

## PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS: FORESTRY—A LEGITIMATE\* FORM OF LAND USE

M. J. CONWAY †

It is only eight years since the then President of the Institute in his address at the Annual Meeting drew attention to the increased planting rates needed to reach the national targets accepted at that time, and to the demands to be made on labour to do the job. He was concerned lest the target for new plantings of 25,000 acres annually, together with 10,000 acres of restocking, should be unattainable because of a shortage of manpower. This was at a time when the new area planted both by the State and the private sector had averaged a modest 12,000 acres annually over the previous five years. His concern was real and understandable, but a review of the progress made since then would suggest that his fears were unfounded. Over the next five years, the average rose to 27,000 acres — slightly above target. In the last three years, in line with the conclusion that the earlier objectives were too low, new planting has increased still further — 35,000 acres in 1966, 42,000 in 1967, and 53,000 in 1968.

It would seem, therefore, completely realistic for the Forestry Development Conference earlier this year to adopt a target for new planting of 52,000 acres annually, with a crash programme for the next five years only of an additional 5,000 acres a year. Two reservations only may be voiced. Firstly, in 1968 there was a period of unemployment, especially during the winter, and many men who would not otherwise have been engaged in forestry were thus given useful work. With an improvement in the national economy, it could be assumed that such extra labour will not be forthcoming. Secondly, forestry is not the only industry which has been examining its future. With the Government call for indicative planning in all fields, it is certain that other sectors will be pressing their claims for available resources — financial and physical.

If we look back over the history of afforestation in New Zealand since the beginning of the century, we can see an undesirable pattern. In the early years, much of the planting was done by prison labour. The massive plantings of 1927 to 1934 on which today's industrial enterprises are based were only possible because of widespread unemployment and, as mentioned earlier, the 1968 peak was achieved in a time of recession. It could well be assumed that the pace of afforestation is directly related to economic and social conditions. It would be preferable for future targets to be met by an adequate and stable labour complement, and for any temporarily surplus manpower to boost the planting programmes or to improve the crops by additional tending.

We may well ask if the situation as described is good enough. Is there some stigma attached to our occupation, to

\*Legitimate: logically admissible.

†Conservator of Forests, N.Z. Forest Service, Christchurch.

our profession? It is not so many years since a magistrate said to a youthful offender: "We do not want you here in this city. Go out and get a job in forestry." It is equally regrettable that this remark was allowed to go unchallenged. I doubt very much if it would today, because there is a growing appreciation of the role that forestry is playing in the national economy and of its future importance. Could it be that this awareness has been heightened by the fact that in recent years, in Government statistics on productivity and of overseas earnings, forestry has been promoted from the obscurity of the category "other" to a place in its own right? Could it be that the returns to the investor from the large forest-based industrial complexes established in the nineteen-fifties are now such as to inspire confidence in financial circles? Or has the image of the forest official finally changed in the public eye from that of the butcher of a priceless indigenous forest heritage to one of a man who is constructive rather than destructive, sensitive to values other than the purely material, and more prepared to accommodate the claims of a wider community?

Whatever the reason, it can truthfully be said that forestry now has a place in the sun. It has emerged from under the agricultural umbrella and is a contender for the economic use of a portion of the remaining undeveloped land in the country. Amid the many resolutions adopted at the Forestry Development Conference is one which may escape immediate notice, but which I believe is of great importance. It reads: "An authoritative land-use advisory committee should be established on a permanent basis to develop criteria and national policy for land use".

Lest the farming community become unduly alarmed, I quote further from supporting statements: "Farming is and will continue to be the major form of productive land use in New Zealand and its major source of export earnings. For this reason land should not lightly be taken out of intensive agricultural use".

We must keep a sense of proportion. While raw material from our forests is the base for 12% of the country's industrial production, export earnings are a very small proportion of the total — only 4%. But there is little doubt that exports will grow as the forests planted 30 to 50 years ago are fully utilized. The Forestry Development Conference, after the most exhaustive examination ever made of the current state of forestry in New Zealand, and of its potential, has recommended to the National Development Conference an export target for 1979 of \$96 million (f.o.b. values at current market prices), compared with the 1968 level of \$35 million. This target may not survive the scrutiny of the National Conference or obtain subsequent Government approval, but it is a measure of the confidence of those in industry and in marketing. Their confidence is soundly based in that this growth in exports is possible, after satisfying local demands, from forests already in existence. Indeed, the subcommittee on forest resources was adamant that no predictions on forest production could be

made beyond 1995 as this would involve the projection to maturity of forests not yet planted.

While those engaged in industry and marketing are looking a decade ahead, the overall forest planner must look forward 30 to 40 years. If the growing domestic market is to be met and the export growth rate maintained at a high level, more land must be planted. It is for this reason that notice is given of the desire, if not the intention, to compete on proven economic grounds for available land. Forestry is beginning to be accepted as an alternative form of land use, but tradition dies hard. While there is machinery in Government circles for the allocation of land offered to the Crown, it has been the practice to give first call to agriculture. To put it bluntly, forestry has tended to get the fag end. Only recently has it been conceded that there may be merit in assigning to forest use, not merely sub-marginal or marginal land, but good agricultural land, particularly where it adjoins an established forest unit which would be more economic if enlarged.

In this country we have perhaps reached not the cross-roads, but a check point, in land use. With the advent in 1881 of refrigerated shipping, the opening of the Panama Canal to give more direct access to European markets, and the demands of two world wars, New Zealand naturally expanded its pastures and increased its flocks and herds. Several warning notes must be sounded, however. There is a growing realization that on unstable land the removal of vegetation has gone too far and that there is a need to retire this land, mostly at high altitudes, at a faster rate in the cause of soil and water conservation. Much is being done by the Department of Lands and Survey and catchment boards to this end. Pressure is mounting for the retention in forest of catchments to ensure the adequacy and purity of urban water supply. Add to these trends the clamour for preservation of forests for recreation and we have some limitations placed on agricultural expansion. This does not mean that we are by any means near the end of land development. It is estimated that there are still 20 million acres of land suitable for development and, if the targets proposed by the Forestry Conference are accepted, less than two million acres would be needed for afforestation in the next 30 years. Some of this land is already held under State and private ownership and the availability of the balance would not appear at first sight to be a problem, were it not that the land required is not necessarily in the right localities, particularly for the export-oriented forests. If we look further into the future, into the next century, it may well be advocated that a further one million acres of forests should be planted.

Over the last few years there have been several shocks administered to the national economy, based mainly as it is on exports of animal products. To mention the most obvious — the possibility of a protected European market, current low prices for our dairy products and competition from synthetic fibres. Despite these difficulties the long-term prospects cannot be regarded in a pessimistic light. The greatest need of mankind is food and the markets in the developed countries alone

will always be substantial. Much has been made of the potential markets of Asia and South-east Asia, but it is not generally appreciated that literally millions of people in these developing countries are at present on a subsistence diet and economy. It will require massive aid from the rest of the world together with national and regional effort, before the natural resources of these countries are harnessed and the standard of living raised to the point where individual purchasing power will be of significant benefit to this country.

It might well be asked whether these limitations would not apply to forest products. This is true to a large extent, but it is not of immediate concern as our major importers are Japan and Australia, which can scarcely be classed as developing countries. From first-hand knowledge of the supply and demand position of some twelve countries in South Asia, East Asia and South-east Asia, I would predict a shortage of wood next century. This statement is based on the almost insatiable demand of the timber-deficient countries such as Japan, Korea and Taiwan, and on the rapid inroads being made into the forest reserves of the currently well-endowed countries of the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia. These high quality hardwood forests are not inexhaustible and I have reservations on the ability of the forest authorities in these and other countries to meet future demand, because of the pressure on land for agriculture, firstly to grow food for ever-increasing populations, secondly to grow crops for export and earn overseas exchange. In many countries the claim on the forest for fuelwood is paramount and much of the produce from quick-growing plantations being established for industrial use may be needed for fuel in the meantime. Attempts are being made in many countries of this region to raise short-rotation plantations of exotic species but progress to date has not been at all spectacular. Moreover, techniques of perpetuating the high quality indigenous species have not been perfected, and when put into practice will still involve rotations of 60 to 80 years. What does this all add up to? I suggest that three things may coincide — international aid and national effort will have had effect, consumer demand will have risen, and local wood production will be regionally inadequate. It is this vacuum which will provide an additional market for products from forests planted in New Zealand later this century and early in the next.

In the past, land in this country has been retained in forest until needed for agriculture, and undoubtedly more forest land, recently logged or still stocked, will rightly be allocated to farming, the mainstay of our economy. While it is true that, overall, the availability of land is not a limiting factor in forest expansion, ultimately it must be so. Just as agriculture is more efficient on good land, so is forestry, and it is not too soon for recognition to be given to the concept that in selected locations land should be farmed until such time as it is put into forest in perpetuity. I look forward to the day when old antagonisms, born early in our history when forests were a hindrance to land development, are removed; to the day when the word "conflict" in land use is replaced by "partnership".