The role of local sections is set out in the Constitution of the Institute, para. 26: "Such local section may, by virtue of an official recognition to be granted by the Council, arrange and conduct, under the auspices of the Institute, a series of meetings for the advancement of technical forestry through the presentation of professional papers, for mutual discussion and for the promotion of good fellowship."

The framers of this part of the constitution obviously had in mind a gentlemanly debating society with slightly convivial undertones. In fact, the more active local sections have strayed some way from this drawing-room outlook, which it is clear is quite inadequate in the present New Zealand context.

That it is inadequate was clearly brought to light at the Te Anau Annual General Meeting last year when local sections strongly attacked Council for what they saw as unsatisfactory relationships between themselves and the parent body. This so impressed Council that a circular was sent to all local sections, shortly after the AGM, setting out the matters that had been hotly debated at Te Anau, and asking for comments and support. The matters raised were:

1. The important public relations role sections could play.
2. The fact that local sections could take effective action on matters of local importance and were in a good position to bring such matters to the notice of Council.
3. The need for reports from local sections to be sent to Council, and vice versa.
4. Local sections could help Council in preparing reports, by appointing members who could assist if called upon by Council.
5. The need for more Council meetings.
6. Change of the name of the Institute.
7. Changes in membership classes.
8. Attempts to improve the Institute’s public image.

In the course of this year’s AGM you will notice that Council has acted with commendable swiftness on several of
these proposals. However, I do not intend to further reiterate Council's actions during the past year (except to bring to your attention the fact that you have an exceptionally capable and active Council membership), but to try to analyse the roles that local sections have been developing, and to suggest possible future courses of action.

The circular letter was debated by at least one local section, and three had some comments. However, the reaction was rather tentative, and bore no relation to the intensity of feelings at the AGM. Nevertheless, in respect of several of our sections things have changed, while with others the mixture is as before. For example, when I asked local sections to send me their annual reports by early April so that I could prepare this report, several of them did not respond; I rather feel that one or two sections have been more or less in recess for some time. Others report poor attendances at meetings, or an inability on members' part to pay the minuscule dues requested. On the other hand, several local sections have been booming, and I should particularly like to mention Southland-Otago (starting at the blunt end), Canterbury, Westland, Nelson, Rotorua and Hawke's Bay.

Council has had one disagreement with a local section. This relates to a perennial problem. When Council is preparing a submission on a national issue, it takes factual evidence from as wide an area as possible. Local sections have, in the past, felt that Council should take more notice of their views. This occurred in relation to the mooted beech scheme, when the Nelson section took objection to Council's viewpoint. In the event, Council was reasonably on the ball.

The reason Council tends to prefer to be independent is that, on some previous occasions, local section members have been too close to the action and have been emotionally involved in the issue. This year Council put in submissions to the Commerce Commission on the removal of price control from native timbers. A great deal of factual evidence was gathered, and it was on the basis of this that Council drew up its case. The Westland section, no doubt in an excess of zeal, launched an immoderate attack on Council, without bringing forward any facts to support their case. It was an emotional response, perhaps understandable in the circumstances.

On reflection, Council could perhaps have sought the views of the local section, but it is doubtful whether Council would have changed its views, which were in fact based on policies and views which successive Councils of the Institute have held for some years. However, justice must be seen to be done, and it is clear that Council should in all cases consult local sections where they are closely involved in national is-
issues (such as, for example, the future use of native timbers and the management of native forests). While acknowledging this, I must also advise local sections that Council cannot be expected, in all cases, to agree with them!

Let me now examine some local section activities.

First, meetings: Where local sections have met regularly, reports indicate that many meetings have been lively and useful. This is valuable because local sections attract membership from several sectors of the community, and it is good to show that the Institute is alive and kicking. Even though information on meetings may not get into the local press, these folk will tend to spread the word. When meetings are not held there is no publicity, and forestry becomes of little local consequence. Several sections have regularly sent information on their meetings to the press. One, at least, has approached TV1, and another has advised Council of possible avenues for useful publication of forestry viewpoints.

It may be that the kind of meeting is important. Southland-Otago section has an annual family outing, usually focusing on recreation and environment, which is highly popular, and it may be that other sections could consider this possibility. The Westland and Canterbury sections have for some years held joint meetings, and these also are popular. It would not be difficult for other sections to arrange similar meetings: for example, Rotorua and Hawke's Bay at Taupo; Rotorua and Auckland at (say) Pirongia; Wellington and Hawke's Bay in the Wairarapa; and so on.

Some local sections have mounted public debates on matters of regional importance. Southland has been particularly active in this way, and the results have been rewarding. The Rotorua section made all the arrangements to hold a public meeting on the management of Whirinaki Forest, at which the Forest Service and the Environmental and Conservation Organisations (ECO) would present their plans for public debate. Unfortunately, this fell through because of the difficulty ECO had in formulating their proposals. The Forest Service eventually felt bound to present their plan for public information, and therefore the reason for the meeting was forestalled.

Secondly, the Annual General Meeting: Of recent years a great deal of the effort for mounting AGMs has fallen on local sections, and they have, in the main, made a thoroughly excellent job of it. The Te Anau AGM was excellently arranged and conducted, and the same can clearly be said of this year's meeting. I have no doubt whatsoever that the 1980 AGM, in conjunction with the Institute of Foresters of Australia, will be an outstanding effort on the part of the Rotorua section. There's nothing about this in the constitution, but the best
part of it is the willing way in which this onerous job is undertaken.

A number of local sections have made useful submissions, either at the request of Council or on their own initiative, on matters of local or national concern. There are some unwritten rules about this, which were set out in the letter to local sections of May 17, 1978. That is, local sections have the delegated powers to act in matters of local forestry or land use importance, but should inform Council of the action they have taken (or, when in doubt, of the action they intend to take). They should also bring to the attention of Council any matters which are, or could be, of national importance. There has been some slight disagreement on this, and one South Island section saw fit to present a submission to the Taupo seminar last year without even informing Council. We put that down to honest exuberance rather than a deliberate attempt to upstage Council. However, it is necessary to ensure that we don’t get our wires crossed in public, and a bit of internal discipline will do no harm.

Nelson and Westland have been particularly active in preparing submissions, of a high standard, on a number of topics, as you will see from their annual reports. Other sections have also made useful contributions. This is surely an important role for local sections, and it should be encouraged and expanded in view of the present social climate where forestry is a very suspect profession. As conservationists in the strict sense, our voice should be heard throughout the land, and Council simply cannot fulfil this role on its own.

You will have observed that the whole field of land use in New Zealand has been largely pre-empted by people who have not the faintest concept of what forestry means in terms of wealth, employment and social wellbeing; by people whose outlook is to extend farming to as near to the top of Mount Cook as they can get it, irrespective of the consequences. I have watched appalled as the Government’s grant scheme has resulted in the clearing of needful scrub from erstwhile eroded hillsides in the mistaken belief that this will result in increasing wealth and prosperity for farmers. It won’t. The catchment boards will have to call on the taxpayer to send our good money after bad when these areas again spew their soils down into the river systems. Nor can one condone the use of subsidised herbicides on woody growth which is the only means of holding highly erodible soils in place — again in the mistaken belief that farm production will increase. The irony of the situation is that the traditional farm products from this country are less and less needed by our so-called trading partners, who are overfed anyway and can produce
all their own needs. The land so abused could be growing trees which would add immeasurably to our wealth and well-being in the form of much needed exports, or as a basis for our own energy requirements.

The organisations charged with land use are staffed almost exclusively by agronomists, engineers and town planners who haven't the faintest idea what forestry is about and seem to be bent on resisting the spread of forests at all costs, whatever the proper land use should be. County after county, in district plans, is making every effort to see that forestry is a provisional use on all land, even Class 7 and 8. The local bodies concerned are largely peopled by farmers who see forestry as a threat to their diminishing livelihood, whereas the truth of the matter is that a proper complementary forest/farm use of our pastoral lands would rejuvenate the countryside and be of lasting benefit to the country in many ways.

Several local sections have recognised the great importance of our getting into the land-use debate and have been very active and effective in this area. Council has formed a liaison with the Forest Owners Association on this issue — and it is a vital issue to foresters. It is impossible for Council to enter the fray in every direction; it would be greatly beyond our resources. But local sections can here make a major contribution by:

1. Supporting objections lodged by the Forest Owners Association or the Forest Service, with expert witnesses.
2. By data gathering.
3. By getting in amongst local planning staff to explain forestry and its importance to the local economy.

During the year it came as a surprise to me to find that not one member of the Institute sat on a state forest park advisory committee as a representative of the Institute. The same could be said for national park boards. There are, of course, difficulties. The local Conservator of Forests might be loath to place one of his staff on the advisory committee, even if he was there as a representative of the Institute. However, I am glad to say that one of our members has recently been appointed to the Pureora State Forest Park Advisory Committee.

The forestry profession is under trial. Therefore it is necessary for all foresters to make a concerted effort to see that we have a say in public policies and make an impact on planning and action for the future wellbeing of our country. With this challenge it is a matter of sorrow to me that some local sections have simply faded into sloth. It is also a matter of concern that some foresters have so little time for their
profession that they resigned when there was a rise in dues last year. It is also a pity that so many foresters see no need for the Institute and so don't join us. What the present situation means is that every forester must fearlessly present his honest and unassailable case for forestry to play a major part in the social and economic wellbeing of this country.

Local sections have a vital role to play in this campaign. Several of them are doing very well; others could do equally well if they decided to. But it is clear that the role of local sections has changed, and is continuing to change. This is all to the good. Last year our then President advocated the employment of a permanent staff. We looked at it and decided it was economically beyond our means. But a single employee would also be of dubious value because he could not possibly encompass all the various facets of expertise we are accustomed to embrace under the term "forestry". An active membership can contribute every facet — and that is the best solution.

We should continue to grow in this direction, because growth is strength. There are sufficient able and active members in all regions of the country to lead the rank and file and to draw out their energies on our behalf. If we want to ensure that the public hears our voice, we must be seen to be active in all parts of the country, to have skill, sound knowledge and technical expertise, and above all integrity. If local sections accept this role, our actions will in time bear fruit, for actions speak louder than words.