

NZIF 2013 Conference summary

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The next few pages contain a very brief summary of the recent conference in New Plymouth. The first two days following the AGM were indoor sessions, the third day a field trip around parts of the Taranakai region. After the conference finished a group of random attendees were asked their opinion of the conference. The answers in general were very encouraging, in spite of the doom and gloom surrounding the industry as a whole with the current lack of tree planting. The attendance of a significant number of forestry students was favourably commented on. These are the foresters of the future and as many as possible should come to these conferences.

The conference started with a well presented karakia and was followed with an introduction from the President Andrew McEwen. He emphasised most of all that we need a national forest policy as trees are more complex and longer lived than any other primary industry product.

The first speaker was Guy Salmon the Executive Director of the Ecologic Foundation. He outlined how regional councils managed water 20 years ago and he saw an overall decline, apart from in Taranaki. What went wrong with the other regional councils? Apparently it is because New Zealand is not a Nordic country where collaboration works well. Guy is optimistic that having tasted some collaboration, eventually it will prevail in New Zealand.

Basil Chamberlain, the Chief Executive of Taranaki Regional Council, came up with a jargon-filled promotion of Taranaki. However, there do seem to be successes, especially with riparian planting, the programme of which will be completed by 2020. It was a shame that we heard nothing about trees and forestry in his presentation, perhaps next time.

After the first break we heard from the Hon Jo Goodhew, Associate Minister for Primary Industries. She explained she had a background in farming and expressed the usual platitudes expected of a government Minister. She did suggest that forestry should put in more bids for the Primary Growth Partnership funds as currently forestry only has a small slice. More was said about adding processing within New Zealand, but without explaining quite how this may come about without confidence in the longer term for forestry. She did agree, at the end, to consider discussing an overall forestry policy, prompted by Andrew McEwen in a question. We will see what happens over the next year.

Bruce Clarkson, Director of Environmental Research Institute, University of Waikato, suggested a bold approach to work together on land restoration in Taranaki. He outlined how the native forests which once dominated Taranaki were cleared and that the native forests left on the ring plain are just very small fragments of the original landscape. He was hopeful that urban dwellers would help provide special opportunities

to see native forests return to the landscape of the ring plain.

Vince Neall, Emeritus Professor, Massey University, kept us awake with the fact that in recent times, Mt Taranaki has erupted at least once every 200 years and that there was an even chance of the next eruption occurring within 50 years. From all the past eruptions the volcanic ash soils on the ring plain are very good for food production and ideal for deep rooting plants. However, the slopes of the mountain need tree cover to help maintain a good water supply at lower levels.

After lunch was the turn of Roy Weaver, Chief Executive of Port Taranaki. The port caters for ships of all descriptions including drilling supply vessels, bulk gas carriers as well as log exports, often on ships which have brought in bulk fertiliser from overseas. Log exports from the port have risen from 20,000 tonnes a year in 2009 to 300,000 tonnes a year now. This is projected to rise to 800,000 tonnes a year by 2019. The port is New Zealand's safest port for workers over the past four years, according to ACC figures. This is mainly due to the influence of the safe working practices of the oil and gas industry, and is perhaps something the forestry industry can learn from.

Kevin Cash, Land Management Officer, Taranaki Regional Council presented an overview of how comprehensive land management plans, working with land owners, are helping prevent erosion. The council help prepare the plans as part of the regional erosion support scheme and also help provide resources, such as poplars and willows, at cost price. This is all part of a 20-year plan to prevent erosion and reduce sediment loss.

Don Shearman, Land Services Manager also from the regional council, outlined how riparian planting was being managed on the thousands of kilometres of waterways. Six million native trees have been used so far involving over 2,000 land owners in a large vegetation project. Specific plans are produced, tailored to each landowner. The aim is to plant the borders of all streams, big and small, unlike the Fonterra Clean Streams Accord which does not include fencing waterways which are 'less than a stride wide'. As small

streams involve up to 40 per cent of run-off, they are part of the Taranaki riparian plans. Plants are supplied at cost, which is a form of subsidy but is not overtly called that. The plan is to have all streams fenced and planted by 2015, compared with the Fonterra targets of 60 per cent fenced by the end of 2013.

Philip Luscombe, a dairy farm owner, admitted how up until the 1950s effluent went straight into the streams and that there had been in his words, 'brutal changes to the land' until 40 years ago. He has now carried out a lot of riparian planting with help from the regional council. The result is that with all his river and stream banks planted, stock losses in the water have stopped. Nor does he need to spend time clearing the water after floods because the tree roots hold it all together. The loss of land to planting has made no noticeable difference to his farm income.

The final speaker of the day was Katrina Smith, an environmental scientist, explaining how water quality was checked using macro-invertebrates. The results showed, not unsurprisingly, that the health of the water is good in the upper parts, but poor lower down the catchments. The panel session which followed was a lively discussion based on the speakers of the day.

The second day began with a talk by Al Morrison, Director-General of the Department of Conservation. He outlined the strategic changes by the Department of Conservation because their recent biodiversity work had not been successful and they were not able to turn the tide of the biodiversity loss. The plan was conservation for all of New Zealand, not just on DoC land, and they would be working a lot more closely with business in the future.

This was followed by John Leathwick, Principal Science Adviser also from the Department of Conservation. He continued outlining the changes with a move to systematic conservation planning and general prioritisation of biodiversity. However, the plan will not be ready for implementation until 2015.

The largest community-based possum control programme was introduced by Steve Ellis, Biosecurity Manager for Taranaki Regional Council. The council signs up land owners, needing a minimum of 75 per cent of land users on 75 per cent of the relevant land area. Once this target has been achieved, the council carries out a once-only possum reduction programme and then requires land owners to keep these numbers below a set threshold of five per cent catch. If they do not keep these levels the council will do it, but charge between \$3,000 and \$5,000. Now with a total of 4,000 properties covering 330,000 hectares, the target kill is 460,000 possums each year. The self-help initiative was set up 20 years ago when they realised more resources were needed to solve the possum problem.

Yet another collaborative venture was introduced by Karen Schumacher, Chair of the East Taranaki Environmental Trust. With significant community support in a habitat management project they have

managed to raise the numbers of kiwi from 600 to 1,000, and the predator controlled land area from 190 hectares to 13,000 hectares.

The next speaker was Kit Richards, Environmental Manager for PF Olsen Ltd. His paper is given in full in this issue of the *Journal of Forestry* on page seven.

Tim Payne from Scion Research outlined how valuable forest systems were from wood supply to health and well-being. There are numerous opportunities requiring collaboration to improve the perception of planted forests.

Production forestry in Taranaki was the subject for Paul Silcock, Forest Development Manager for NZ Forestry. There are about 20,000 hectares of exotic forests in Taranaki, many of them in small woodlots. Getting the small woodlot owners to work together over the next 10 to 15 years when a spike in production will occur is going to be difficult. In addition, although mill capacity can double, it will not be enough and around 80 per cent of harvested trees will have to be exported as logs.

Dean Meason, a scientist from Scion Research was, interested in the alternatives to radiata pine as a tree crop such as redwoods and eucalypts. He did admit that although these may be a better option on some sites, poor markets for the wood does not help encourage planting alternative species.

Jason Loveridge from JTL Farming Carbon Consultancy raised the sad story of the Emissions Trading Scheme, outlining how interest collapsed along with the value of carbon. His suggestion was that anyone who is in the ETS should exit by 2014, although it is not the first time we have heard this option. His overall advice was not to sell the credits too cheaply.

An alternative source of income from trees was suggested by John McLean, Emeritus Professor UBC Forest Sciences. Good flows of honey from bees using planted manuka can be obtained within six years of planting, and at \$20 to \$25 a kilo, honey can be a good income. However he warned that keeping bees is a lot of work, particularly since the varroa mite arrived. He also explained how important trees were for pollen supplies in the spring and the low protein value of radiata pollen. Bees need high protein pollen if they are to survive, so planting the right species to help bees is important.

Finally Graham West, Principal Technologist at Scion Research introduced a fledgling software programme to help make better land use decisions. Access to the programme, which is being evaluated, will be free as money has been put in by the Ministry for Primary Industries, Future Forests Research and AgResearch. The programme is designed for landowners and will use cloud based software allowing the user to have a permanent record of how the land is used.

The presentations were summarised by Murray Parrish in an excellent précis of the previous two days and the conference was closed by Andrew McEwen.

Some highlights from the conference field day



