

NZIF - A body of representatives or a representative body?

Hugh Bigsby

My first professional forestry association was when I joined the Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA) while a forestry faculty member at the University of Melbourne. I can remember joining because I wanted to be part of an organization that shared my interests in forestry and to be able to interact with others in the profession. As such, my expectations of what being a member of the IFA involved were largely related to field trips and dinners, and what I could learn from others.

The mid-1980's however, were turbulent times for forestry in Victoria, with many pressures on forest resources and forestry organisations. The long-standing Victoria Forests Commission was disbanded and government forestry began a long cycle of organizational changes. At the same time resource withdrawals started upheavals within the processing sector. I can still remember my surprise when I realised that many of the members of the local section of the IFA saw the function of the IFA as the voice of professional forestry rather than being an organisation of professional forestry. As individual forestry professionals within organisations that had a range of agendas, the feeling among these members was that larger forestry issues were being compromised and that an 'independent' collective forestry voice was needed.

Elaine Birk's letter in this issue of the Journal raises similar interesting questions about the role of a professional association such as the NZIF.

In my experience, there are two distinct functions for a professional association. One is to facilitate maintenance of professional standards and interests. In this context, each member represents a particular set of standards or knowledge, and the organisation could be seen as a body of representatives. The other function of a professional association is to represent the profession as a whole. In this context, while individual members of the organization have their own spheres of interest and expertise, collectively the organization spans the breadth of the profession. In this case the organisation could be seen as a representative body.

The issue is not trivial because it has the effect of defining the function of an organization and the relationship of an individual to an organization. Individually, we are involved only in some small sphere of the larger forestry profession. Typically that sphere is defined by our immediate employment situation. In fact for many peo-

ple, the day they leave tertiary education is the day when their forestry involvement begins to narrow.

Layer on to employment-related narrowness in forestry the need for individuals to align their professional expertise with the desires of their organization. How does an employee comment on or join the debate about decisions made by their employers? The halls are rife with anecdotes of academics and researchers being told by either their own organizations or industry to 'toe the line' or risk contracts. Whether the issues involve decisions about forest growing (e.g. Millennium forestry), government involvement in forestry (e.g. public indigenous forests), forest investment (policing prospectuses) or biosecurity, we must consider whether there is a need to ask questions that reflect forestry in its broadest sense rather than technical proficiency in its narrowest sense.

So how does the NZIF view its role? The NZIF mission statement shows that,

"An organisation with a proud history, the New Zealand Institute of Forestry was founded in 1927 to provide a forum where those involved in forest management, utilisation, research and consulting could exchange ideas and information and keep up to date with industry trends."

As well as the stimulus of debate and the fellowship of colleagues, the Institute encourages the highest standards of ethical and professional performance amongst its members. Today this role is even more vital in an industry that has continued to evolve and grow almost beyond recognition since its earliest days.

New Zealand Institute of Forestry membership is an acknowledgement of high levels of competence through education, experience and ability and is evidence of a member's commitment to professional practices and values.

For its part, as an organisation the Institute is committed to serving the practice of forestry and the wider community through education, accountability and its codes of ethics and performance standards. Increasingly it fulfils a quality assurance role, setting the benchmark for professionalism and the quality of advice and practice by which members and others in the profession are measured." (<http://www.nzif.org.nz/>)

Taken at face value, most of the mission statement adopts the view that the NZIF is a body of representatives.

Increasingly though, the last paragraph of the

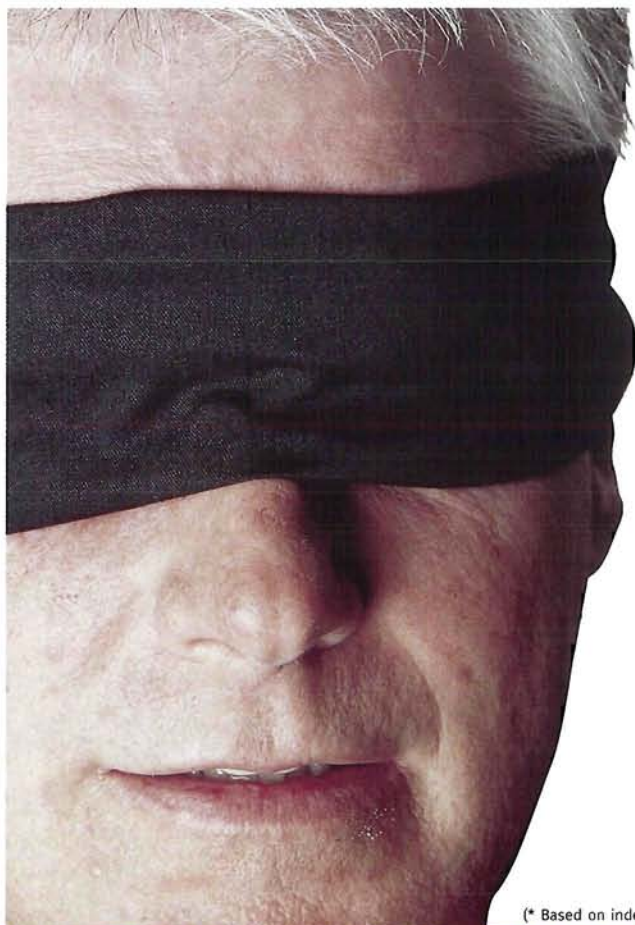
mission statement has come to define where the NZIF is moving. The NZIF has taken lead roles in providing a voice for professional forestry where other organizations have stepped back. The only forest policies in the country have been produced by the NZIF. The NZIF has taken the lead role in assisting members of the Primary Production Parliamentary Select Committee Inquiry into Sustainable Forest Management to become familiar with the forest industry, including the organization of field visits. The NZIF has been instrumental in developing and promoting forest valuation standards for the industry. All of these activities have been undertaken as an initiative of the NZIF as a professional body. They are the NZIF's collective results and in today's environment, an important contribution to forestry in New Zealand.

This brings us to the issue of how the NZIF fits into a national debate on environmental certification. Firstly, is there a role for an independent advocate for forestry? Look at most who are involved in the certification process and their presence is defined by something that they can take from it (increased sales, stopping logging). The NZIF stands out as being one of the only ones (save perhaps the Government) where the logic

of their involvement is that they can provide independent expertise rather than standing to gain or lose from the results. Secondly, is the stance of the NZIF to advocate for a comprehensive agreement on all types of forests a surprise? Take into account the development and publication of the Institute's forest policies, and discussions in the Journal or the AGM about the NZIF and forestry, and it should be evident that for some time now the Institute has been positioning itself as an advocate for forestry in its widest sense.

The mechanics of the meeting in May and the process that was required are unfortunate in that they have made what the NZIF can contribute as an organization become secondary to how the organization can be made to fit a process. However, other than warning the NZIF that we might have to make some changes to how we present ourselves as a professional body, it does not negate the fact that there is a role for the NZIF as a representative body for professional forestry.

More discussion on the issue of the NZIF and the debate over environmental certification is carried in the Letters and Comments sections of this edition of the *Journal*.



Don't sell your forest in the dark.

If you've got mature plantation trees make sure you're getting the best prices.

Marketing your forest to a range of buyers will return on average **15%*** more than selling to just one buyer.

Don't sell your trees without consulting **woodmetrics**... It's not worth the risk.

For further information, please call us at:

0800 96 63 63

A Carter Holt Harvey Business

 **woodmetrics**

(* Based on independent research)

INCREASING YOUR RETURNS AND REDUCING YOUR RISKS