

# It's often the people issues that make forestry difficult

At our superb annual conference this month we traveled into the Manawatu to see for ourselves erosion that plagues hill country farmers and doubly plagues dairy farmers in the Wairarapa every time there is a flood. After the last flood taxpayers provided more than \$200 million to help clean up the mess. About 175,000 ha of the Manawatu needs afforestation, according to the New Zealand Empirical Erosion Model that John Dymond showed us. We also heard Frank Brenmuhl, Chair of the Dairy Farmers of NZ, proclaim that "somebody had told him" he needed 17% of his farm converted to trees *each year* in order to produce greenhouse gas (GHG) neutral milk. His plea was that farmers had no viable alternative but to continue emitting GHGs, and that they would "never" go along with the New Zealand Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS).

The amount of forest required by dairy farmers to comply with the ETS is open to some dispute, but "17% of their land each year" seems to be inflated by a factor of around 30 if total greenhouse gas neutrality is the goal. In addition, the ETS, as currently constituted, would not require Mr Brenmuhl to be fully GHG neutral until 2025, and so to initially comply with the scheme a very small investment in forestry would be required. In fact, he could use a small portion his dairy receipts to finance a joint venture with a hill country farmer to afforest eroding land, thereby allowing both of them to meet ETS commitments while reducing the likelihood that dairy farmers on the flats will need another bailout from taxpayers. Technically this seems clear enough.

The problem is, how do we enable the joint ventures to happen? To illustrate why this is such a difficult issue, consider another part of our field trip in the Manawatu. We passed several blocks of radiata pine plantation, and our guides almost invariably said that the forests had been planted because either someone had died or someone's marriage had broken up, necessitating the liquidation of their farms. Forestry companies apparently accompany calamities like the grim reaper in these farming communities. The same communities have critically small schools, rugby clubs, and social networks that they feel are threatened by an ever-growing blanket of radiata pine. One of the Horizons Regional Council employees was "ordered out of a valley" by local residents when he was trying to help them plan afforestation on eroding hill country. Some of the hill farms reputedly make negative rates of return on capital, but it is the lifestyle that matters.

Helen Moodie of the Landcare Trust presented a moving account of her interactions with farmers, including plenty of hints about how to work with the farming community in positive ways. We often get it wrong, it seems. In recent email correspondence, Mike Halliday, a

former President of the NZ Farm Forestry Association said, "...you need to be careful with the tone of any response, in my experience (about 40 odd years of SLM) - and one of the reasons I didn't attend your recent conference - the Institute tends to display a rather patronising, 'we know what's best for you' view on land management, that doesn't go down well with the poor struggling peasants who can't afford to put a new roof on the shed."<sup>1</sup>

Yes, it is the people issues that make forestry difficult, and in saying that I'm pointing the finger at us - foresters. Congratulations to the organisers of the conference for bringing together such a diverse cross-section of the land management sector. The lesson for foresters is that it's all very well to believe we know how things might work out technically, but we have to make a greater effort to understand where other people are coming from and consider their views when we try to help. Maybe Landcare Trust could do the enabling and forestry consultants could provide technical advice later, if and when the need for it is accepted by landowners.

On a somewhat different issue, we've received and printed replies to Piers MacLaren's November 2007 editorial. Piers discussed those who think the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is seriously mistaken about anthropogenic climate change. His article questioned how they could support their views, and compared them to flat earth society members or young-earth creationists. Not surprisingly this prompted some responses, including one in this issue that says those who don't think the IPCC has got its predictions seriously wrong are members of a "mindless rabble". I accept full responsibility for initially allowing some *ad hominem*s to be published in the journal, and I thought that to disallow the latest round of name calling might risk bias. However, this will be the last time *ad hominem*s will be allowed in the New Zealand Journal of Forestry, at least while I am editor. To all those who agree with me that the journal should be above that kind of thing, I apologise unreservedly.

Euan Mason

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<sup>1</sup> Reprinted with Mike Halliday's permission