

# A NATIONAL FOREST POLICY

## Terms of Reference for Ministerial Advisory Group

In February 1990 the Queen announced in her speech at the opening of Parliament that Government will develop a National Forest Policy. At the instruction of the Minister of Forestry, and with the agreement of the Rt Hon. Geoffrey Palmer and the Primary Production Caucus Committee, a Ministerial Advisory Group has been constituted to action this government initiative. Members of the Advisory Group are:

John Valentine (convenor)  
Diane Burns  
Mike Cuddihy  
Dudley Franklin  
Di Lucas  
Colin McKenzie  
Kevin Prime  
Guy Salmon  
Mike Smith  
Wink Sutton  
John Novis (secretary)

The task of the Ministerial Advisory Group is to prepare and submit to the Minister of Forestry by June 15, 1990 a report for public circulation which:

1. Outlines the evolution of forestry in New Zealand.
2. Seeks to raise public awareness of the role of trees and forests.
3. Identifies opportunities for New Zealand from national and global perspectives which can be realised through trees and forests.
4. Identifies policy and implementation options which will lead to the realisation of desired opportunities.
5. Recognises the rights and responsibilities of Government, Maori and land owners.
6. Recognises all existing legislation and government policies relating to trees and forests.

### Comment by John Valentine

One of the disciplines of a free market economy is a free flow of information. People need to know what is going on so that they can "make their rational decisions". If there is an information gap they are likely to fill it with fiction to suit their own agenda.

So it is with forestry.

- Why, when privatisation of the State's forestry assets is a perfectly logical step in the development of industrial forestry in New Zealand, is the Public Service Association campaigning against it as just another part of its public versus private ownership debate?
- Why, when most of our privately owned forests are in the hands of three major companies who have

shown a long-term commitment to forestry, are they being cast as unworthy stewards of the State resource?

- Why impose restrictions and requirements on State forest licence holders that are not imposed on other land managers, be they private or public? Don't farmers, land developers and private forest owners have exactly the same responsibilities for wise stewardship?

And, worst of all, why is all this happening when the New Zealand forestry story is exciting, positive, and full of potential? What are the doom and gloomers feeding off? Forests are a renewable resource that cover 25% of New Zealand and provide a multiplicity of benefits and opportunities. I don't think we should develop a forestry framework from the position that in 15 years' time an international licence holder might not replant some hectares of pine out the back of a State forest just because they were planted in 1974 for social reasons.

Forestry has been hammered on many fronts over the last decade. We are at the crossroads and a public expression of where forestry is now going is needed. A forest policy is essential and will be a very suitable vehicle. We need a clear expression of objectives backed up by an agreed code of practice and, probably as the exception rather than the rule, some regulatory support. The approach to follow was explained recently by Brian Boyle, the Commissioner of Public Lands for the State of Washington. In answer to a question about how to stop forests being converted into 'junk bonds' he advised that "while the tools are regulatory, we have proved that they are the worst tools, so we are starting a talking (accord) process through the Timber, Fish and Wildlife Agreement". In New Zealand the Tasman Accord is an example of what can be achieved when two parties with different views get together and talk, without the opportunity to push their extremist views at each other via an intermediary (usually the politician/bureaucrat combination).

We can make very clear statements on our objectives covering the whole range of values that forests contribute, and we can back them up with examples. It is a fact that forests provide a multiplicity of benefits, most of which are perfectly compatible much of the time. The signs from the United States are that foresters' efforts to implement multiple use on Federal lands under their multiple use

legislation have become very bogged down in enormous exercises concerned with measuring everything. The balanced use approach developed by the NZ Forest Service, which was sound enough in intent, on reflection probably had timing against it, along with execution problems. It is ironic that we need to turn back to the approach of identifying primary or predominant uses as the way to go into the 1990s. The tone of such a policy would be: "We are managing this forest primarily for this reason, but," we must add and emphasise, "you can have all these benefits from it as well". Our policy should reach beyond forests. We must concern ourselves with the places of trees in our rural, periurban and urban landscapes, as we move from colonial to more mature patterns of land use.

We do need a forestry policy: one which is developed, and supported, publicly.

H. Levack

## Forestry taxation

Mr Doug Kidd, National's spokesman on forestry, told the Nelson/Marlborough Branch of the Institute of Forestry on April 30 that a National Government will do away with the "cost of bush" formula for assessing forestry earnings for taxation purposes.

A forestry policy is being developed in the Primary Production Caucus Committee for caucus approval. The committee has agreed that the "cost of bush" formula should go, and be replaced by a system of deductibility similar to that for other land uses. Essentially this would be a straight deduction of expenses for the years in which they were incurred, although consideration is still being given to some short-term spread of expenditure under a limited number of headings.

Whatever caucus finally approves, the tax treatment of forestry will be essentially neutral when compared with other forms of land development and use. He stressed that there will be no subsidies or other like payments to any sector.

In accordance with National's usual practice the policy will be published before the election; it is expected to be ready by the end of June. NZ Forestry hopes to bring readers highlights from this and other parties' forestry policies (if available) in our August issue.

H. Levack