
NZIF Indigenous Forestry Working Party – Developing a policy for indigenous forests

A group of Institute members, comprising Udo Benecke, Dave Field, John Holloway, Colin O'Loughlin, Andrew McEwen and Alan Reid, is developing an Institute policy for indigenous forests, at the request of the Council. The review group believes that the importance, characteristics, administration, management and statutes covering indigenous forests have all become confused and even demeaned in recent years. As a professional association, the Institute needs to address this position, develop an appropriate policy and advocate this in relevant situations.

Key elements and considerations for a modern policy will include the following.

Background

An understanding of the place of indigenous forests in New Zealand's social and economic history and an appreciation of the history of policy formulation. A discussion of events and issues up to the present will be included, leading to a "clean slate" approach, unconstrained by current conventions or statutes.

Scope

The policy will embrace all indigenous forest, irrespective of tenure or nature, and will relate the national situation to an increasingly important international picture.

It will be a professional forestry response to public and political interest in the nature, function and management of indigenous forests, identifying specific needs and desired outcomes.

It will address historic and evolving issues of ecological virtues balanced with human needs, community and public perceptions, legislation, information bases, research, and forest values and products.

Definitions

There will be a re-examination and clarification, if possible, of frequently used terms such as "indigenous forest", "sustainability" and "biodiversity".

Legislation

A number of long-established and some recently enacted statutes affect indigenous forests. Present legislation and deficiencies will be considered.

Research

The present responsibilities, direction and magnitude for indigenous forest research

are causes for considerable concern. The importance of a sound, coordinated and sustained research programme is recognised. This must be developed along national priorities, focusing on interdisciplinary needs and orientated specifically to concepts of forest health, sustainability and new management technology.

Information Bases

There is inadequate knowledge of the extent, description and condition of indigenous forests. It follows that we need to redevelop and maintain appropriate information systems to determine and monitor forest area, health, threats and opportunities. New techniques in mapping, recording and analysis will play an important role.

Training and Education

Training of forestry professionals needs to keep pace with the changes in indigenous forests policy and evolving technologies including sustained management. Publicity, teaching materials and community projects are all part of a better understanding of indigenous forests.

International Context

International obligations and perceptions are particularly important in view of New Zealand's forestry position and reputation. Despite our achievements with plantation forestry we cannot claim similar credibility for indigenous forest management. This policy will focus on enhancing the position of New Zealand forestry generally.

Policy Outcomes

The policy will express some desired outcomes including enhanced appreciation of the roles of indigenous forests, measures and maintenance of forest health and sustainability. Associated aspects include soil and water protection, biological diversity and socio-economic implications. There should be improved understanding of the scope for products from indigenous forests, including recreation, tourism and wood products. Improvements in education, training, information, cultural and public awareness will be sought as policy outcomes. Coordinated research, health and forest monitoring programmes are also considered to be fundamental outcomes of the proposed policy.

Timetable

The group is currently considering a draft synthesis of ideas prepared from papers and discussion among group members. It is expected that refinements through several drafts will be completed in time to present a report to the next Institute Council meeting.

The working group is adopting a broad view of indigenous forests and forestry and it is hoped that the outcome will provide a constructive basis for an Institute policy on this issue.

Dave Field
Convener
Indigenous Forestry Working Group

News from Wellington Section of NZIF

A very successful meeting of the Wellington Section of NZIF was held at the Ministry of Forestry's Head Office on Tuesday, July 18. About 40 NZIF members were entertained by the guest speaker, Wink Sutton, who spoke about "populations, food and wood".

In about an hour Wink managed to traverse several tens of thousands of years of human development, and a wide range of topics covering biodiversity, natural selection, environmental issues, food preferences and changing patterns in the demand for wood.

Among the audience was Robin Cutler who was visiting Wellington to present evidence at the High Court hearing

regarding West Coast timber supplies. Robin kindly agreed to provide an update on forestry in Britain. In about 40 minutes he traced the broad history of forestry in Britain from the time of World War I to the present time. He outlined how the push to privatise the forests of Britain, which seemed inevitable as late as 1992, came up against very strong resistance from the conservationists and the general public and was ultimately rebuffed. Robin retires from his position as Chief of the British Forestry Commission later this year.

Colin O'Loughlin
Chairman, NZIF Wellington Section