



DECISIONS ON

BEECH FORESTS

Sir,

I found your editorial comment in the August 1988 journal, dealing with the decisions on the Western Southland beech forests, to be singularly one-sided and narrow in its view of what constitutes forestry. You do not mention the conservation case for these forests, which was sound, but you imply that 40 years of work by the old Forest Service is sufficient justification to carry on placing those conservation values at risk by further pursuit of an uneconomic activity.

I acknowledge that those years of trial and research have provided proof that those forests can technically be regenerated and managed to provide high-quality timber, but at what cost? The conservation cost you have not counted. The economic cost clearly drove the Forestry Corporation to compromise the silvicultural approach so that it was less than ideal. However, even with those economies I have seen no evidence throughout the consideration of this issue that the Corporation could operate profitably in these forests.

You suggest that the politicians believe that the taxpayers in New Zealand are unwilling to pay for adequate silviculture to ensure a sustained supply of high-quality beech timber for future generations to enjoy. That is the most realistic observation in your editorial. The overwhelming evidence of the last few years is that the public have rejected the notion that natural forests should continue to be the plaything of the forestry profession. Hard economic realities suggest that investment in silviculture without any realistic hope of profit within a reasonable period has also been rejected. Given the conservation values of those forests, the lack of an economic case, the views of the wider community and the relatively low levels of employment actually at risk, the sound decision was to conserve the forests, to allow present generations to enjoy them for what they are, and to leave to the next generations the ability to review the decisions taken in 1988.

As a forester I acknowledge with respect the dedicated work of the early researchers and the quality of the results in professional terms. As a forester I accept that the only responsible decision in the economic climate of 1988 is to con-

serve those forests and the full range of options for their future. As a member of this Institute I would hope that the editorial policy of this journal could recognize that conservation is a legitimate form of forest management, as or more compelling in some circumstances as wood production and the application of silviculture.

Murray Hosking

MAINTENANCE OF NATIVE FOREST

Sir,

I meant to respond to your May editorial much sooner.

Of course the Institute of Forestry has a role in promoting reforestation of New Zealand. It doesn't say so directly in the Institute "Forestry Policy" but it can easily be read into goals (1) and (4). However it seems rather ironic to me to be promoting reforestation while apparently condoning continued deforestation! I refer to the continuing practice of converting native forest to plantation forest. Despite the Institute's stand over the years against clearance of native forest for farming, especially in areas sensitive to erosion, there has not been a similar commitment to halt conversion to plantation.

I am entirely sympathetic to your **reforestation** call and believe the Institute has a duty to promote it. It wouldn't be new because the visionary foresters of the last century beat you to it. It would, however, be much more satisfying to me to see the end of **deforestation**. It is time New Zealand foresters and other land users shook off the colonial mentality of cutting down native forests. It is an archaic practice, generally uneconomic, not necessary and not worthy of an organization that includes in its object "to promote the best of New Zealand's resources" and "to encourage the wise use of forests and forest land".

At this stage the Institute would hardly be in the forefront of the movement to halt native forest clearance. That position has been taken by some conservation groups and a couple of local authorities. However, I believe that the Institute has an ethical and political responsibility to advocate the maintenance of existing native forest as well as promoting renewed reforestation.

David Field
(Slightly abridged – Editor)

THE WRONG BATTLE?

Sir,

I have been arguing for some years that foresters have not only chosen to fight the wrong battle on conservation issues, but also have through that choice been spectacularly out-manoeuvred and out-gunned. Journal comments from both the President on the need for a pro-active Institute and the editorial on the Southland beech forest decisions show it is timely to state my views to a wider audience.

The real enemy in this battle is time. Time to prove that a manipulated forest in the long run enhances the forest environment in those values conservationists strive to achieve. Thus the battleground we should have chosen, and should now choose to make our stand on, is time-proven, silviculture-driven, forest perpetuation.

We have not won on the old well-worn track that we have trodden for podocarp, beech, tawa and even Tasmanian forestry, of reacting to environmental campaigns with short-term justifications of economics, employment and regional viability. The arguments we will win are those that show the indigenous forests, managed with scientific understanding of light, ecology and silviculture systems such as practised in Europe for centuries, with wood yields, become the forests that the public would accept as pro-active forestry that will maintain those values that are important. There has not been time for this to be accepted or even well demonstrated. But the excellence of much of the FRI research, plus natural and accidental examples to prove the systems work, will allow us to argue for the older silvicultural teachings, wherein logging and wood utilization were the means to achieve the natural regeneration arrangement preferred, leading to renewed vibrant forest structure. We must teach that long-term silvicultural precepts and strategies dominate over shorter-term utilization pressures.

To be pro-active in forestry requires us to merit recognition that we understand, can interpret and will implement silviculture-led forest management. We have to fight the time constraints, and prove foresters' understanding, strategies and practice of the art and science of forestry lead to workable, acceptable, long-term indigenous forest solutions.

R. Usmar