

Response by Jim Park

I am pleased that Graeme Young took the time to read my paper thoroughly and then make some comments. I agree with Graeme, there are a number of things that need to be clarified. I also agree that root causes for many defects remain elusive and, further, exact definition of what those defects are can be difficult. However, we at Interface have decided that grouping defects by degrade types is more important than absolutely correct nomenclature. For example, the difference between needle fleck, birds-eye and other less definable groupings of fleck can be hard to determine at the margins. Consequently we define two types of fleck; individually occurring random fleck (as number/m²) and patterned fleck (by % of board affected). The latter is a much more significant cause of degrade. Similarly, traces left by galls can be difficult to identify but have exactly the same degrading effect as dry resin pockets.

So Graeme is wrong about the resinous defects excluded from my analyses. The gall trace (if that is what it is) shown in Graeme's Fig. 2 would have been counted and included in "small dry resin pockets". The smudge on the right in his Fig. 2 would be included in the small streaks category. (If it had been much smaller we would have called it a blemish.) In short, my analyses included most of the defects he refers to and includes in his own studies.

At the current state of the art I have to admit to being disturbed by the possibility that bark scores could affect pruned log price at harvest. Graeme seems to contradict himself on that issue; i.e. "The tool is not intended for rating all resinous defects in a stand and therefore placing value on a final product" followed 4 paragraphs later by "It is a technique that I as a pruned log purchaser take into consideration when determining suitability of supply or setting a value on a stand." I understand that to mean stands are already being discriminated against on the basis of bark scores. I hope I am wrong.

Regardless, the scariest aspect is the ready and unquestioning acceptance of bark scoring as valid and immediately useful by large contingents within the North Island at least. It seems that people were waiting, arms outstretched, for a simple and cheap solution to a very complex problem; and lo, a couple of years ago the answer was provided in the form of a brilliantly presented field guide which included summarised results from the base batch sawing study at Tikitere. Since then the majority of forest companies have included bark scoring in their pre-harvest inventories although most don't seem to know quite what to do with the data they have collected. The consensus of opinion seems to be, "It must mean something". Some sawmills have also tried segregating pruned logs in the yard by features visible on the bark and log ends. I have heard of no success stories but know of one large mill that tried for more than four months before concluding it was not making any difference and abandoning any further attempts.

The real problem here is symptomatic of a whole range of similar problems that have plagued forest industry R&D since the advent of 'User Pays'. These days, most things are confidential or you have to pay and join some exclusive club to get access to results or information. Formal publication has become decidedly unfashionable and not even an option for researchers in some organisations. The associated disciplines are also disappearing and we are all the poorer for that. While development of bark scoring systems has been going on for at least 5 years, first in Forest Research and then in WQI, it is bizarre that the only published paper on the subject is recent and by myself as an independent.

Graeme refers to the 2002 Tikitere results as being published. While those are the most accessible of all writings promoting bark scoring, he is incorrect. The details of that study were presented in an internal Forest Research Report which does not even have a number and should not be used as reference material according to the person who found it for me in FR Publications. The remainder of the so-called validation studies are locked up in WQI reports. I was given access to three of those reports and, while I was sworn not to disclose details, I can say that none of those reports goes close to meeting publication standards. Graeme's allusion to ... "a lot of unpublished or confidential material around that supports this tool" is not helpful either. Rather it seems indicative of a general decline in research standards and accountability by researchers.

I stated in my paper that the one-off batch sawing studies have proved little and not addressed the real questions. Nothing has changed and nothing will change unless the promoters of bark scoring for resin defects come out in the open, summarise their important findings, add some sadly missing statistical support to their claims, write a coherent report; and then get it refereed and published. I am sure they would learn a lot from that process and so would the rest of us.