The proposal by the Tasman Pulp and Paper Company Ltd to form a company, jointly with the Crown and 40 Maori title holders (representing about 4,400 individual owners), to develop 76,000 acres of unproductive land, is both bold and commendable. It is commendable because there is too much such land lying idle; and it is bold because it tackles squarely the problem of multiple ownership of land, by applying what has for too long been merely a theoretical solution. For these reasons it may well serve as the model for future joint afforestation schemes, on the East Coast or around Taupo, for example. At the recent Maori Land Court hearings held in Whakatane and Rotorua to consolidate the titles and legalize the agreement, it was stated that "... if the Maori owners are prepared to approach this matter with mutual trust and understanding, then their confidence will not be betrayed and future generations will proclaim their foresight and initiative."

Briefly, Tasman has proposed the establishment of an independent company, Tarawera Forests Limited, to absorb 38 thousand acres of Maori land, 19 thousand acres of Crown land and another 19 thousand acres already owned by Tasman. It is estimated that, of this area, 60 thousand acres will be plantable, and that it will ultimately yield 20 million cubic feet of wood per annum. Tasman Pulp and Paper Company will contract to purchase the whole of this yield at a price equivalent to the average cost, landed at its mill, of similar wood from all other sources.

It is also proposed that the capital structure of the company should be based on a distribution proportionate to the respective owners' contributions in land and finance for development. During the hearings much was made of the fact that the Maori land was being valued at figures considerably higher than its current Government valuation. However, the latter are traditionally based on prevailing local prices for farmland (a form of land use for which the Tarawera scoria country is not suited), and foresters will consider that much more attention should have been given to estimating land expectation values under forest management. The relative value of the land resource is further submerged by the proposal to capitalize all establishment and management costs, less tax, during the development period; instead of allocating them to a sinking fund, or financing them by a fixed interest loan that would not affect the future capital allocation of the company. The consequence of this arrangement is that, on expiry of the development period, the nominal capital of the Company will be apportioned 76% to Tasman, 8.9% to the Crown and 14.4% to the Maori owners.

There is at least one other technicality for which this case deserves close scrutiny by foresters. It concerns the basis for payment of stumpage, which superficially appears reasonable enough. Moreover, as the Tasman brochure is careful to point out, the whole of the proposed forest lies within 20 miles of Kawerau, so that the proposed company should secure a very handsome premium over other suppliers of wood. The crux of the matter, however, lies in the fact that these other sources are 98% derived from Kaingaroa
or other State forests, and the rate of stumpage has already been fixed by long-term agreements. There is no need to examine here the necessity for such long-term contracts between major suppliers and consumers of timber; but it is extremely pertinent that the supplier in this instance is the State, because in negotiating a mutually acceptable stumpage the State will be less concerned with profitability than with the social and economic policies of the Government of the day, and with the implications for national and regional development. These factors have little relevance for the private investor, or for a group of people who are concerned to secure the best return on a resource that they control.

In these circumstances foresters will feel considerable sympathy for the Maori landowners' dissatisfaction with the overall financial terms of Tasman's proposal, and with their suggestion that "there could be other schemes employed to develop a forestry project with greater immediate and long-term benefits to the Maori landowners". Certainly Tasman will have a very good bargain indeed, in securing effective control of a major source of raw material at almost the lowest prices in New Zealand.

At a recent conference in Auckland, arranged by the Maori Council to discuss the Prichard-Waetford report on land law reform, one of the resolutions called for the establishment of a committee of experts to advise Maoris, who were considering selling their land, on the potential of the land before they sold it. If the new Tarawera Forest is to form a pattern for the future, it is apparent that foresters have an essential role to fill on such a committee.

The Future Ranger and Forester

One of the matters about which Members of this Institute have long been most circumspect concerns qualifications for different categories of membership. It is a matter that is important for the Institute, in seeking to establish its professional status, but which is clouded by the unfortunate distinctions drawn between professional and general divisions within the government services. Let it be said at once that there are no grounds for such a distinction written into our Constitution, which is founded on a mutual interest in the profession of forestry, whatever the ranking of the individual.

It is necessary at this time to reaffirm this principle because, unless it is clearly recognized, our Institute may find itself bitterly divided over the future of foresters and rangers. This crisis is being precipitated by the discussions and imminent decisions regarding the training of these men, and the role that it is envisaged they will fulfil in the forests of the future.

What has been the role of the Ranger in the past? As local forest supervisor and general practitioner, he has been responsible for the organization and deployment of considerable forces of government or company-employed men, and for their accommodation and essential servicing. He has been responsible for local accounting, budgeting and procurement of supplies. He has carried the dual burden of employing men and of supervising all their operations in the field — and he has often been expected to exercise the technical skills of surveying, cruising, silviculture and civil and mechanical engineering.
The forests on which the Ranger exercised these many accomplishments were often, and in some cases still are, remote from major centres of population and commerce. Both the forest and its services had to be created from scratch. It absorbed resources of men, money and materials, but, for many years, was completely unproductive — so that industry and commerce ignored it accordingly.

With time, these forests have grown and have become productive, and their needs have changed accordingly. Harvesting has resulted in a whole series of side-effects — it has justified further capital investment in the form of housing, thereby attracting commercial services and reducing the need for camp labour. Independent contract employment from outside the forest has further reduced the Ranger's domestic burden. The increased volume and diversity of work has warranted employment of specialists for accounting, storekeeping, survey, engineering and technical operations generally. Thus the role of the Forest Ranger has changed radically — requiring a more analytical deployment of resources, both of funds and materials; demanding a less direct and more objective management of men, a constant evaluation of technical operations and a careful regulation of yield to satisfy growing capital commitments. The consequence of this change is that the Forest Ranger of the future must be, in other words, a formally-trained Forest Manager — and he can only acquire this formal education at a university. Whether the graduates of such formal training are called rangers or foresters is quite immaterial: it is their functional role that matters, and this can only be filled by the best of the current ranger and forester groups.

Some apprehension has been voiced at various times about the period of transition that is consequently likely between the new and old “generations” of forest staff. In fact, however, the inevitable temporal overlap need not involve any functional displacement or promotional injustice — provided that the transition between the two “generations” is kept in gear with overall forest development. The Forest Service has already indicated that this is its approach; and there is still an adequate number of undeveloped and developing forests where the old-style Ranger cannot functionally be superseded — provided the break between the “generations” is made soon.

Our Institute could itself eliminate many misapprehensions about “status” by more liberal elections to full membership of those Associates who, though not graduates of a school of forestry, have many years of professional experience behind them. The strength of a professional Institute does not rest upon the academic qualifications of its members, but upon their proven calibre, and the vigour and wisdom with which they pursue common professional aims.