

lenge because of the myriad of detail, the poor cross-referencing of criteria, and their generally confusing nature. Understanding the FSC babble and converting it into normal speak was a major challenge and one that should not have been necessary. Where clarification was needed, the problem was compounded because the auditors couldn't advise because ethical considerations required separation of auditing and consulting. Although I agree with the rationale, who do you ask, other than the auditor, about what exactly needs to be done?

- Audit reports tended to focus on what wasn't achieved rather than what had been done well. This was a motivation dampener.

#### Future challenges

Pan Pac has not met the principal original purpose for attaining FSC. This was to increase profitability through sales of FSC logs. The certification process has been expensive, in the order of \$300,000 excluding most staff time, so a financial payback is expected in addition to the other gains. Sales of certified product have been small to date, but are increasing. It would be highly unlikely that the current trend of increasing environmental consciousness leading to expanding "green consumerism" will go away.

Maintaining FSC will be challenging due to the complexity and all-encompassing nature of the numerous criteria and the strong temptation in a busy organisation to move on to the next business focus area, and in the process lose emphasis and drive on FSC. Key considerations for our organisation's success with FSC

will hinge on maintaining a "well managed forest" culture. This will be heavily dependent on all staff, contractors and their employees managing their environmental responsibilities. Also the processes within the EMS will require continued diligence to ensure things actually happen.

The bedding in of the National Standard, if eventually ratified, may pose challenges. The major benefit is that FSC will reflect New Zealand's unique conditions by clarifying local requirements. However, in many circumstances the standard will not solve the interpretation of FSC's Principles and Criteria or address their readability. They will still be complex and awkwardly written over 50 pages because they need to follow FSC Principles and Criteria format. For example, "6.3.5. Weed and pest control plans as dictated by 6.2.4, 6.4.3, 6.4.6, 10.2.5, 10.5.4 are progressively implemented to ensure ecological functions are maintained including ecosystem regeneration and succession and species diversity". Numerous issues are raised including what do the underlined words or criteria really mean? Can the average forest owner wanting to attain certification absorb this? Is the intent "control pests so you can maintain or improve what you've got"?

In addition, because of the political nature of developing a standard, some contentious areas have been heavily negotiated. In some instances criteria are substantial compromises. For instance, 10.5.8 requires "a minimum of 8% of certified forest area will be protected.....". Why 8%, or should I even go there?

There are interesting times ahead!

## Are plantations forests? An environmental NGO perspective of New Zealand forestry

By Grant Rosoman<sup>1</sup>

Forestry has moved into a new era of certification and having to be more accountable to a range of society values. It is a good time to take stock and reassess its direction and potential. Ten years on, NGOs are reconsidering the effectiveness of the Resource Management Act and looking to other mechanisms to achieve and reward environmentally responsible and socially beneficial practices.

#### Failure of governments and international institutions to act

First, a recap on some aspects of the international context and New Zealand environmental milestones. Popular environmental movements and rising public awareness, as well as the Brundtland report, Agenda 21 and other international fora, have identified the crisis in

the world's forests. As a result the 1990s led to unprecedented land stewardship accountability being required from state-managed lands and private lands. It heralded a new era of environmental and social responsibility by managers. However, governments and international institutions have been consistently high on rhetoric and lacking in action to ensure a regulatory environment that matched this. There is a lag in government action on society expectations.

Globalisation and the rise of consumerism at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century combined with unprecedented environmental awareness in westernised nations. Civil society movements evolved to bridge the accountability gap where governments and international institutions had failed. Thus the rise of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and certification.

The forest industry in Aotearoa has 'matured' from the bad old days, of the 1960s to early 80s, of destructive native forest logging and conversion of forest to

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Fig. 1: Large-scale exotic monoculture, the Achilles heel of the plantation industry, has barely been acknowledged as a significant issue, let alone been addressed.

plantations. The end to logging on public lands after decades of failed experiments and depletion of intact lowland forest has reinforced plantations as the strategic direction for providing most wood and fibre for New Zealand. It also cleared the way for a reconsideration of indigenous forest management – what are the best strategies to restore and maintain the remnant native forests, including where and if any logging is appropriate, consideration of forest management mechanisms such as conservation concessions or incentive packages, and local initiatives such as rate relief and conservation management subsidy funds. Conservation concessions are particularly interesting as they are voluntary agreements that are both a constraint and an incentive for management practices, maintain the existing ownership of the resource, and effectively enable society to invest directly in conservation of native forests or biodiversity protection.

#### The Accords and the RMA

The Tasman, West Coast and the New Zealand Forest Accords, as well as the evolution of the Resource Management Act (RMA) in the late 1980s saw an expression of society's environmental and social values, and laid the foundations for movement towards meeting certification requirements. The Accords began the dialogue and consensus building between some key parties. However, key omissions were tangata whenua and most social sector stakeholders. The multi-stakeholder consensus building approach is a key part of credible certification.

The RMA has to a large degree failed to have public participation in resource decisions, and has bypassed some of the certainty of the Town and Country Planning Act and land zoning. The performance focus is over-emphasised, with consents often given on the strength of relationships with local councils and self-monitoring by the applicant. The RMA has leaks as well, just as the Building Code's over-the-top emphasis on performance requirements has buildings rotting. For example, there are numerous reports about issues as basic as sedimentation of streams as a result of plantation harvesting. RMA as a regulatory approach is neither cost-effective nor motivating for the land manager, nor does it allow the local community to have their needs




Fig. 2: Mosaics not monocultures - New Zealand plantations are still in transition and in the process of 'naturalising'.

and values accounted for. While the RMA forces the development of a systematic and more accountable approach to environmental management, certification can greatly extend this, by providing the incentives and participatory mechanisms.

#### FSC and certification

Stemming from boycott campaigns on rainforest timbers in the late 1980s, FSC was born out of a need to provide an alternative source of supply and to meet a credibility gap. Destructive logging still proceeds apace in many of the Earth's key ancient forest areas. In some, illegal logging is out of control. Independent certification of wood was established to provide guarantees of environmental and social performance to consumers, in



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particular, corporate consumers.

Plantations are often promoted to meet the supply gap both in substitution for destructive wood and expansion for an increasing demand from a growing, affluent population. However, it is not enough justification for plantations to be considered 'good' if they are simply substituting, on a global basis, supplies from poorly managed or increasing depleted natural forests. They need to environmentally and socially perform at a site level if they are to win support and also be certified.

The rise of third party certification should have come as no surprise. Its coming has been predicted since the early 1990s. It is a market tool. In New Zealand it took buyer demands to move complacent plantation managers to realise that it was becoming an inevitable requirement. Credible, third party certification such as the FSC is about a re-alignment of plantation and forestry practices to local and international society values. FSC Principles and Criteria for Forest Management are a global set of guidelines for responsible management that necessarily had to incorporate global values, expressed in this case primarily via NGOs and the consumer.

### **Plantations in the process of naturalising**

Forest management certification inevitably means that plantations are being required to become more like forests, or at least perform more like forests. We don't hear the call from industry anymore that plantations are simply 'fibre farms' like a crop of corn or 'factories without roofs'. Under certification frameworks such as the FSC, plantations have to meet most of the requirements of a forest.

But New Zealand plantations so far are still in transition and in the process of 'naturalising'. The performance standard limits are primarily still drawn around what is economically feasible rather than environmental and social imperatives. There is a gradual recognition of the crisis with Aotearoa's biodiversity, and the necessity of restoring indigenous biodiversity to re-address the imbalance of a thousand years of human impact, particularly on the lowland areas. Maintenance and protection of biodiversity is a key element of the FSC. Plantations must restore natural forest and protect representative samples of ecosystems. This is a key issue in the New Zealand national plantation standards setting process. But the proposed requirement of 8% reserves is woefully inadequate from a conservation biology point of view, particularly when it is combined with clearfelling practices, exotic monocultures, and landscape dominance of either agriculture or plantations.

Large-scale exotic monoculture, the Achilles heel of the plantation industry, has barely been acknowledged as a significant issue, let alone been addressed. Yet it is a key 'macro' aspect of the New Zealand plantation model that distinguishes it from a natural forest. Resilience and vulnerability to exotic pests, as well as landscape ecology issues need addressing. Planting native species for production, even on a trial basis, is considered by most to be heresy. The 'exotic monoculture' model also

relies heavily on pesticides for establishment and weed control, problems exacerbated by clear-felling and even-age planting regimes.

The conventional 'wisdom', if it can be called that, in industrial forestry circles, is that anything else is not possible or feasible. However recently, at long last, there is research being carried out by both certified companies and institutions. As well, long-time innovative forester John Wardle is experimenting with continuous cover forestry and improving value and profits on conventional clearfelling regimes.

The FSC is more advanced than any other certification scheme in the social agenda. Recognising and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples is a key principle, as well as maintaining local communities through generating benefit and wealth, instilling stewardship and a sense of place. It is not clear how trans-national owned forestry that is focused on exporting raw logs and fibre is contributing to this.

### **The future**

We are at a point where we have to consider what is possible. Who is capable of predicting what society's expectations of plantations and forests will be in 20, 50 or 100 years? Can we predict what will be technically possible in relation to forestry?

What type of management provides the greater long-term efficiency and benefit, when environmental and social externalities are considered: management focusing on what can be technologically engineered and the intensification of production areas, or management working with what nature intended, while sustaining local communities and responsible land stewardship?

For certain, forestry will need to keep pace with society values. A clear set of environmental and social values have emerged through the FSC, and are being responded to and adapted for application in New Zealand. What will the land ethic of the 21<sup>st</sup> century be? Will we learn from the excesses, over-consumption and destruction of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? Will science and technology provide the answers?

Maybe we need to listen to the wisdom of indigenous peoples, lessons from local communities, and to visionary conservationists such as Aldo Leopold.