

FORESTRY BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES

After discussion at the 1963 Annual Meeting of the New Zealand Institute of Foresters, a subcommittee composed of H. V. Hinds, E. A. Cooney, A. W. Grayburn and Russell W. Smith was appointed by the Council of the Institute to "bring down a report on local body forestry and make recommendations on any help that could be given". J. G. Groome was co-opted later and J. A. Buchanan and F. J. Gimblett were later asked to assist in the collection of information.

A detailed questionnaire was sent to all counties and catchment boards, and to those cities, boroughs, domain, hospital, harbour and education boards which were known from existing records to possess 50 acres or more of forest. The members of the subcommittee also made as many as possible personal contacts with authorities, particularly with forest owners who had not replied to the questionnaire.

The subcommittee reached the following conclusions from these enquiries.

PART I: CONCLUSIONS

Resources

The National Exotic Forest Survey (1960-61) found 45,000 acres of productive forest in local body ownerships of 50 acres or more (26,000 acres in Canterbury). A further 27,000 acres are said to be potentially productive (9,000 acres are held by one authority in Wellington Province and 9,000 acres in Otago-Southland).

Allowing for minor owners (aggregating 3,000 acres), there are therefore some 30,000 acres of potentially productive land, of which 19,000 acres is held by four authorities. Additional land could possibly be made available by vesting vacant Crown land in local authorities for forest development. A few authorities are willing to purchase land.

Stocktaking

Most local authorities have a very sketchy and quite inadequate knowledge of their forest resources, not only of species, age-classes and stocking, but even of areas planted.

Management

Technical control has been severely handicapped by lack of trained personnel. Top management is often in the hands of engineers or superintendents of parks and reserves, either with little knowledge of forestry or with insufficient time to spare from their main jobs. Junior field staff also have had inadequate forest training.

The small size of holdings has in many cases militated against remedying this generally amateur management.

On the other hand, management has been helped by authorities having vehicles and machinery at their disposal.

Silvicultural Operations

Planting appears to have been of an average standard. As with other exotic forests in New Zealand, pruning and thinning have been inadequate or misapplied. Improvement in this respect was tardy but fair progress has been made in the past two years.

Labour

Reports that labour was insufficient were few. In many cases it appears possible for other employees of counties and municipalities to be made available for some forest work.

Marketing

Some authorities with accessible plantations close to markets claim to be satisfied with returns, but, in the main, marketing has undoubtedly suffered from ignorance of resources and of timber values. Many stands have been sold below their true worth, often on the objectionable sawn out-turn system.

Competition of indigenous timber has kept down the prices of exotic timber, particularly in Canterbury, where the influence of West Coast supplies is dominant.

Regard for Forestry as a Local Body Activity

Reaction to forestry is uneven. Many local body members would like to see reserves, which would be otherwise waste, producing something in the form of trees, but they are frequently dominated by one or more tree enthusiasts or antagonists. These influences may not be sustained as representation changes and hence there may be also fluctuations in directional policy.

Those authorities with accessible land in timber-hungry districts may be willing to engage in or enlarge forest activities, but a larger number are deterred by past poor returns or poor prospects of future prices, or by high establishment costs; and there is a general reluctance to put any appreciable additional burden on the rate-payers.

Catchment Boards

Some catchment boards own reserves, primarily for protection purposes but which can be usefully employed in growing trees; and two boards are major owners. It was twice pointed out that catchment boards are in an exceptionally good position to engage in forestry as they have men and machines to call on, and have officers experienced in assessing land-use potential.

PART II: POSSIBLE FORMS OF ASSISTANCE

Assistance to local bodies in their forestry can be either:

- (1) Technical: Advice on management; training of personnel.
- (2) Financial: Grants, loans or subsidies.

Technical

It is doubtful if the existing extension forestry personnel of the N.Z. Forest Service, even with the increased practice by private consultants that may be expected, can give the technical assistance required. The Service should be asked to make provision for technical advice on an increasing scale.

Even if increased technical assistance becomes available, there will still be a lack of work supervisors with sufficient knowledge of the job. Authorities must be made to realize that if they have valuable assets they must expect to spend some money in handling them. They must be encouraged therefore to:

- (1) Employ a full-time trained manager where their holdings exceed 1,000 acres.
- (2) Seek skilled advice in management or silvicultural problems, either from the N.Z. Forest Service or from consultant foresters.
- (3) Employ trained staff to supervise workmen, or employ reliable forest contractors.

This may entail training of existing staff. The N.Z. Forest Service should be asked to provide (or extend) facilities for such staff to join in:

Trainee courses

Specialist technical courses — *e.g.*, fire control

Forest foreman courses

Leading hand courses

Timber grading courses

The N.Z. Forest Service should be asked to notify local authorities of the training facilities available. This may be done through the Counties Association, the Municipal Association and the Catchment Boards' Association, or alternatively and preferably, direct to those authorities known to own over 50 acres of plantations.

Groups of local authorities should consider co-operative organization of their forest interests. The Selwyn Plantation Board is an example where the forest assets of a number of small authorities have been amalgamated for 50 years. By so doing they have been able to place their resources under professional management, with a permanent establishment. The subcommittee thinks that co-operative boards on these lines could be considered in the south-east of Wellington province, in North and South Canterbury, and possibly elsewhere.

There are several precedents for the co-operative organization of counties for a specific purpose — *e.g.*, the administration of Masterton airfield.

The amalgamation of forestry interests would involve a valuation of assets.

Financial Incentives

The possibility of grants for specific purposes — *e.g.*, fire protection — should be considered. They would be of especial benefit

to authorities who already carry on forestry under adequate management with their own resources.

Government has offered suspensory loans to farmers and others to encourage afforestation, with the object of taking some of the burden of an expanded planting programme from the Forest Service. The subcommittee sees no reason why similar facilities should not be made available to local authorities (interest might be included in the loan) provided the following safeguards are observed:

- (1) Selection by the Forest Service, or possibly by an Afforestation Loans Board, with due regard to proximity of markets and subsidiary objects (*e.g.*, erosion control).
- (2) Approved working plan control.
- (3) Stipulation on employment of trained personnel—*e.g.*, estates of over 1,000 acres to be under full-time trained management, estates of 250 to 1,000 acres to be under management of a sub-professionally trained officer. Loans in this category should also apply to the silvicultural treatment of existing stands.

The 30,000 acres of land potentially productive of forest that is at present owned by local bodies represents only a small proportion of the State afforestation programme. The Government therefore should assist by making other land available.

Government assistance to local authorities would not be worth while for small areas. It is thought that aggregate areas of 100 acres for one authority and 250 acres for an amalgamation of interests should be minima.

The subcommittee learnt from contact with various local authorities that the latter felt that any loan assistance should carry a low rate of interest, not more than 2%. Almost all authorities were reluctant to add to rates and it is considered desirable that any loan should be secured by means that would not be an additional burden on the ratepayers. The Institute should recommend that the Forest Service should draft an incentive scheme on the above lines.

To give some alternative to advisory facilities provided by the Forest Service, the management fees of qualified consultants should be allowed as part of the subsidisable cost of the project.

Summary

- (1) Present forest assets of local authorities total about 46,000 acres. They hold in addition about 30,000 acres of potentially plantable land.
- (2) Local authorities' knowledge of their forest resources is generally inadequate.
- (3) Failure to employ trained personnel has led to poor management practice, with deficient silvicultural programmes and poor marketing results.
- (4) Interest in forestry as a local body activity tends to be coloured by personalities and past results.
- (5) Assistance in forestry can be given to local authorities.
 - (a) By helping them to acquire land.

- (b) By encouraging them to employ trained management personnel and to train their existing staff in forestry operations.

Provision for increased training facilities should be made by N.Z. Forest Service.

By encouraging them to combine to form an amalgamation of forestry interests on the lines of the Selwyn Plantation Board.

- (c) By Government issuing grants, loans or subsidies for new planting or for the expenses of management of existing assets.

Any loan or subsidy to be at a low rate of interest, and with adequate safeguards requiring proper forest management.

- (d) The Institute should consider circularizing local authority forest owners suggesting the advisability of obtaining professional or informed advice before disposing of forest produce.

E. A. COONEY
A. W. GRAYBURN
J. G. GROOME
H. V. HINDS
RUSSELL W. SMITH

July 31, 1964.