

Professional Expectations and Registration

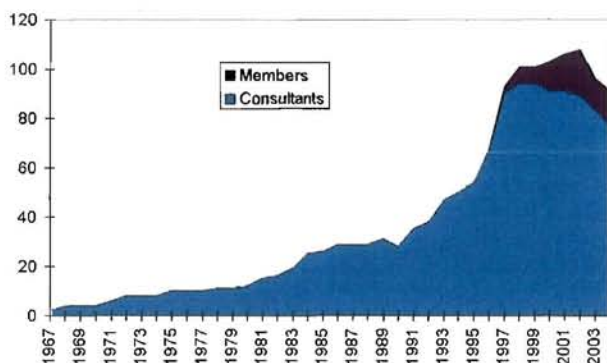
Forestry professionals must meet the expectations of their clients or employers, the broader community, and their peers. NZIF members are required to adhere to the Institute's code of ethics and standards.

This issue of the Journal reviews the expectations that forestry professionals must meet. It describes the obligations and the liability that they face. Ways of covering this liability are also discussed. Topics covered include:

- Professional obligations (NZIF expectations of members, Code of ethics).
- Professional liability.
- Managing professional risk (Business structure, Standard terms of engagement, Insurance).

The material is relevant to all members of the NZIF, particularly Registered Members including Registered Forestry Consultants (RFCs). As shown in Fig. 1, this group has become a significant component of NZIF membership. There was a dramatic increase in the number of Consultants following the adoption at the 1996 AGM in Invercargill of the NZIF Registration process to replace the previous consultant recognition process. The NZIF Registration Board was initiated to administer the registration of members – Registered Forestry Consultants are a subset of Registered Members.

Fig. 1: Total number of Registered Members and Registered Forestry Consultants.



Currently there are 91 Registered Members including 77 Registered Forestry Consultants. The reduction from the high of 108 members in 2002 is largely a reflection of the age-class distribution of consultants, the change in employment circumstances of some, and the financial tightening in the sector. However a quick glance through the NZIF Membership Directory reveals that there are still a significant number of other Full Members who act as "consultants" but who are not registered. Why is this the case?

There are a number of reasons why eligible individuals have not sought registration

including:

- Fear of not meeting the registration criteria. Being judged by your peers certainly involves putting your reputation on the line.
- The requirement (to be reconsidered at the 2004 AGM) for RFCs to have professional indemnity insurance. This is a significant cost for individuals who do a limited amount of consulting.
- The requirement for Registered Members to do at least 20 hours CPD (Continuing Professional Development) every year.
- The higher subscription rate of a Registered Member compared to a Full Member.
- Not seeing any material advantage in becoming registered.

These individuals often call themselves advisors or something similar – the NZIF Articles of Association state that *No member of the Institute shall use the designation forestry consultant (whether or not under the designation "Registered Forestry Consultant") unless the member is Registered.*

The original wording for this clause, when drafted prior to the 1996 AGM, required that no member of the NZIF should act as a forestry consultant unless they were registered. However this was amended for a number of reasons; it would have been difficult to interpret and, more importantly, it was considered better to have members seek registration voluntarily rather than being forced to do so. Indeed a limitation was put on use of the title 'forestry consultant'.

The objectives of implementing the NZIF Registration process were to:

- provide a means for individual members to be able to be recognised by their peers as both qualified and able to practise the skills of forestry for the public at large;
- provide the public with protection;
- have a distinctive, professional image in the public perception; and
- provide Registered Forestry Consultants with a legally protected title viewed with status by their peers.

There is still work to do but, by and large, these objectives have been met and the benefits of registration are becoming increasingly recognised.

The ongoing challenge for the whole Institute, not just NZIF office-holders and the Registration Board, is to support and promote NZIF Registration so that all eligible members who are acting as consultants recognise these benefits and seek to become registered. For the continuing viability of the NZIF Registration process, it is important that it is supported by the membership.

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