MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE REPORT
MARCH 1986

The Membership Committee, consisting of Mr D. W. Guild as Chairman, and Messrs J. C. Halkett, R. H. Kempston, N. L. Ledger, and S. S. Strand, have met several times during the year, and have examined the role and inter-relationship of the Institute and its members. The Committee has tabled to Council a number of papers which:

1. examine professionalism within the Institute, and review the membership rules;
2. examine the needs and expectations of the membership;
3. outline guidelines for membership drive;
4. examine the merits of affiliation with other organisations;
5. examine ways of identification of prospective honorary members.

The full text of this comprehensive report will be available at the Annual General Meeting.

Parts will also be published in this journal over the next year to ensure wide distribution to membership, so that it may be debated at the Annual General Meeting in 1987.

The Membership Committee’s examination of the needs and expectations of the membership is published below.

NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS OF THE MEMBERSHIP

Over recent years membership of the Institute has not grown as much as could reasonably have been expected given the relatively rapid growth within the forest industry over about the same period. In 1984 it was estimated that only 46% of those eligible to belong to the Institute, and the establishment of a procedure to achieve these goals.

It is now generally recognised that if the Institute wants to attract and retain members from the many sectors that now make up the forest industry it needs to increase and broaden its appeal. The pragmatic nature of forestry people suggests that (subconsciously perhaps) prospective (and current) members conduct a cost-benefit analysis and at present many see membership of the Institute as not being worthwhile.

Information Sources

The membership committee has used three sources of information for endeavouring to determine the needs and expectations of the Institute by the membership. No attempt has been made to differentiate between the needs and expectations of each class of membership. These three sources of information were:

(a) The results of a questionnaire sent to members of the Institute in 1978 which has been reported by Sutton and Kennedy (1978).

(b) The discussion on membership which was contained in Vol. 14 Nos. 4 and 5 of the Institute’s Newsletter.

(c) The perception of the members of the membership committee, and comments from members.

There may well be other ways by which the needs and expectations of the membership could be solicited, but the membership committee was mindful of the immense amount of work and considerable cost that these could entail, and felt that it was best to make use of information currently available or quickly obtainable in the first instance.

The 1978 Questionnaire Results

From the questionnaire data the membership committee has interpreted the needs and expectations of the membership as being:

(a) An Institute that strongly advocates forestry and (to a lesser extent) the profession of forestry, as stated in Section II of the Articles of Constitution, at all times and in all places but especially at times of crisis or whenever major issues surface. Such action should include lobbying at the political level if necessary.

(b) An Institute that provides a forum for debate and exchange between its members as follows:

- On technical aspects of forestry
- For social/fraternal reasons

The Institute’s main methods of fulfilling these needs and expectations have been:

(a) Through the preparation of written submissions and press statements, by making personal representations, and by holding public meetings, usually at the initiative of council or a council member, though local sections have also played a part in some cases.

(b) Through the newsletter and journal, and at annual conferences and local section meetings.

Current Institute Performance

The effectiveness of the Institute’s present performance in these areas mentioned above can be assessed by examining the membership gains/losses since 1978, and the perceptions of the membership as conveyed to, or interpreted by the membership committee. There has been a net increase in our membership with 290 new members and 120 resignations between 1978 and 1985. The period of greatest gain was in 1983/84 when:

- active recruiting was carried out especially by the then President;
- Council became more active as an advocate for forestry especially in the political arena;
- there was good reporting of Institute activities in regular publications of the Newsletter.

Current Perceptions

The membership committee’s interpretation of the current perceptions of the members is as follows:

(a) Recent activity by Council and members on the matter of environmental administration in particular has been commendable. The stronger attitude taken by Council over recent years as an advocate for forestry, and the bid to keep the membership better informed on these matters, is being appreciated by members. Nevertheless, there is always room for improvement and the initiative gained so far should not be lost. And there are traps — it is vital to continually address the question of the Institute’s role in any debate as it is perhaps too easy to only make use of the Institute to promote the interest of one’s employer, rather than those of the Institute itself.

(b) There is much room for substantial improvement in our main communicating media. There are already major changes occurring with the journal and newsletter. Members need, and are entitled to, an attractive, regular, and interesting printed communication.

26 N.Z. FORESTRY MAY 1986
This is an important issue as Institute publications are the means by which contact with, and the interest of, the membership is maintained. Publications are also often seen as the only tangible commodities which existing and prospective members, and the forest industry at large have to judge the worth of the Institute — their effectiveness needs continuing critical examination.

(c) The annual conference is a major event that depends largely on the enthusiasm, imagination and hard work of the local section hosting the event. Council itself needs to take greater responsibility for the conference by making available to the organising committee a planning timetable and a detailed statement of the responsibilities of Council and the local organising committee. The councillor delegated the responsibility of conference liaison should have terms of reference which require him to meet regularly with the organising committee.

There would appear to be scope for improvement in the way in which conferences are run, in both style and format. For example, it has been suggested that a more effective way for members to participate in Annual General Meeting business may be through a remit system. The Institute should therefore give serious consideration to introducing a well planned and controlled remit system. Many organisations similar to the Institute have such a system — it provides an opportunity for rank and file members to express a point of view and make a contribution to Institute affairs. To work effectively however a remit system must be well understood and correctly managed and have adequate actioning and report back procedures.

(d) For many members, their only personal contact with "The Institute" is through local section activities. Local sections also play an important role in recruiting new members for the Institute. Council needs to give much more attention to the purpose and operation of local sections. This could be done by allocating one council member to each local section. Each would be charged with the responsibility of liaison between Council and the local section concerned, and for encouraging a high level of activity at the local section level. Terms of reference need to be drawn up to permit this to occur effectively.

(e) At present Honorary status is the only membership category where merit is recognised. Without denying the need for this prestigious award, the membership committee believe there is a need for two other membership classes where merit can be recognised. That of professionalism, and that of service to the Institute — both being intended to be less exclusive than Honorary membership, but nevertheless requiring a standard of merit that will require some effort to achieve. Details of this proposal are dealt with in a separate report.

Other Membership Issues

Other membership matters identified by the membership committee are:

(a) The ability of members to feel as though they can fully participate in Institute affairs and aspire to the highest membership class. This is not possible at present for those in the affiliate class, and is being fully addressed in the report which reviews membership criteria.

(b) The perception of obtaining value for money. There is a feeling of discontent amongst some members at being required to pay a surcharge for a travel fund for which there is little interest or competition.

(c) There is also a feeling that subscriptions are too high for full members.

(d) The name of the Institute. Although opinions in response to the 1978 questionnaire were divided 2:1 in favour of a name change to the NZ Institute of Forestry, it is felt that this is now much less of an issue than it used to be, and is likely to become even less of an issue when the Forest Service drops the term foresters to identify a particular type of training and occupational category.

Recommendations

In order of priority:

(a) There is urgent need to introduce improved Institute publications.

(b) Council should lend greater support to local sections by appointing a council member to liaise with each local section.

(c) Council should take greater responsibility for annual conferences by giving clear guidelines to the local organising committee and the council liaison member.

(d) The Institute should review the following issues:

(i) Improvements to the annual conferences.
(ii) The travel fund surcharge.
(iii) Membership fees.

Reference