
1992 NZIF AGM and Conference

a success

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The 1992 AGM and Conference demonstrated a significant change in format from previous such functions.

The executive committee of the Auckland Section, responsible for organising the event, proved somewhat iconoclastic, deciding early in the piece that:

- there would be a rigorous adherence to the nominated topic, "Investment in Forestry";
- The programme should include sufficient technical content that employers could justify sponsoring their employees to attend on the grounds of "continuing education";
- the programme should be geared to attract a sizeable attendance from outside of the Institute.

The last was on the basis that for their own credibility (and indeed survival) professional foresters need to demonstrate their capability to translate the technical complexities of forestry into the investor's language.

Most heretical of all, when the Auckland executive found that several other organisations were also proposing seminars on the same subject, they elected to combine forces with Profile Publishing Ltd, publisher of NZ Forest Industries magazine. Perhaps inevitably, there was some negative reaction to this liaison, with criticism that the Institute function had been hijacked by commercial interests. Any such assertions were completely unfounded - the Auckland executive initiated the approach to Profile Publishing who proved a thoroughly honourable partner. The synergies offered by the partnership saw a much stronger lineup of speakers than the Institute alone could have offered. It also resulted in a very professionally run conference which attracted a strong attendance from the financial sector.

Forestry Investment

For the record there were some 175 conference delegates, of whom approximately 40% were Institute members - by far the largest attendance in recent years. The conference heard from an impressive group of speakers including politicians, bureaucrats, industry representatives, accountants, investment analysts and consultants. Significantly, of the 21 speakers, nine were members of the Institute.

The tone of the conference was almost universally bullish - almost, but not quite, as Gareth Morgan indicated in customary style that there is more than enough evidence to foster endless pessimism. While most speakers saw forestry as a favourable investment opportunity they were, nevertheless, not over-exuberant about its possibilities. Discussion of the perceived disadvantage of forestry investments - the taxation treatment, illiquidity of immature forests, lack of debt financing and market uncertainty - was candid, and indeed reassuring. Forestry could only stand to lose credibility if there appeared to be only sweetness and light.

Positive Signs

For those Institute members disinclined to spend either time or money on the two-day jointly-run conference, there were three events run under the auspices of the Institute alone - the AGM, Dinner and a field trip. The AGM was well attended, lively, and ran to time. Several areas of discussion confirmed that, like the wider NZ economy, the health and vigour of the Institute has in recent years been less than inspiring. Like the wider economy, however, there are now some positive vital signs. An entertaining section of the meeting was Liza Crozier's report on the age-class structure of the Institute and associated actuarial implications - it left the listener idly musing as to whether the Institute's biggest problem was that it had been collectively trapped in a mid-life crisis.

Institute Dinner

The Institute Dinner proved particularly convivial, with nearly 90 attending. Formal functions included presentation of the Schlich medal to Melissa Nicol and a presentation to Wink Sutton as outgoing President. Guest speaker Dr. Robert Donnelly then addressed future market opportunities for radiata pine, particularly those within North America. Consistent with the preceding conference, Robert's presentation conveyed a real optimism for the market prospects for sawn and remanufactured radiata. Equally consistently he also warned of any complacency or inactivity

- "The US customers are asking when will the market studies stop and the trial shipments start?" Robert's paper presented a thorough position statement on the North American market. It will be reprinted in a future issue of this journal.

Field Trip

The field trip, organised by the NZIF, continued the conference theme, tracking backwards down the investment cycle. The first visits were to possible destinations for the forest output - the export log facility of Port Auckland, and Anderson and O'Leary's sawmill. From there the tour visited progressively younger stands within Woodhill forest, before finally relaxing with some wine tasting.

Overall, the conference/AGM met the various objectives of both the Auckland section of the NZIF and Profile Publishing, including the mutual aim of attracting a strong attendance and giving value for money. Feedback from delegates has been universally positive, and we are confident that the profile and status of the Institute has been raised in an important arena.

Lessons for Future

What lessons can be drawn for the future? The conference has indicated that the Institute can successfully capture the attention of those outside its ranks, educate them to forestry in terms they understand, and enhance its own credibility in the process. The conference has also demonstrated the considerable advantages of combining with another party in organising a major function, particularly when the partner can offer promotional support.

More than one speaker within the conference stressed the need to avoid complacency within the forestry sector, particularly in the **marketing** of our forest output as **high value products**. Similarly, the opportunities for **joint ventures** at all levels of the industry found frequent mention. The 1992 Profile Publishing NZIF conference represented a joint venture with assiduous marketing. It also set out to be a high-value product, and there is general agreement that it succeeded.