

Communication – the key to Resource Management planning

The passing of the Resource Management Act 1991 provides a framework for the allocation, use and management of New Zealand's natural resources into the future. This Act, having integrated provisions from a large number of statutes, is the principal statute for the management of land, water and soil resources, subdivisions, the coast, air and pollution control.

Sustainable management is the focus. What this means with respect to land has been the topic of debate over many years. In November 1991 the Government provided its perspective. This perspective builds on the position set out in the Resource Management Act 1991, and previous policy initiatives, by describing sustainable land management outcomes:

- (a) The maintenance of the potential of the nation's soil resources to achieve viable land use options for present and future generations;
- (b) The adoption of management skills and application of appropriate technology to enable people and communities to provide for their social and economic well-being;
- (c) The adoption of land management practices that maintain or enhance the quality of waterways, and ground water resources, from suspended sediments, nutrients, harmful micro-organisms and other contaminants;
- (d) The avoidance, mitigation and remedying of the impacts of land related hazards including flooding, subsidence and erosion;
- (e) The maintenance of catchments to provide high-quality water resources for downstream users;
- (f) The maintenance of cultural values associated with land and water, including the relationship of Maori and their culture and traditions with their ancestral lands, water, sites, wahi tapu and other taonga;
- (g) The maintenance of aesthetic, ecological and conservation values related to land and water.

The achievement of these outcomes will result in land use that is consistent

with known physical limitations and better able to withstand short-term stress. In this way land management would be more cost-effective with consequent impacts on business viability and economic growth.

Contrary to these desired outcomes current land use throughout some parts of New Zealand is not sustainable. Land use has developed without taking sufficient account of the physical and climatic limitations of the land resource. In some localities, such development has led to an ongoing exposure to the damaging effects of natural disasters and adverse climatic events.

Current land-use problems include:

- land instability and erosion including Northern Hawkes Bay/East Cape, Northland, the volcanic plateau, King Country, Rangitikei, inland Taranaki, the Wairarapa, Marlborough and coastal Otago;
- eutrophied lakes and rivers resulting from sedimentation and nutrient runoff, and associated incursion of aquatic weeds;
- silted up estuarine systems and coastal margins;
- ecological decline associated with land degradation, pests and weeds in the South Island high country;
- potential for wind erosion and land degradation as a result of drought through the east coasts of both the North and South Islands.

Well-managed forestry operations have the potential to impact in each of these problem situations. In many situations land-use change to a forest system, be it plantation, woodlot or conservation planting, provides the only feasible and technical means of achieving long-term solutions. Recent changes in the investment and policy climate have seen a resurgence in interest in new planting across a wide range of situations, including these problem situations.

The Resource Management Act is an important factor in realising the potential for further forest expansion. The Act focuses on sustainable management and the achievement of sound

environmental outcomes through limiting adverse effects and provides an enabling and permissive approach to land-use planning. In this way the highly prescriptive approach to defining approved activities in District Scheme plans becomes a thing of the past; discrimination against forestry as a competing land use is much more difficult to sustain through these new arrangements.

This doesn't mean that the planning problems that the forest sector has had to endure in the past will disappear as if by magic. The process put in place by the Act depends on consultation, public participation and the provision of good information. That is, the Regional Policy Statements, Regional Management Plans and District Plans that will be prepared during the next two years will only be as good as the information provided to the Councils concerned.

The provision of high-quality information that fully and fairly sets out the objectives and aspirations of forestry, and foresters, is the responsibility of us all. Whether we like it or not, forestry people are perceived as having an island culture. We have been very effective at communicating among ourselves but much less effective in communicating with others.

As an interest group we must become proactive and take a full role in the public participation process. To a large extent this means no more than using current information and initiatives more effectively. For instance, the New Zealand Forest Code of Practice provides a comprehensive basis for the establishment of Regional Rules regulating particular forestry activities – if we don't advocate this approach it won't happen. With cooperation and continued good performance self regulation is a very real prospect.

If we don't take up the challenge of communication and cooperation and forestry does not achieve its rightful place in future resource allocation decisions whom do we blame except ourselves?

Kevin Steel