

# New Zealand engagement in international forestry policy

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## Abstract

This paper discusses the New Zealand government's participation in forest and forestry-related international discussions. It focuses on the period from the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED or Rio conference) in Rio de Janeiro to the present. During this time the basis of this country's international forest policy positioning, as set by domestic natural resources and forest-related policy changes in the 1980s, has not fundamentally changed. In essence the New Zealand engagement on forests is about: extracting and protecting the multiple values held by indigenous and planted forests; the need for a coherent and effective global governance system; the necessity to address contemporary issues such as illegal logging and illegal trade in timber; and the importance of, and New Zealand's experience with, sustainable forest management.

## Background

International attention to environmental sustainability and development and related forest issues was building in the years prior to the 1992 Rio conference. The 1983 United Nations Resolution establishing the World Commission on Environment and Development and the 1987 Brundtland Report were key developments leading to the conference. Forests were a dominant theme at Rio and outcomes of the meeting drove much of the subsequent international forest policy dialogue.

Forests were a major and controversial topic at the 1992 conference and a forests convention sought by many at Rio was not agreed. However the conference outcomes set the stage for a new phase of international discussion on how forests could be integrated into the way human communities deal with environmental and development issues. As a follow-up to the 1992 conference the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, known as Rio+20, was convened in Rio de Janeiro in 2012. The Rio+20 meeting sought to review progress made in the intervening decades and participants agreed to launch a process to develop new Sustainable Development Goals. However, forests did not feature strongly in the Rio+20 outcomes, with no clear expressions of how forests might be integrated into future Sustainable Development Goals.

What has happened in the intervening years? On the one hand, there have been continuing, unresolved and pressing issues. Deforestation and forest degradation continues, including losses of forest habitat and biodiversity. Forests remain the source of livelihood for a significant portion of the world's population, but their role in economic development remains surprisingly

poorly understood. Many of the challenges and debates concerning forests and sustainability, land use, timber production, climate change and environmental values also remain unresolved. There is ongoing debate on the funding of global forest management assistance, and this issue dates back decades to initial tensions over timber trade and tropical forest loss. Illegal logging and its associated trade has a significant impact on dependent communities and on the legitimate global trade in forest products.

On the other hand, the last two decades has been a period of intense international discussion on forests in the United Nations bodies and processes established after Rio. For example, international criteria and indicators (C&I) processes have been established among various regional and country groups following the 1992 conference. These processes built on earlier work by the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) and European countries to establish processes under an agreed framework to assess progress towards sustainable forest management.

There have been efforts among the international organisations to collaborate on forest issues, such as through the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) and among the criteria and indicators processes, the Montreal Process, Forests Europe, the International Tropical Timber Organization and the Global Forest Assessment of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO). There are new and better tools and more information to assist reporting and monitoring, assess forest extent and condition, and inform policy.

## New Zealand participation

The late 1980s to early 1990s was a changing time for this country's engagement in international forestry. The pioneering phases in forestry in the late 19th and early 20th centuries had strong international links. New Zealand later contributed expertise and knowledge gained via forest development, research and management by participation in various established international forestry fora, and by the provision of international assistance such as through New Zealand-funded aid projects.

Although technical exchange work was maintained, the developmental dimension of this country's international engagement diminished with changes in government administration and policies that commenced in 1987. This coincided with the international changes, which had also swung away from the development and operational focus on forestry to an emphasis on international policy issues.

At the time of the 1992 Rio conference, New Zealand was implementing significant domestic natural resource policy reforms. These included legislative changes in 1987 that split the administration of Crown-managed indigenous forests and planted forests, the passage of the 1991 Resource Management Act, and the ongoing privatisation of the Crown planted forests. There was also continuing public debate about timber harvest from private indigenous forests, for which legislation was in train, i.e. the 1993 Amendments to the Forests Act 1949. Collaborative initiatives such as the 1989 Tasman Accord and the 1991 New Zealand Forest Accord, established between industry and environmental non-governmental organisations, also sought to promote the sustainability credentials of planted forests.

With the domestic policy changes the government focused on strategic and economic issues, especially the key economic role for commercial planted forests and the promotion of conservation of the remaining indigenous forests, and aligning these with international developments. New Zealand participants at the 1992 Rio conference, including both government and industry (NZ Forest Industries Council) representatives, pressed for planted forests to be included in the agreed Forests Principles in the face of significant opposition among some parties and organisations at Rio.

New Zealand endorsed the Rio outcomes, including the Forest Principles. The final version of the agreement was a compromise between the demands by developing nations for increased funding assistance to pay for the setting aside of forest reserves and resistance to these demands from developed nations. This issue is still essentially unresolved and a matter of continuing debate in United Nations fora.

## The Rio conventions

New Zealand signed and subsequent ratified two multilateral conventions that were agreed at the 1992 Rio conference – the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – and then later signed and ratified the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). All three conventions have addressed forest issues. New Zealand engagement has been more active in the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Over time the conventions have established intergovernmental and ad hoc expert groups, as well as cross-convention partnerships and sub-agreements that address the variety of issues arising from the conventions' mandates. Both conventions have had a significant impact on the shape of international discussion on forests.

New Zealand regularly participates in meetings of both conventions and their subsidiary bodies. Delegation composition for both is from several agencies. The lead agency is generally the Ministry

of Foreign Affairs and Trade, with other participants from the Department of Conservation, the Ministry for the Environment, the Ministry for Primary Industries (previously the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and earlier the Ministry of Forestry), the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, and Te Puni Kokiri. The mix depends on the issues being discussed. Forests and climate change are included in broader international negotiations related to commitments under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, including the Kyoto Protocol. New Zealand's cross-departmental engagement is led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Promoting the capacity of forests, and especially fast-grown planted forests, to absorb greenhouse gases and therefore play a major role as carbon sinks, has been central to New Zealand engagement. This engagement has led to specific international agreements on technical rules, accounting methods related to carbon sinks, and carbon trading approaches. International decisions and guidelines are coupled with domestic policies, including the emissions trading scheme, that have had a major influence on commercial planted forest management and forests as a land use.

New Zealand signed the Convention on Biological Diversity in 1992 and ratified it in 1995. There are currently 193 parties to the convention, comprising both states and regional economic integration organisations. Since its inception the convention has addressed an expanding range of biodiversity-related issues, many of these associated with forests. This country has worked with like-minded parties to support decisions on forest biodiversity conservation and sustainable use and defended the sustainable use status of planted forests. It has also supported the view among many parties that better collaboration is needed among the United Nations conventions and organisations and with other regional and global groups, including criteria and indicators processes dealing with forests, to:

- Minimise duplication, share global forest information and reduce reporting burdens
- Align Convention on Biological Diversity decisions with other sustainable forest management developments
- Assist in resolving the climate change and forest interface issues, especially the development of Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) measures and how these deal with safeguards for forest biodiversity
- Deal with illegal logging and associated trade
- Ensure some alignment with existing criteria and indicators processes in the adoption of indicators as measures of achievement of targets
- Explore ways to assist countries, as needed, to operationalise decisions relevant to specific national situations.

## International Tropical Timber Organization

International discussion linking trade, development and impacts on forests, especially deforestation in tropical forests from exploitative timber production, began to emerge in the 1960s. The first International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA), including environmental provisions and marking an important blending of conservation and development interests, was adopted after the 1983 United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and came into force in 1985. It was a significant step in developing cooperation and consultation between tropical timber-producing countries and tropical timber-consuming countries and led to the formation of the International Tropical Timber Organization.

Further versions of the International Tropical Timber Agreement were negotiated in 1994 and 2006 under the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, these keeping pace with the changing issues and priorities relevant to the agreement. The producer and consumer groups within the International Tropical Timber Organization have sought to resolve long-running tensions and differences, and over time it has sponsored and coordinated a considerable amount of research and technical assistance covering a wide range of forestry topics.

New Zealand joined the Consumers' Group of the International Tropical Timber Organization in 1992, a move supported by industry and non-governmental organisations. While a minor consumer of tropical timber, membership was an opportunity to:

- Play a constructive role in the developing international dialogue on sustainable forest management
- Contribute New Zealand's technical and management experience in plantation forestry, albeit in temperate species
- Enhance trade opportunities for this country's wood products and consultancy services

- Protect New Zealand forestry interests through the promotion of the understanding of plantation forestry techniques
- Promote the complementary roles of, rather than competition between, temperate and tropical timbers
- Contribute to work on sustainable management of tropical forests.

Later, and following the negotiation of the 2006 International Tropical Timber Agreement, New Zealand further promoted the International Tropical Timber Organization's role in advancing work in some specific and topical aspects of sustainable forest management of particular interest to this country. This included:

- Implementation of criteria and indicators and other similar tools to help countries manage tropical forests sustainably
- Support to countries who are working towards certification schemes, both as a means of promoting market access and as a way of addressing illegal logging and the illegal trade in tropical timber, but not endorsing any particular certification scheme
- Consideration of the role of tropical forests in combating the adverse effects of climate change.

## United Nations Forum on Forests

Between 1995 and 2000 the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) and its successor, the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF), established under the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development and United Nations Economic and Social Council, respectively, met to consider and propose actions arising from the 1992 Rio outcomes.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Forests considered over 100 negotiated proposals for action. However a number of the controversial issues, especially related to trade and environment, funding and the legal and institutional framework for sustainable forest



The Montreal Process Working Group discusses climate change and sustainable forest management issues in June 2009



Meeting of the Subsidiary Scientific Body of the Convention on Biological Diversity in May 2010

management, were unresolved. Some of these were resolved in the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests which in turn recommended the formation of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) and the Collaborative Partnership on Forests. The United Nations established the United Nations Forum on Forests and adopted the framework based on the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests recommendations, collectively referred to as the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF). In 2006, the United Nations Forum on Forests adopted four global sustainable forest objectives which sought to:

- Reverse the loss of forest cover and increase efforts to prevent forest degradation
- Enhance forest benefits and their contribution to international development goals
- Increase the area of protected forests and areas of sustainably managed forests
- Reverse the decline in official development assistance for sustainable forest management.

In 2007, the United Nations Forum on Forests adopted a Non-Legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests (NLBI) and a Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPOW) for the period 2007 to 2015. The most recent UNFF10 meeting in 2013 agreed a process for a review of the International Arrangement on Forests which will be considered at UNFF11 in 2015. The outcome of this review is likely to significantly affect both the future direction of the Multi-Year Programme of Work, the structure of the United Nations Forum on Forests itself, and more broadly the direction of forests and forestry in the post-2015 sustainable development agenda arising from the Rio+20 conference.

New Zealand participated in the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests, the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests and the United Nations Forum on Forests meetings from the outset. This country was generally supportive of the proposals of the first two bodies and the continuing process through the United Nations Forum on Forests, which produced the global goals and the Non-Legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests.

Substantial work was done to match New Zealand forestry policies and practices against the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests and Intergovernmental Forum on Forests proposals related to sustainable forest management. Many of these were seen to align with the reporting against the Montreal Process criteria and indicators. Some of these proposals were considered non-relevant to this country's situation. Specific characteristics of the New Zealand situation included the absence of a single national forest policy, private ownership of most commercial planted forests, and other elements resulting from the 1987 administrative split of forests.

New Zealand positioning at the United Nations Forum on Forests meetings emphasised:

- Raising the political profile of forests internationally for their contribution to economic, environmental and social outcomes, and to secure greater international acceptance of sustainable forest management
- The positive role that fast-growth planted forests play in sustainable forest management, but avoiding discriminatory decisions that could affect future market access for products

- Enhanced collaboration and cooperation among forest and related organisations to reduce the burden of reporting required of countries
- Support for an open and consultative process to investigate further work on a future legally-binding instrument on forests, but not impeding ongoing implementation of sustainable forest management.

In the recent United Nations Forum on Forests meetings, New Zealand supported the substantial inter-sessional work done towards resolving the impasse over international funding of forest activities that arose at UNFF8 in 2009. This work explored funding gaps, forest management, and administration difficulties in some countries. Along with other developed countries, New Zealand opposed the establishment of a new global fund for forests to address gaps in international funding assistance, arguing that it would not solve the complex forest governance issues globally.

## Montreal Process

The Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (now Forests Europe) and the Montreal Process Working Group on criteria and indicators for the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Temperate and Boreal Forests (the Montreal Process) were formed shortly after the Rio conference and following meetings between European and other temperate and boreal forested countries. These meetings were to discuss the potential use of internationally agreed criteria and indicators to help measure, assess and report on national and regional progress in implementing sustainable forest management.

The Montreal Process held its first meeting in June 1994, initially with 10 and subsequently 12 member countries including Argentina, Australia, Canada,

Chile, China, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, the United States and Uruguay. These countries represent about 90 per cent of the world's temperate and boreal forests and 60 per cent of all the world's forests.

The 1995 Santiago Declaration Statement on and indicators for the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Temperate and Boreal Forests adopted by Montreal Process members contained a comprehensive set of criteria and indicators for use by policy-makers, forest managers and the public. The declaration was presented to both the FAO Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Forestry (Rome, 1995) and to the third session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (New York, 1995).

The Montreal Process Working Group has subsequently developed and agreed refinements to these criteria and indicators. Recent meetings have sought to foster greater collaboration between other criteria and indicators groups – such as the International Tropical Timber Organization, Forests Europe and the Global Forest Assessment of FAO – in an effort to streamline international information and reporting. New Zealand participates in the policy-level Working Group and the Technical Advisory Committee and has prepared two country reports in 2003 and 2009, with a further report currently in preparation.

## Food and Agricultural Organization

New Zealand's active participation in the FAO forestry work began shortly after the 1946 establishment of the FAO Forestry Department and currently includes technical input into the FAO Forestry Department's Global Forest Resource Assessment and biennial reporting to the Rome-based Committee on Forestry. At the regional level, New Zealand participates in the policy-focused Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission (APFC) sessions. It is one of six FAO regional commissions.

New Zealand contributes to various regional reports made at Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission sessions and to special FAO-published case studies including on the effects of logging bans in native forests, forestry administration at the national level, fire management and the development of plantations. The Commission's sessions are an opportunity for New Zealand to maintain our dialogue with the Pacific island nations on forestry issues and enhance understanding more broadly among Asia and Pacific member countries about our forests and forestry.

## Challenges and opportunities

Despite efforts over time to develop and promote a more coherent global view on forests and forestry there is no single globally agreed approach to forestry, such as a forests convention, as was hoped for at Rio. Planted forests are more accepted globally as performing a range of key commercial, social and environmental roles, but this is in the midst of an expanding array of different



Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission delegates at the Rotorua session hear about New Zealand plantation forest management in November 2013

forest-related issues and agendas. The future of the current United Nations International Arrangement of Forests is uncertain given the upcoming review in 2015. Proposals from European countries to establish a legally binding forest instrument create further uncertainty, as they contemplate how this might affect global forest governance arrangements.

The challenges are well understood by many key global organisations. For example, the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO, 2010) has noted 'the proliferation of forest organisations and initiatives seeking to address forest issues at the global, regional, and national levels, with a complex and fragmented web of the international forestry governance.' They and others have made a plea for cooperation and communication between often competing groups, and emphasise that efforts to draw attention to forest issues have to resonate with a wider audience and stress the need for a cross-sectoral and cross-institutional participation on forest issues.

Others note the advantages that forestry has over other sectors and it apparently failing to capitalise on these in the bids for funds. In a keynote address to the 24th Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission session in 2011 (FAO 2012), Andrew Steer, then Special Envoy for Climate Change at the World Bank, stated that the previous narrow definition of 'capital' has now expanded to cover physical, social, natural and human capital, with all elements working together. He said that forestry has been a pioneer in the area of 'green' business, with trade in other commodities seeking similar certification processes to green their businesses. He noted that forestry, unlike other sectors, was going into Rio+20 without a clear narrative of success, and cited five useful and topical areas for discussion that could help build such a narrative to take forestry forward:

- Forestry has a high capacity to create jobs and reduce poverty, especially that caused by shifting agriculture
- Patterns of forest product consumption are changing, for example, the demand for paper is increasing in developing countries and nations can no longer be split between producer and consumer
- There is a need to adopt a 'rural landscape' approach in defining forests as the pattern of tree distribution is shifting
- Forestry has a minor share of international funding and needs to become more efficient at bidding for and using funds
- Partnerships are vital, but donors have shied away
- There are no silver bullets in making forestry work properly in the face of new and complex demands.

Over the 22 years since the Rio conference, and through successive cycles of government, the New Zealand international forest policy position has

remained essentially based on the defence and promotion of the respective roles of planted and indigenous forests as our sustainable forest management model. New Zealand society and forest-related policies are well-attuned to sustainability principles, and we have an established international reputation in this regard. This model has proved to be a durable framework for our positioning in the international forest policy dialogue and remains an effective basis for this country's participation in the future development of green business.

Nevertheless, New Zealand's engagement across the range of dialogue in which forests are either directly or indirectly topical is challenging, if only because of the need to stay attuned to the changes both globally and in the Asia-Pacific region. Some of these are more relevant to the way this country engages internationally and include changing socio-economic influences as well as changing community demands from forests, such as for expanded environmental and recreation services.

Commercial planted forests are now a source of a significant proportion of globally traded forest products. However New Zealand needs to remain watchful for restrictions on trade, such as through certification and legality requirements and tariff and non-tariff barriers affecting trade in finished products, across the span of international discussion on forests and forestry.

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