

EDITORIAL COMMENT

A New Decade

This journal in 1970 saw forestry as having made an auspicious beginning to the seventies. It is doubtful that even the writer could have forecast the achievements of the profession during the decade nor accurately foreseen the reverses, let alone the present situation, in which forestry is being hailed in some quarters as a major salvation for the present economic ills of the country. It is an opportune moment to review the past and to look cautiously at the way ahead.

The achievements have been dominated by the exotic forest production sector; the planting rate of new forest soon reached, and has remained consistently at, twice the level prevailing in 1970; the total stocked area has increased by some 77%; roundwood production, at 9 million m³, is up 30%. Perhaps more significant is the achievement in industrial processing; despite increased production, and an increase of 80% in the proportion exported, the quantity in log form has fallen significantly, and exports of sawn timber, pulp and paper have all increased massively. It is no wonder, then, that the forest sector has recently become the focus of attention in the financial pages of the nation's journals, and has been the subject of analysis by economists and politicians alike.

It seems ungrateful, if not impertinent, to suggest that the very success of production forestry may lead to future difficulty — and yet the lessons are already at hand from the last decade. The seventies dawned virtually without an environmental movement; foresters must accept a significant part of the "credit for the development of an environmentally conscious and vocal lobby because of their failure to fully understand the changing values of a more affluent society, or to successfully explain the principles and objectives of indigenous forestry, whether on the grand scale of the original "Beech Scheme" concept, or the more mundane operational level of maintaining the *status quo* in the central North Island. It is evident that *society has not been prepared to accept uncritically the forester's values.*

This issue contains an account of the decision-making process in land use determination for the Wairoa County; the question of land use and the Town and Country Planning Act 1977 increasingly occupies the time and talents of the profession. But why? Because there is abroad a widespread suspicion of forestry,

and especially of radiata pine, which is manifested in many countries in a deep-rooted opposition to the creation of new forest. Again, *society does not apparently accept the forester's values* — at least insofar as those who presently exercise the levers of power reflect the values of society at large.

Although foresters might regard as irrational these fears of forestry, or at best regard as somewhat cynical those who, while quite prepared to accept the benefits of a society in which forestry is producing a large and increasing proportion of the wealth, nevertheless are quite prepared to oppose it, they cannot afford to ignore the groundswell of opinion. Forests are monotonous, alien; forests are unnatural, exotic monocultures; forest industries are energy-intensive, polluting, and prone to industrial strife. The refrains are familiar, but they cannot be dismissed lightly. It is on the social front that foresters must concentrate in the coming decade. We have a breathing space — Hamish Levack has predicted (*N.Z. Jl For.*, 24 (2), 1979) that the volumes of wood available for harvest during the forthcoming decade will rise but slightly, by comparison with the massive increases to follow. During this period we must be able to demonstrate to New Zealanders that forestry does *not* mean these things, and that forest industry need *not* be the bogey that is feared in many quarters. We have in large measure solved the technical problems of exotic forest management; we have been forced to find a solution to the controversy over indigenous management; let us take up in the 1980s the challenge of demonstrating the acceptable social face of forestry. Among the questions to which we should address ourselves are.

- Can policies be designed which will foster the closer integration of forests with other land uses to accord more closely with land capability?
- Can systems of ownership and management be developed which reflect more closely our traditional pattern of tenure and individual independence?
- Can we develop industry in such a way, and on such a scale, that individual pride and responsibility are promoted and maintained?
- Is it possible to foster among a much wider community the distinctly *New Zealand* flavour and *esprit de corps* which have characterised the forestry sector during the developmental phase?

There are, of course, a great many other issues to be resolved. The future of forestry and its status in the community depends largely, however, on our ability to solve sympathetically the social problems of the future in as efficient a fashion as we have done the technical problems of the past.

The 1981 Forestry Conference

For all the brickbats which tend to be aimed at foresters, it must be said that they have made, and are continuing to make, a genuine effort to ensure that their goals and objectives are debated publicly at regular intervals. The 1981 Forestry Conference comes from a line of illustrious and extremely influential predecessors, the "Development" conferences of 1969 and 1974-5, which have effectively charted the sector's growth over the last two of those periods peculiar to foresters, lustra. It is excellent that the profession should meet thus at regular intervals with other disciplines which interact with our own; as forestry expands, its linkages with other sectors become ever more complex — gone are the days when a forester's horizons needed to stretch little, if at all, beyond his forest gate. (Although they are not so long gone as all that — the rapid and increasing pace of change is a salutary phenomenon on which to reflect, particularly in a discipline such as ours in which we tend to assume a constancy of management and markets lasting decades rather than months or years).

It is the intention that from this conference should be developed an exotic forest policy for New Zealand. Participants should ask themselves whether it is possible to develop a comprehensive exotic forest policy in the absence of well-defined national goals, and whether, given this problem, forestry should not draw on its long tradition of comprehensive planning and provide not only a forest policy but a draft national policy on which to base it.

The Utilisation of Our Forests

One manifestation of the increasing awareness of forestry in New Zealand is the preparation and publication jointly by the Development Finance Corporation and the New Zealand Forest Service of a seminal report, the Forest Industry Study, published in March 1980. While the report has not been universally acclaimed by all sectors of the industry, it is nevertheless an extremely important document setting out clearly and concisely the requirements which must be met if the sector is to fulfil its potential.

The impending boom in wood production in New Zealand is now documented and universally acknowledged. Our ability to process and successfully market that wood is less established; despite this lack, understandable in terms of the time scale over which forest production and marketing must operate, the sector's planners are confident that markets will exist, although this confidence rests partially on the persuasive "seat of the pants" analysis, epitomised by W. R. J. Sutton's article in this issue.

Among the many points made by the Study are:

- New Zealand's production, even at expanded levels, will remain a relatively minor part of world trade.
- New Zealand should adhere to its basic policy of providing the maximum volume of sawlog material, pruned where possible, and continue to regard material for use in reconstitution processes as arisings.
- Nevertheless, in view of the steeply rising supply curve from 1990, if conservative policies are pursued, every effort should be made to bring forward potential supplies by thinning or judicious early felling so as to spread the demand for capital and labour, and (probably more importantly) expand the opportunity for gaining processing and marketing expertise.

The need for the development of such skills in marketing is the substance of a major recommendation that a Sectoral Planning Unit be set up to (*inter alia*) "undertake detailed and well planned market and research work to gain an in-depth understanding of export markets, particularly for solid wood".

That there is a need for such a unit, be it established within the Forest Service, or as an independent body jointly funded by private and State sectors, is made obvious by the current situation; readers with a retentive memory or methodical filing system, and an interest in the financial pages of the press, will be aware of at least half a dozen proposals to set up mechanical pulp mills, the basis for which seems to be as much jockeying for a position on the ground floor so as to get commercial advantage as anything else. This approach on the part of industry is highly admirable, and is the kernel of the free market, capitalist approach. However, New Zealand must ask itself whether it is sufficiently large to sustain such a basis of sectoral "planning", especially when the influence and interest of the State are so large, both in ownership of the raw material and in its influence through administrative and fiscal policy, such as development and export incentives.

A greatly expanded investment in impartial research and planning is essential if we as a nation are to reap profitably the forest harvest established with such great foresight. The research and development (including marketing) expenditure must not be parsimonious, and must be allocated on the basis of *future production and not present earnings*.

It is essential that the Forest Industry Study be not treated as are so many such studies, as a one-off effort to be pigeon-holed as soon as possible, but as a valuable guide to the future, whose general conclusions are sound, even if the details can be debated, and that the machinery be established not only to implement it, but to ensure the work it has initiated becomes an ongoing commitment. The Study has in effect shown us how to see the wood for the trees.

A Change of Editorship

The *Journal*, and the Institute, have been fortunate indeed to have been served by the talents of Geoff Sweet for the past five years. As he said [Editorial comment, *N.Z. Jl For.*, 24 (2), 1979], a change of editorship is an appropriate time to review the standards, content and style of the journal. The style has changed but little over the years; change for change's sake is certainly to be avoided, but equally there comes a time when, if all around has changed, a rigid adherence to a former style may be disadvantageous. Council, and the Editor, would welcome suggestions or comment from members.