

## PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS, 1967

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By custom, it appears to be the President's prerogative to discuss any subject he wishes and not to distribute his address in advance. I will not depart from this custom (as much as anything, because there was not time to do otherwise).

The most difficult task that Council has had to deal with during the past twelve months has been the "registration" of consultants. Council members have discharged their duties in this respect with the utmost seriousness. I thought I would like to bring you up to date on how we have done this, and add a few thoughts, not necessarily those of Council, on how we should proceed in the future on this and allied subjects. This address could therefore have the sub-title of "Professionalism, Consultants and the Institute".

The Constitution states that the Institute has two objectives. One is to "further the development of forestry" in New Zealand and the other is to "further the interests of the profession of forestry" in New Zealand. From this it can be assumed that one depends on the other.

As the Institute had its beginning within the walls of a university, it can also be assumed that the type of profession envisaged would have an academic background rather than an "apprenticeship" one. This is in line with what is generally accepted as the meaning of a "profession". The term connotes a foundation of academic education and vocation, and some degree of social dedication.

The Institute is the body representing this profession, bearing its responsibilities, exercising its voice and guaranteeing to the community a minimum standard of competence and practice amongst its practitioners. Therefore it can be said that the Institute's main aim is the protection and development of the "professionalism" of forestry in New Zealand.

When the Institute was first formed, the number of academically trained foresters was small and much of the forest practice was being undertaken by "non-professionally" trained foresters. They have done a grand job, and continue to do so. The reasons why the number of professionally trained members has not grown are historical and obvious. So long as the major employing organization recruited a majority of "non-professional" personnel, this state of affairs would remain. The Institute recognized this position and has rightly made it possible for those practically trained foresters, "considered worthy of advancement", to gain full membership. This policy is justified so long as it is in the interests of the profession and of the community. Any lowering of the standards for entry to full membership would not be in these interests.

With a generally higher standard of education available to all in New Zealand and with the advent of the new Forestry School at Canterbury, it should be possible and desirable to tighten even further the admission to full Member of the Institute in the future.

This thought may be unpalatable to some of you, but if the Institute is to advance its professional status, such a move is ultimately inevitable. A profession can only gain status if it is composed of learned men.

And now that we are "registering" consultants, this fact becomes even more important; the two cannot be dealt with separately. Many other professional associations have faced the same dilemmas and gone through similar stages in their development. There is no need to be hasty about any decision in this direction; in fact, a slow, cautious and deliberate approach is proper in a professional body—many would say we have always done things this way!

If the Institute does not meet the needs of professionalism and becomes a forestry-society-type of organization, those members with full professional status will form a splinter group. The same can be said of the consultant members. The need is here, now, for us to recognize them; and we must accept this challenge otherwise they will form their own splinter group. The public requires their services, they deserve recognition, and ours is the logical organization to administer it on a true professional basis. New Zealand is too small to have a number of organizations furthering forestry in all its phases.

And this leads me on to the present position with forest consultants. Remember always that we have not special legislation for the Institute or for consultants. I consider it too early for this step; but without legislation there is a limit to what we can do. Discussions made and experience gained now will lead on to ultimate legislation in the future, when conditions justify it. Much will depend on how Councils administer this section of the constitution, and how consultants conduct themselves, as to how the profession advances in the future. There must be a clear differentiation in fact between consultants and contractors and you should all recognize it.

During the past year, Council for the first time has considered applications from consultants for "registration" and for recognition in certain fields of special experience and competence. It was only then that we encountered some of the details, which required some long hard thinking and changes of attitude. The first of these was a realization that we should not use the term "registration" but decide on the term "consultants recognized by the Institute". Registration would give the public the impression of protection by legislation, which of course is not the case.

It was also realized that consultants should be looked upon as general forest consultants, not specialists in the true sense, and be recognized for their special experience and competence in certain fields.

Council decided that it would not set up a subcommittee to consider applications at this stage. Instead, it decided to study applications at full Council meetings, consultant Councillors excepted. In this way valuable experience would be gained, a wider cross-section of opinion would be obtained, and the responsibility would be more widely spread. It was also decided to interview all applicants so that there would be no misunderstanding or lack of knowledge in any quarter. As President, I have prepared a set of statements and questions for Council to place before consultants when interviewed, as a guide to all. Interviews are time-consuming but considered well worth while.

And now there are some general observations I want to put to you on the conduct and ethics of consultants, and you will see how they will affect the maturity of the profession and the future membership of the Institute.

First, the true basis of professional conduct is a positive concept which cannot be captured in words—it lies in the observance of the golden rule “do unto others as you would have them do unto you”. This must be the fundamental concept of all professional ethics—the placing of service to client above personal gain, the concept of independence, the maintenance of the highest integrity, and a readiness to exercise discipline within the ranks. It is the gaining of trust. To this end, applicant consultants must declare their company and other business affiliations so that their position is clear to all.

When we come to the subject of consultants, a third objective could tacitly be added to the Institute's objects. That is the protection of the public and furtherance of the public interest. This is fundamental in all professions. If I remember correctly, this was almost overlooked in the early discussions on the amendment to the constitution to recognize consultants, but fortunately it was brought to notice in time. That the public will come to know this is indicated in a similar quotation from the 1963 Presidential Report to the N.Z. Society of Accountants, and I quote: “The public will know that any person holding himself out publicly as an accountant, or under a designation including that word, is a member of the Society's fidelity fund or has a fidelity bond and that such a person is under the strongest disciplinary control. In the fullness of time, they will also know that any person under such a designation is qualified both by examination and experience.” In time this must be accepted for foresters too.

During the year, a case occurred in which a member of the legal profession referred to a forester as being inferior to a valuer in a case involving evidence on forest valuation. This state of affairs must be corrected. It behoves us all to play some part in raising the status of our profession in the eyes of the public and other professions.

The extent to which only foresters can give forestry advice has exercised our thoughts, too. The name of the profession can only be protected by act and exemplary conduct. If the public seek advice on forestry matters from others under other names, nothing can be done about it. All professions have this problem and to illustrate the point I again quote from the 1963 Presidential Report to the N.Z. Society of Accountants:

“While the Act affords entirely adequate protection of the designation ‘accountant’, it is important to realise that the legislation does NOT restrict the right to undertake accounting work to members of the Society. This is an important distinction, since it answers completely any allegation that the Society is seeking monopolistic legislation or to maintain a ‘closed shop’. Any such restriction would be considered by the Legislature or the public at large as not in the public interest, it would be impossible of enforcement, and it would attract much public criticism of the Society.

“In future, persons commencing the public practice of accountancy and who are not members of the Society will no doubt practise as taxation consultants, bookkeepers or secretaries.”

However, to prevent erosion by others of what might be considered parts of the forestry profession, the profession must meet this challenge by constantly broadening its outlook and experience.

If we do not remain dynamic, progressive and abreast of new developments, of course we will lose to others. We must be outgoing to broaden our field of influence. This, of course, does not justify the lowering of standards or quality. At a time when scientific knowledge and experience is becoming more and more specialized, the consultant is expected to call in other experts to confirm or augment his opinion. This is normal and accepted practice. And by the same token experts can be members of a consultant partnership and still not be recognized consultants of that particular profession. For example, there are partially qualified accountants who cannot audit company books or certify certain work, but are a valuable part of the partnership.

While the constitution gives the Council power to admit only those members whom it considers fit to be consultants, there can be dangers in the way this is interpreted. Unless it sets a lot of examinations for all applicants, there could be accusations of inconsistencies and bias. Admission to the various grades of membership of the Institute is the time to do the close vetting. Constant efforts must be made to raise the standard of education for entry to the profession. Add a prescribed number of years of experience to this high standard of education for entry, and we will have no worries about our consultants.

There will always exist a minority of members whose standard of work falls short of that which might be expected by others of a skilled professional forest consultant. How you deal with the problem is not so easy. It would be a sad day for forestry, or any profession for that matter, if there were not different points of view and ways of attacking a problem. Why does a patient like one doctor's opinion and not have confidence in another's? In the same way, only the client can judge the competence of the consultant, provided always that the latter observes the normal professional code of ethics. There must always be freedom of choice and opinion. We must not be too quick to judge unless a complaint has been lodged by a client.

I hope I have been able to illustrate to you how closely the recognition of consultants is related to the membership grades of our Institute. I believe you cannot look at one without considering the other. If we demand a high standard of education and experience, the future of the Institute and the profession will be laid on good foundations.