



Moving into the 90s

The 1990s should be an exciting, positive period for New Zealand forestry. Many foresters will see the climax of their work as the new plantations begin to be harvested and an end to the exploitation of our indigenous forests. Some of the bottlenecks of production, such as the wharves, have recently started to be overcome and New Zealand companies have strengthened their place in the market by expanding their forest activities overseas during the 1980s. The industrial future looks bright. In forestry education the School of Forestry at the University of Canterbury appears to be gradually overcoming the period of low student numbers, and is completing its reorganisation of courses to meet the needs ahead.

However, we move into this period with some uncertainty as changes are still in progress.

There is still uncertainty surrounding the sale of State forests. Who will end up owning them? What are their utilisation and management plans going to be? Who will manage any forests that are not sold? Many have reservations about some aspects of the sale, and in particular the NZ Institute of Forestry is recommending that management plans be a condition of the sale. (See page 22.) New Zealand needs to be careful that it doesn't end up like Alberta where

"many Alberta taxpayers feel their Government has handed Japan the keys to a publicly owned resource – and slipped them the bill for its uncertain environmental costs". ("The Great Forest Sell-off". Toronto Globe and Mail, Nov. 1989)

There is also uncertainty about the future of the Ministry of Forestry. Already it has lost its firefighting functions (see page 3) and there are rumours of difficulties at the regional level. The Forest Research Institute is undergoing further changes as it struggles with funding. (See page 14). It is interesting to see how Canada has gone full circle in its State forestry organisation. (See page 4.) Will this happen in New Zealand?

The Department of Conservation is not without its problems as well. Since its formation in 1987 two Directors – General have moved on and the third has been appointed. Hard evidence is difficult to obtain but there appears to be a significant reduction in funding for the Department and staff numbers are down. Education changes in the area of forestry are still occurring. (See page 9.)

Opportunities

Most of all, though, foresters should see the 1990s as an era of opportunity.

There is a strong groundswell of public feeling about trees and forestry. We saw this reflected by the concern over the appearance of Dutch elm disease (see page 8) and also in the general 'green' awareness. People are suggesting we need more trees and forests for a variety of purposes, including to counter the buildup of CO₂ in the atmosphere.

It doesn't matter greatly that some of the public reject planting more radiata pine – even if they base this on emotion rather than reason. Most foresters are aware that too much of New Zealand was deforested and in large areas there are ecologically unstable vegetation communities which will tend to move back toward forests. Many of these areas are not prime areas for growing radiata pine; there are opportunities for a wide variety of new forests and other plantings. These can be in both urban and rural areas and employ native as well as introduced trees.

What better time to capture the public feeling and move forward positively? Currently Government is developing forest policies. But this should only be a beginning. On the national scene we need to continue to ask for a fair tax scheme, better national accounts (see Hutchinson's letter page 10), and perhaps even subsidies. If the figures are correct it is amazing how a relatively small government investment has encouraged such large changes in Chile (see page 7).

Just as we should encourage further reforestation, we should also be encouraging the public to appreciate the new industries based on plantations. They will assist New Zealand to grow in a sustainable fashion. Of course, strict environmental controls need to be insisted upon.

Changes in the Pacific also bring additional opportunities to foresters. New Zealand is in an excellent position to help these countries to overcome some of their forestry problems.

Forestry in the 1990s promises to be exciting and rewarding to be involved in. Foresters and other associated professionals, whether they work in the area of conservation or wood production, have many opportunities to make positive contributions.

Don Mead
Editor

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for inclusion in this publication

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- comment on forestry or Institute of Forestry affairs;
- items on current events;
- letters to the editor;
- items from local sections;
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