

## Forest policy and advocacy

Chris Goulding

It should come as no surprise to New Zealand foresters that they may not necessarily be well thought of by the general public. The late Brian Allison of NZ Forest Products commented that Robin Hood, on his way to Nottingham, slew half a dozen foresters before breakfast and is still highly regarded. In this issue Paul Nicholls writes on the public's perceptions of New Zealand forestry, specifically with regard to the unacceptable number of fatalities in 2013, but also more generally on the need to engage the public on the economic and environmental benefits of trees and wood products. John Stulen's article describes the industry's response to the 'merciless media' on workplace safety that has led to radical behaviour changes.

This November issue follows the NZIF conference in August which debated the sector's Forest Policy Project to develop a long-term intergenerational forest policy. NZIF President James Treadwell stated that such a policy encompasses conservation, plantation forests and wood processing, with social, environmental and economic objectives. He hoped that it would enable the general public and government to understand what the wider forest sector can offer.

His article in the issue presents his views as to why the Institute has been and will continue to be an advocate for the forest sector, and why it is necessary for the 50 or so groups and associations in the sector to speak up and enlist the public on the key issues.

A useful forest policy is not just window dressing, full of high-sounding phrases, but would be a road map that could be translated into strategic plans based on problems that need to be overcome and opportunities that could be taken. The Forest Policy Project takes a 100-year horizon, a much longer period than anyone can reliably forecast, but not so long when considering that this country has some of the longest living native trees in the world. A vision of what New Zealand's indigenous forests would look like 250 years from now would not be inappropriate.

100 years ago, the 1913 Royal Commission on Forestry initiated the most significant change to forest policy of the time, based on fears of the rapid depletion of merchantable domestic native forests (see NZJF 58(1), May 2013). Conditions in 2015 are no longer the same, but the principle of presenting a central key vision still remains. I would suggest that providing practical, knowledge-based land-use and decision-

making consistently across the country remains a core policy problem, particularly as it applies to forests, steep country and fragile soils. This November issue contains articles from Trish Fordyce, Chris Fowler and Georgina Thomas on the application of the Resource Management Act and from Sally Strang, Kit Richards and Peter Weir on the progress towards a National Environmental Standard for Plantation Forestry.

The New Zealand Forest and Wood Products Industry Strategic Action Plan is not a plan as such, but does present a vision of more than doubling wood product export earnings to \$12 billion by 2022. New Zealand market forces by themselves have not been able to overcome the blockages that prevent the achievement of this level of export revenue. Indeed, since the NZJF May 2013 issue, New Zealand has slipped further to become the world's largest exporter of unprocessed logs and the forest exporting country poorest at processing its own harvest. Woodco's vision presents an opportunity for government in cooperation with the Forest Policy Project to put into place a policy to increase the value of New Zealand's forest harvest. Substantially increasing that value can only be achieved by more domestic processing and, perhaps, by expanding the forest plantation resource.

Independent of the policy theme but of direct relevance is Bruce Manley et al.'s paper that estimates the proportion of the small-scale forest that is likely to be harvested, and John Moore and Peter Clinton's paper on enhancing the productivity of radiata pine forestry.

The last word belongs to Andrew McEwen. He states that 'a national forest policy must focus first on what the country wants from forests' ensuring that there will be forests for our children and grandchildren, providing those benefits available to us, and making those forests thrive for New Zealand.

With a forest policy in place, and in collaboration with the wider forest sector including forest environmentalists, government could make decisions with that policy in mind for the greater good of New Zealand. With the means to put into effect that policy, New Zealand society would gain substantial social and environmental benefits far beyond pure economic gains.



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