

President's Comments

An independent advocate for forestry

Tim Thorpe

Two members of the NZIF have recently commented to me that the NZIF has a good reputation within the forestry sector for commenting on technical issues but that it needs to be careful not to be seen to be too involved in lobbying. An interesting comment and one in which it must be said that it is not always easy to draw the line between what is a technical comment and what is effectively lobbying.

Take the case of indigenous forestry harvesting for example, not an important issue for many working in the forestry sector I suspect, but one in which the NZIF has had quite a prominent role. I can remember that at the time of the debate over sustainable indigenous management on the Crown estate (read Timberlands West Coast Ltd) that the NZIF came under some criticism for not doing enough lobbying, given that to all intents and purposes the arguments were not technical but political.

A member also recently wrote to us suggesting the NZIF advocate that its members put their names forward for local government elections. This was seen as a means of countering other lobby groups on Councils including farmers who, by and large, are very good at getting representation on Councils.

In the last few months the NZIF has made submissions to government on climate change, biosecurity, leaky buildings, and biotechnology as well as submissions to local government. We are actively involved in the national certification process. Our positions have not always aligned with others in the forestry sector and occasionally we have received media attention for our comments. Every now and then, one of our submissions is adopted by the party we are submitting to, over and above other views from the sector. Does this mean that we have been lobbying?

The Council made a conscious decision last year to raise the NZIF's profile. To do this we have become more active in a number of areas and I envisage a continuing level of activity over the coming year. This

does not mean that we have become involved in lobbying. But we must remember that one of the NZIF's objects is to be an independent advocate for forestry. This means being front-footed where necessary. Who else can provide that independent voice - NZ Forest Owners Association, NZ Forest Industries Council, Timber Industry Federation, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry - I think not.

Allied to this theme, I have recently written to the National Initiatives Working Group (NIWG) developing certification standards expressing concern about the process that has been followed to date in developing these standards (see article by Euan Mason elsewhere in this journal). In essence, the indigenous forestry certification process has been disenfranchised by lack of participation from some environmental groups and the NIWG has not resolved this situation.

The letter I have written points out that lack of action by the NIWG undermines not only the indigenous certification process, but may also undermine the plantation certification process, particularly if the NIWG intend to meet Forest Stewardship Council criteria. The NZIF is keen to see progress made and has offered to assist resolve the impasse if appropriate.

It is appropriate to note the real anger that lack of progress on this issue by the NIWG has left amongst some of our members.

On a separate note I must record the passing of Mick O'Neill a former Director General of the NZ Forest Service, the second death of a former DG in a relatively short period; and Harry Bunn a former Director of Production Forestry Division at Forest Research Institute. Mick was a Fellow and former Vice-President of the NZIF and Harry both a Fellow and Honorary Member. Both men made significant contributions to the sector and maintained strong interests in forestry matters in retirement. May they rest in peace.

See you in Queenstown.

FSC deliberations - a growing concern

Euan Mason

The NZIF is participating in a process that potentially will result in national Forestry Stewardship Council standards for our forest management. A body called the National Initiative Working Group (NIWG) governs the process, while two technical committees, one for plantations and one for indigenous forests, create the standards. People from four chambers (economic, environmental, social and Maori), that represent diverse stakeholder groups, elected members to the NIWG and the two committees. The NZIF has one official representative in the process (myself - on the plantation standards technical committee), and several other NZIF members were elected to either the indigenous standards technical committee or the NIWG.

By the time you read this I hope that you will have taken advantage of the opportunity to comment on the draft plantation standards, because the period of public consultation will be over. It is now up to the NIWG to approve the next draft and then seek endorsement of the New Zealand FSC process. They will probably seek endorsement from FSC International's Board in mid-March following a visit by the board to NZ. This will be an interesting period, because the New Zealand FSC standards setting process is currently fraught with a controversy that could derail it.

The controversy is almost entirely due to the issue of indigenous standards. According to some stakeholders, the environment chamber has not followed due process

in appointing members to FSC bodies, and has disenfranchised stakeholders who wish to advance certification of indigenous forests. The environment chamber has refused to appoint people to the indigenous standards technical committee, stating officially that the environmental NGOs do not have time to work on parallel standards for plantations and indigenous forests as agreed at our initial meeting in Rotorua. Unofficially, Eric Pyle, of Forest and Bird and chair of the NIWG at time of writing, reputedly said to Nora Devoe that Forest and Bird would never countenance FSC certification of indigenous forests, and that he “didn’t have to let her listen” to a recent NIWG meeting. Democracy and inclusion are important principles for FSC, and such repudiation of them would affect FSC’s endorsement of our standards. Nora’s silver beech research area at Gowan Hills is FSC certified, and she therefore has a very keen interest in the process.

The response of the NIWG to date has been to say that the indigenous standards technical committee is not properly constituted and can therefore not be officially recognised. Standards that the committee has been preparing are also considered to be “unofficial”. This means that people interested in indigenous forest management that includes wood production have been effectively excluded from the New Zealand FSC process.

I’m not aware of anyone who wants to hinder the establishment of a sound FSC process in New Zealand. The soundness of the process, however, is being called into question, and those calls are increasing in volume. Our Institute comprises people with interests in plantation forests and also stakeholders in indigenous forests. In my view, the NZIF needs to represent the interests of both.

Some people may believe that plantation standards might be established by sacrificing standards for indigenous forests. This would be unethical. It goes without saying that we should not abandon one section of our membership to favour another. Moreover, FSC certification of indigenous forests would improve indigenous management if it were not being done well, and increase public confidence in those operations that are ecologically sustainable; both highly desirable outcomes. Finally, if FSC is truly credible, it will not endorse a process from which stakeholders had been excluded, and so sacrificing the indigenous forestry stakeholders will not work.

One way to resolve this situation is for the environment chamber to participate fully in the process. Indigenous harvesting is legal under an approved permit or plan, with or without certification. Is it not in the interests of environmental NGOs to help set standards for these operations? This would bring the process in line with FSC guidelines and increase the likelihood that FSC would endorse the New Zealand FSC initiative. Grant Rosoman’s call in this issue of the Journal for “a reconsideration of indigenous forest management...including where and if any logging is appropriate...” suggests that some environmental

chamber appointees in the FSC process might consider full participation.

Either way, the NIWG has to endorse the indigenous standards technical committee. If the environment chamber chooses not to participate in the indigenous standards setting process, then that is the choice of the environment chamber. However, if the NIWG fails to endorse the committee, then it is disenfranchising a large group of stakeholders. In doing so it would risk not being endorsed by the FSC, which in turn would threaten the entire New Zealand initiative, including the plantation standards.

It is alarming that some members of the environment chamber have expressed an attitude that may derail the process. I hope that their attitude changes, and/or that the NIWG does the decent thing and officially recognises the indigenous standards technical committee. If the process failed it would be a waste of the enormous amount of time and energy members of the two technical committees have invested, and our efforts to ensure that our wood production is sustainable and make our wood products more attractive to buyers would be set back years. The consequences of failure are dire: we could see a concerted effort by some NGOs to thwart certification or recertification of New Zealand’s forests.

The Urban Connection

NZ FFA Annual Conference 2003

April 4th-8th,

Te Papa, Wellington

NZIF members are invited to join the NZ Farm Forestry Association at its 47th annual conference. For the first time the conference will be hosted by the Wellington Branch, and will be based at Te Papa, in the heart of downtown Wellington.

The conference combines indoor sessions on Saturday 5th and Sunday 6th with a great choice of field visits to growers and processors around the Wellington Region.

Indoor speakers have been drawn from government organisations, industry and research, and include Murray Sherwin, director general of MAF and Devon McLean. There will be a choice of half-day trips on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, and full-day visits to the Kapiti Coast and the Hutt Valley on the Monday and Tuesday respectively.

In addition, full registrants have the opportunity to join trips to Kapiti, Mana or Matiu/Somes Islands on Friday 4th April and Wednesday 9th April.

The conference is renowned for being highly informative and inspiring to farm foresters, private woodlot owners and numerous members who don’t own any trees but are associated or simply interested in smaller scale woodlot management. It is also a great social highlight.

For further details, visit the conference website visit the conference pages on www.nzffa.co.nz or contact our conference managers, EventMergers (09 426 3066). Both full and day registration is available.