

## EDITORIAL NOTES

### *The 1967 Symposium on Man-made Forests*

"The planting of forest trees is nothing new; it is a long-established practice in many countries, but the establishment of man-made forests on a very large scale is a relatively recent phenomenon. Such forests now cover 200 million acres". These words were spoken by the Deputy Director of Forest and Forest Products Division of FAO in his introduction to this symposium at Canberra in May.

That the southern hemisphere should be the venue of the first world symposium on man-made forests is a matter of more than usual significance. This symposium developed from two earlier world eucalypt conferences, the first in Australia in 1952, the second in Sao Paulo in 1961. There was a general desire that the third conference should return to Australia and that, at the same time, advantage should be taken of the opportunity to study the important man-made forests of pines in Australia and New Zealand. The idea then developed that the symposium would discuss a wide spectrum of the problems attending man-made forests, particularly in the middle and lower latitudes of the world, where the need to improve the standard of living is greatest.

Australia certainly has much to contribute to a symposium on this topic: it is not generally realized "that eucalypts have assumed such great importance in world forestry that there is now more eucalypt wood growing outside Australia than within that country, and that this has been achieved in less than half a century".

The symposium was divided into five sections dealing with policy and silviculture, management, utilization, planning and financing. In touching on each of these aspects the Deputy Director said: "Most of the world's man-made forests are young, over half being under 10 years old. Thus experience in the establishment and utilisation of man-made forests is still in its infancy. And yet already these forests are making a signal contribution to the national economy of many countries. Thus in Chile, New Zealand and South Africa these forests already account for two-thirds or more of total wood production, providing valuable export earnings. Other countries will certainly become equally dependent on man-made forests as time goes on. Present indications are that over the next twenty years the area of man-made forests will double. But it may be doubted whether even this rapid increase will be sufficient to keep pace with the world's rising needs".

"Classical silviculture is being challenged. But let us dismiss from our minds the picture of two warring groups of foresters; those who believe in man-made forests and those who believe in God-made, man-maintained and man-improved forests. Both forms of forestry are the stock in trade of every true forester. The real challenge is to the forester: how to select from his growing armoury those weapons which will best serve his country's goals. Nine times out of ten the decisive consideration will be the economic one."

"Speaking of cheaper wood, let us not bemuse ourselves by too much cross-talk about quality. When I say cheaper wood, I mean

cheaper-for-the-purpose wood. There is no doubt whatever that over a considerable range of utilisation man-made forests can produce cheaper-for-the-purpose wood."

"There is no point in putting wood for industry where industry cannot use it. The world is full of examples of man-made forests which are a silviculturist's dream but a forest industrialist's nightmare. In planning afforestation schemes, not only is it necessary to take into account from the start both the forestry and industrial aspects; it is also necessary to pay attention to parallel or expected developments in other economic sectors, and notably infrastructural investment in power and communications. And every effort must be made to take into account, difficult though this may be, the likely impact of a changing technology."

"The challenge of man-made forests also carries with it a caution. It is all too clear that today our capacity to influence and to change the biosphere has, in many respects, outstripped our understanding of the biosphere. In recent years there have been warnings galore, but too often these have gone unheeded."

The symposium attracted participants from 47 countries, more than any international conference of government delegates previously held in Australia. The organization of an international meeting of such magnitude was as impressive as were the excellent facilities available in Canberra. Of the southern hemisphere cities, Canberra more than any other has made a feature of trees in the streets and surrounds. At the time of the conference they were at the peak of autumn excellence.

The twelve New Zealand representatives, used to dealing with specific problems in a local scene, found some adjustments were necessary for participation in discussions and recommendations applicable to a wide range of physical and political environments. To achieve validity within a world-wide context, conclusions must often be expressed in seemingly over-generalized terms.

In retrospect we must see ourselves as one of a group of countries that are pioneering experience in the establishment, silviculture and utilization of man-made forests. It is human that we should advertise our successes, but if we are to give the world the total benefit of our experience we must give equal emphasis to our failures and our difficulties. Many of the countries now embarking on establishment of man-made forests can ill afford to repeat the vast experiments in plantation forestry that were made here in New Zealand.

### *Indigenous Forest Timber Advisory Committee*

In March 1966, the Government set up an Indigenous Forest Timber Advisory Committee in order to advise the Minister of Forests on how best to achieve a compromise between the conservation and the planned utilization of the country's remaining indigenous timber resources; and on what changes, if any, should be made in the methods of valuing and selling the produce from State-owned forests.

The Committee consists of the Director-General of Forests and two other senior Forest Service officers, together with the President and two committee members of Dominion Sawmillers Federation Incorporated.

The terms of reference of the new Advisory Committee, as outlined in the Regulations gazetted at the time, were as follows:

"The Committee shall investigate from time to time —

- (a) the present and potential resources of the indigenous forests of New Zealand, including —
  - (i) Estimating resources;
  - (ii) Forecasting consumption;
  - (iii) Recommending levels of production; and
  - (iv) Implications of policies;
- (b) The method of sale and allocation of State indigenous bush and logs;
- (c) The methods adopted by the Forest Service in determining valuations for indigenous bush and log sales;
- (d) Such matters as arise from or are incidental to the above;
- (e) Such other matters as are from time to time referred to the Committee by the Minister."

The Regulations also state that the Committee shall have regard to indigenous timber conservation policies and the need to safeguard public interest.

The activities of this Committee are very briefly reported in the 1967 Annual Report of the Director-General of Forests: "It has proposed cutting-targets for the remaining North Island indigenous forests and recommended changes in methods of sale of indigenous timber from State forests . . ." which ". . . include the introduction, where appropriate, of long-term sales — 10-15 years according to the quantity of timber remaining in a forest — and advertising to invite proposals to cut this timber. In deciding who will be the successful tenderer, consideration will be given to such factors as the efficiency of the proposed operator and the distribution of the sawn timber. This system will take the place of short-term sales based on price alone."

Few foresters will be happy with this statement. Is it the prelude to further examples of controlled, undeclared stumpages? There have been too many already, and they have had bad repercussions throughout the field of forest production — providing unrealistic rates of return on current costs of establishment; handicapping the farm forestry scheme; establishing false standards of compensation in land transactions; and allocating industry huge quantities of raw material under a hidden subsidy. In the past this has been justified in terms of a need to leave adequate margins of profit for the sawmiller, selling his output at State-controlled prices. Now that this anachronistic legislation has been lifted, there is no possible justification for any system of sale that would determine, *in camera*, the stumpages of any publicly-owned timber, indigenous or exotic.

This will be especially cogent if, as the Annual Report indicates, long-term cutting rights are to be extended to sawmills that are prepared to improve the efficiency of their conversion and to adopt local processing. Foresters will not cavil at this: the indigenous timber industry is dispersed over no less than 300, mainly small,

sawmills — and, notwithstanding a tradition of hard work and ingenuity, it is in need of consolidation and reorganization. There are relatively few sawmills large enough to achieve the economies of scale that would justify installation of ancillary plant for seasoning and preservation, under adequate technical control. It is now generally acknowledged that, in order to establish such co-ordinated units, the sawmiller must be given sufficient security of tenure through long-term sales. But *caveat venditor*.

Although certain restraints will obviously be necessary to reduce cut-throat competition for a diminishing resource, the expedients of our early forest administration must not be allowed to continue into the new era. To argue that the Forest Service has never openly declared its stumpages would ignore the fact that the early system of royalty collection had to be imposed on mills already established adjacent to tributary areas of State Forest. Short-term licences, with upset prices calculated to give a reasonable margin of profit on the local mill's cost of production, were an equitable device, when combined with the additional safeguard of public tendering. To extend this system, or an even more secretive version of it, to long-term licences, would disastrously weaken the producers' position for selling sustained yield from managed forests; and any "system" that "will take the place of short-term sales based on price alone" demands careful scrutiny by a wider forum of interests than just the Forest Service and the sawmillers' representatives. The vital principle in open tendering (whether it be for the supply of services or the sale of publicly-owned assets such as timber) is that, whether or not the Authority concerned is open to challenge, the decision itself *should be seen to be impartial* and in the best public interest.

Despite output from State indigenous forests having dropped from 160 million bd ft in 1950 to only 92 million bd ft last year, the indigenous cut from all other sources is still much the same as it was in 1950. However, it is now estimated that, of the total volume of merchantable indigenous timber remaining in 1965 (the latest year for which estimates are available), very nearly 80% is situated within State forests. The allocation of rights to these resources is therefore crucial for the indigenous sawmilling industry, and the establishment of new integrated units can only be at the expense of existing mills. Indeed, one of the least enviable tasks facing the sawmillers' representatives on the Committee will be to devise recommendations that are equally fair to the small man and to the consolidated groups — and not to leave national conservation policies a prey to future political appeals on behalf of the underdog.

There is as yet no indication of the Committee's attitude toward timber conservation — nor to the allied but more resourceful strategy of utilizing secondary species. Although the immediate problems are technical, the economic implications of directing new mills to equip themselves for such conversion must concern the policy-makers. This decision may, within less than two decades, determine whether or not New Zealand forestry is going to become exclusively exotic, because it is some of the secondary indigenous species that show most promise for sustained-yield management. But they will never be brought under management if industry continues to ignore them.