

## PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS: THE INSTITUTE AND THE PROFESSION

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In 1955 the presidential address was not delivered to the annual general meeting, for the very good reason that the President of the day considered the time would be better spent dealing with the theme of the meeting. The theme of this year's meeting — the many uses of indigenous forests — is of far greater importance than anything I could say. You have ahead of you interesting field trips and an array of speakers who will discuss their respective viewpoints. By contrast, any remarks I offer will be of limited consequence. To allow you to concentrate on the more important things ahead, I will be brief.

### THE INSTITUTE

At the 1948 annual general meeting, President Owen Jones said there was an impending need for the Institute to have its own permanent headquarters, and at least one person who could devote his full attention to the affairs of the Institute. In 1977 I echoed and expanded upon that theme.

An editorial in the previous issue of the journal correctly notes that my suggestion did not meet with massive enthusiasm — no more than that accorded a similar suggestion almost 30 years ago. The editorial suggests a compromise: using a panel of volunteers to supplement the efforts of the few volunteers on Council who handle the affairs of the Institute. If we can do no better than take this small step, then by all means let us take it rather than stand still. However, our history is littered with examples of such timidity. In 1970 the then President, Malcolm Conway, confessed the Institute's inability to communicate effectively with the public. He said: "Council cannot do this alone. For a few years we had a Public Relations Officer who was not very effective. It was finally decided to leave it to the President of the day to express the opinions of the Institute as and when he thought fit. . . . It cannot be claimed that this practice has been particularly successful. Given adequate notice of an issue we have demonstrated that we are capable of expressing a considered viewpoint; it is the immediate reaction so essential in publicity that presents the problem."

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I remain unashamedly of the view I expressed a year ago that the Institute is less effective than it could and should be. I can now be more blunt than I was then, as now there is a degree of self-criticism of my failure to improve matters in the two years I have been President. There exist today organisations professing an interest in forestry that were not thought of 30 years ago when Owen Jones spoke of the need for a permanent office and staff. The younger organisations now have the facilities Owen Jones spoke of. In forestry matters we are being outstripped by younger, more vigorous organisations, often promoting a narrow viewpoint. This Institute is not keeping pace with the times. As a consequence we are in danger of failing to discharge the responsibility the Institute is so capable of discharging — namely, influencing decisions on the wise management, *for a variety of uses*, of those renewable resources, the indigenous and exotic forests of New Zealand.

### PRACTISING OPEN GOVERNMENT

So far I have been critical, and that is fashionable. I now wish to balance the scales by placing on record what I consider to be major achievements for New Zealand forestry.

The clamour for “open government” and “public participation” has become progressively stronger in recent years. The call has been aimed not only at central government, but at any bodies governing activities which affect the environment and people of a given locality. Forest management, indigenous and exotic, public and private, has been the subject of much adverse publicity. One criticism which can no longer validly be levelled, however, is that foresters are unwilling to involve the public. During the past year there have been instances where forest agencies have — without the need for compelling legislation — involved the public in forestry planning. I will highlight two.

The first involves the Forest Service as custodian of publicly owned indigenous forest. At Hokitika in June 1977, 225 people representing 74 organisations attended a four-day seminar on the future of indigenous forests in Westland. The seminar was held because the subject was one of major public interest. Participants were given all the information available, from a variety of scientific disciplines, and invited to consider this before presenting to the Minister of Forests written submissions concerning the management of the largest remaining tracts of New Zealand’s indigenous forests. The process has not been finalised but, irrespective of the outcome, the array of information given to the public, including

the sociological implications of forest management options, was an outstanding example of the practice of open government.

The second example involves N.Z. Forest Products Ltd (NZFP) — New Zealand's largest company, responsible for managing a sizable area of privately owned exotic forest — and the company's desire to expand those forests into the King Country. Again without compelling legislation, NZFP exposed its exotic forest expansion plans to public scrutiny. The company prepared an environmental impact report which was the subject of audit by the Commission for the Environment. Fifty submissions were received, and the Commission's audit called for a comprehensive land-use study to provide further information so that wise decisions could be made on balanced land use in the region. The King Country land-use study was established for that purpose.

This latter development is welcome. I hope it leads to a more balanced approach to land-use plans in other regions. Foresters might be forgiven for believing that, in a country where agricultural land comprises 51% of the land mass and exotic forest 2.4%, forestry is unfairly being singled out in having to justify its right to exist. Foresters' doubts are in no way assuaged when they see that, in district schemes under the Town and Country Planning Act, exotic forestry is frequently classified as a conditional land use — a condition not applied to exotic grassland. By all means let us have open government, especially on a matter so vital to the future as land use. However, surely *all* land users should be prepared to prove to the public that their plans for the future are soundly based, on the best scientific and sociological advice. Foresters can be proud that they are taking a lead in recognising and responding to the valid desires of the public to be involved in decisions that affect both them and future generations. Foresters can also be pleased that in their case open government is being practised voluntarily, without the need to further burden an already overloaded statute book.