

sible.

Their propaganda states that forests that have commercial value cannot by definition have intrinsic values; ignoring or discounting the evidence to the contrary. Chip and timber exports they perceive to be "bad" (although it is very unclear why), so they try, and sometimes succeed, in banning them. They attempt to make planning legislation restrictive and expensive, this apparently being the best way to ensure sustainable management.

One suspects that, while describing themselves as 'conservationists', which, before the Oxford English Dictionary

changed its meaning, used to include an element of 'use', their approach and beliefs are 'preservationist'. Any human use is 'bad', Kaitiakitanga included, unless it is minimal and on a 'hunter-gatherer' level.

We live in a world of scarce and diminishing resources, with a rapidly expanding population with wants and needs: who can be sure that a strategy of preservation, with the exclusion of human commercial gain that it implies, is a practicable, or **sustainable** option? True 'conservation', meaning use in perpetuity, is our only hope in the long run.

These are general points, and by no means aimed at all groups, some of which are truly conservationist in the old sense of the word. However, one wonders if the more extreme groups have ever considered that by devaluing forests, particularly those with a 'cultural' origin, their efforts may be counter productive to the sustainability ends they espouse – or perhaps their definition of sustainability does not include that species *Homo sapiens*. Welcome to Jonestown?

Chris Perley

A triunity responds to Craig Potton's 'A public perception of plantation forestry'

Mick O'Neill responds

If Craig Potton's perception of plantation forestry (*Comment, NZ Forestry, August 1994*) is representative of his particular pressure group, then it would appear that some people are totally confused. In addition, in developing this perception he has made a number of claims using extravagant language in his assessment of the South Island beech management proposals. Claims of loss of fertility, soil erosion, increased flooding, and destruction of wildlife when logged indigenous forests are converted to exotics are not supported by any data or references to reputable research findings. He also manages to get the only area figure he quotes wrong by about 50 per cent. I suggest Mr Potton goes back to the original White Paper (NZFS 1971) and reads it carefully and refers to the Report of the NZ Institute of Foresters Council published in the NZ Journal of Forestry Volume 17(1): 112-136 (1972) and the editorial in the same issue. If the scatter gun claims of Mr Potton are weighed against the considered views of organisations that commented at the time – including the Forest Research Institute, the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, the Royal New Zealand Forest and Bird Protection Society, the Soil Conservation Society and Soil Conservation authorities – then I suggest there is no contest.

Mr Potton's perception of plantation forestry appears to change from total hostility to grudging acceptance during the course of his article and it appears that one of the major companies meets well his approval. He would present a more persuasive argument if he produced solid infor-

mation and relied less on perceived disasters and the total distortion of management practices to bolster an emotional argument. I think it is unfortunate that this type of material is given space in the Journal.

G.M. O'Neill

Priestley Thomson responds

I am in full agreement with Mr O'Neill's comments on Craig Potton's rather unprofessional article in what is a professional journal.

Could I further stress these facts:

- that the Government at the time knew that large areas of West Coast beech forest were capable of sustained yield management and believed that it ought to take place;
- that the presence on a large scale of bad timber defects meant that only a pulp and paper industry could give full utilisation;
- that the Forest Service undertook extensive surveys to classify the area into categories that could be utilised and categories that ought to be reserved for soil and water conservation, scenery protection, wildlife values or recreational potential;
- that the minimum economic size for a kraft pulp mill was considered by the industry to be at least 500 or 600 tonnes per day;
- that the sustained yield of the beech forests could not support a mill of this size;
- and thus that a supplementary exotic forest resource would have to be created.

The last item mentioned is the nub of the matter. The revised breakdown of the West Coast project reserved nearly 400,000 hectares of native forest for a variety of purposes, mainly soil and water conservation. Of the remaining 243,000 hectares, the total area for conversion to plantations was 97,000 hectares – under 40 per cent. The percentage would be very much less if expressed as a proportion of remaining merchantable forest area in New Zealand; would be much less still, if it were expressed as a proportion of New Zealand's total forest area; and would be **infinitesimal** when compared to the area of forest already clearfelled and converted to grassland. It was considered that the economic and social benefits which would accrue locally, and to New Zealand generally, would far outweigh the disadvantages that could be caused by clearfelling and converting this area. The decision to promote it was a careful and conscientious one, well thought out. It was not, repeat **not**, as Mr Potton claims, "infamous".

In 1971 White Paper (NZFS 1971) invited and got a lot of public comment. It is significant that of the many organisations approached the only one to counsel against the establishment of exotics was the Royal New Zealand Forest and Bird Protection Society. They did not know, and we certainly did not, that in less than ten years the environmental movement would gain such prominence that it could claim the public was against virtually any clearfelling of native forest. Forest and Bird was then the most important protection organisation and here its thinking was well ahead of the times.

It is interesting to look back. For decades the Forest Service, through its battles with the sawmilling industry to reduce the cut in Podocarp forests, and its protection of millions of hectares of mountain-land beech forest, had been the undisputed leader of forest conservation in New Zealand. The conservationists had caught it up and were passing it. Perhaps the Forest Service was here at fault, but I still wonder if the insistence of the environmentalists in this instance was right: the economic and social advantages of a local beech/exotics pulp mill would far outweigh any disadvantages that could be claimed for this course of action. New Zealand cannot in fact afford to sterilise potentially productive resources. It is entirely possible that if the decision had to be made today it would be exactly the same as in 1973 (NZFS 1973).

A. P. Thomson

Lindsay Poole responds

On Craig Potton's own admission, he was not the person to have been asked to give "A public perception of plantation forestry", but, even so, one would not have expected, from any invitee, an attack on the wicked Forest Service about the "infamous" beech scheme in 1971. It was too good an opportunity for Potton to miss a one-sided onslaught. Hardly the way to pursue "peace and enlightenment" which he claims has come about.

The "infamous scheme", in some form, will inevitably rise again because what Potton forgot to say was that the nation owes the West Coast a huge debt. The deliberate destruction of the greater part of the potentially usable land resource, and the manageable rimu forest that grew on it, will be repaid somehow. Politicians, helped substantially at one stage by gold-miners, never swerved from the path of clearfelling rainforest, the policy that was blindly followed throughout the country despite continuous Forest Service protests.

Evidence of rimu management possibilities worked out by the Canterbury School of Forestry, extensive investigations and trials by the Forest Service and observations by many people could not change the chosen course until almost the end of the forest destruction.

Where were the conservationists then?

Beech forests are still there only because the soils under them are poor agriculturally and the wood not in great demand. Experimental work pursued throughout more than half a century has amply confirmed that, with variations, the southern beeches can be managed for sustained production in the same manner as is practised so successfully with European

beech. Leonard Cockayne enunciated this more than 80 years ago. He included human beings in this formula because they were part of the ecology of the country. The conservationists slammed the human beings. They like neither the idea of beech management nor the clearing of poor beech forest for exotic tree planting. Now they admit they need the latter and the needs of people who have been dependent on forests for their livelihood should be met – forsooth, the West Coasters.

Future Governments are certainly not going to be idly contemplating a resource of this nature and extent. Surely the West Coasters who have been "done in the eye" can share it with the birds and possums. Potton's codswallop of "peace and enlightenment" will land us once again in the laps of short-term Governments trying to promote long-term policies.

Wide debate is what is wanted.

A.L. Poole

References

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Footnote

The editorial board is pleased to provoke wide debate, and to that end, we appreciate the contribution from the three Fellows above.

The comments section of this journal was designed to give people the chance to voice informed opinion, in the knowledge that their arguments are subject to critique: nor, by inclusion, does it infer agreement by either the editorial board or the NZIF Council. However, an insular profession is an unhealthy profession ... and a little needle goes a long way. Ed.

1984 or Don't do as I do

Firstly: shoot our editor, or better still, remove him from treeless Otago where clearly he has been subverted by pastoralists. How else to explain the arboreal tokenism illustrated in his May editorial?

Rather more disturbing is the respect which we seem to be expected to give to Dr Thies' views (the May Journal). I read the article several times and at the end of it was none the wiser except to feel if he says grass is blue then we'd better believe it or else.

Dr Thies slates Scandinavian forestry for having simplified the biota and ends up by saying that "generally speaking the vast majority of indigenous or local people will guarantee a forestry that can sustain the ecosystem in the long run".

The problem is that he has already said that they don't in Scandinavia, despite the fact that a very large part of the forest estate is individually owned in small holdings – the local people, he says, have not sustained it properly.

True, he throws in the Lapps as "native" people whose forest has been exploited, but that has very little relevance to the whole, and seems to be there just to confirm his apparent view that "local" and "indigenous" people are necessarily third-world inhabitants – a condescending and rather racist view.

In our case the Maoris (as we are talk-

ing about indigenous people) destroyed in quite a short time a third of our natural forest estate without any outside aid or influence, and in Britain, where I now am, a forest cover of something like 90% is now 5%. The bulk of damage was done well before the industrial revolution and by people whom now we would certainly class as living close to nature.

I worked with Finns for a few years, and found them at times a little self-satisfied. I thought about their standards of forest management: so occasionally I needed them on the subject that Dr Thies raises, of over-simplifying a natural forest.

Not so, they said: in earlier times a great deal of Scandinavia had been cleared by peasant agriculture, a process which on poor soils and in a difficult climate had led to soil degradation and a constant expansion of clearance in search of fresh fertility.

The situation had come to an end in Finland, they said, in a time of war between Sweden (in whose realm most of Finland then lay) and Russia. The Swedish King had marched his army, mostly Finns, to attack the soft underbelly of Russia and had there been defeated.

As a counter-stroke Peter the Great sent an army of Russians ravaging into Finland and the end result was a great lack of Finns, particularly males of breeding