if large-scale native afforestation becomes both more successful and cost-effective. It is also pleasing to see the converging themes of embodied carbon, onshore processing and demand

for sustainable materials mean that engineered wood products are finally rising to the prominence they deserve. We look forward to seeing more buildings such as Scion and Nelson Airport being recognised, not only by architectural awards, but perhaps (more importantly) winning praise from building occupiers as the ultimate test.

While there are no doubt many challenges out there, forestry remains an attractive and rewarding career path and investment class, and the opportunity is there for us all to rise to the challenges with optimism and purpose to ensure we are on the right side of history.

The final word fittingly goes to Murray Parrish (as it so often does) – an enjoyable read combining his sharp intellect and dry sense of humour.

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