

President's Comments

An independent advocate for forestry

Tim Thorpe

Two members of the NZIF have recently commented to me that the NZIF has a good reputation within the forestry sector for commenting on technical issues but that it needs to be careful not to be seen to be too involved in lobbying. An interesting comment and one in which it must be said that it is not always easy to draw the line between what is a technical comment and what is effectively lobbying.

Take the case of indigenous forestry harvesting for example, not an important issue for many working in the forestry sector I suspect, but one in which the NZIF has had quite a prominent role. I can remember that at the time of the debate over sustainable indigenous management on the Crown estate (read Timberlands West Coast Ltd) that the NZIF came under some criticism for not doing enough lobbying, given that to all intents and purposes the arguments were not technical but political.

A member also recently wrote to us suggesting the NZIF advocate that its members put their names forward for local government elections. This was seen as a means of countering other lobby groups on Councils including farmers who, by and large, are very good at getting representation on Councils.

In the last few months the NZIF has made submissions to government on climate change, biosecurity, leaky buildings, and biotechnology as well as submissions to local government. We are actively involved in the national certification process. Our positions have not always aligned with others in the forestry sector and occasionally we have received media attention for our comments. Every now and then, one of our submissions is adopted by the party we are submitting to, over and above other views from the sector. Does this mean that we have been lobbying?

The Council made a conscious decision last year to raise the NZIF's profile. To do this we have become more active in a number of areas and I envisage a continuing level of activity over the coming year. This

does not mean that we have become involved in lobbying. But we must remember that one of the NZIF's objects is to be an independent advocate for forestry. This means being front-footed where necessary. Who else can provide that independent voice - NZ Forest Owners Association, NZ Forest Industries Council, Timber Industry Federation, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry - I think not.

Allied to this theme, I have recently written to the National Initiatives Working Group (NIWG) developing certification standards expressing concern about the process that has been followed to date in developing these standards (see article by Euan Mason elsewhere in this journal). In essence, the indigenous forestry certification process has been disenfranchised by lack of participation from some environmental groups and the NIWG has not resolved this situation.

The letter I have written points out that lack of action by the NIWG undermines not only the indigenous certification process, but may also undermine the plantation certification process, particularly if the NIWG intend to meet Forest Stewardship Council criteria. The NZIF is keen to see progress made and has offered to assist resolve the impasse if appropriate.

It is appropriate to note the real anger that lack of progress on this issue by the NIWG has left amongst some of our members.

On a separate note I must record the passing of Mick O'Neill a former Director General of the NZ Forest Service, the second death of a former DG in a relatively short period; and Harry Bunn a former Director of Production Forestry Division at Forest Research Institute. Mick was a Fellow and former Vice-President of the NZIF and Harry both a Fellow and Honorary Member. Both men made significant contributions to the sector and maintained strong interests in forestry matters in retirement. May they rest in peace.

See you in Queenstown.

FSC deliberations - a growing concern

Euan Mason

The NZIF is participating in a process that potentially will result in national Forestry Stewardship Council standards for our forest management. A body called the National Initiative Working Group (NIWG) governs the process, while two technical committees, one for plantations and one for indigenous forests, create the standards. People from four chambers (economic, environmental, social and Maori), that represent diverse stakeholder groups, elected members to the NIWG and the two committees. The NZIF has one official representative in the process (myself - on the plantation standards technical committee), and several other NZIF members were elected to either the indigenous standards technical committee or the NIWG.

By the time you read this I hope that you will have taken advantage of the opportunity to comment on the draft plantation standards, because the period of public consultation will be over. It is now up to the NIWG to approve the next draft and then seek endorsement of the New Zealand FSC process. They will probably seek endorsement from FSC International's Board in mid-March following a visit by the board to NZ. This will be an interesting period, because the New Zealand FSC standards setting process is currently fraught with a controversy that could derail it.

The controversy is almost entirely due to the issue of indigenous standards. According to some stakeholders, the environment chamber has not followed due process