LETTERS

Structure of the Forest Service and its economic performance

Sir,

Peter Grant on p.3 of the May 1987 issue of the NZ Forestry scoffs at technical forecasts I helped prepare for the 1981 Forestry Conference. He says that the 1983-84 net revenues from growing and harvesting NZ forests was $614 million, less than Carol Gilchrist and I predicted.

In saying this he has overlooked the fact that on P.6 of our 1981 paper we were those that might be obtained if the yield was exported as logs".

Being surprised about a large difference between forecasted shadow export net revenues and actual net domestic values in the Muldoon era is like being astonished that bananas and lemon trees turn out to have different fruit.

Readers may also be interested to know that Carol and I prepared our paper at the request of the deforestation working party of the 1981 Forestry Conference. The paper was widely disseminated only after that working party had checked and approved it.

I wonder if Peter Grant realizes that by ridiculing the Levack and Gilchrist report he is casting aspersion at his own esteemed director, Guy Salmon, who was the NFAC representative on that working party.

Hamish Levack, Wellington

Sutton article on NZFS contribution

Sir,

In the typesetting of my article, part of one sentence was deleted. As a result the sentence's meaning and emphasis was changed.

The second sentence of the second to last paragraph reads "unlike today's philosophy...". My original statement read "unlike today's conservation movement which has very much a 'don't touch' philosophy...". The deletion of these qualifying words has changed the meaning of the rest of the sentence to imply that the present Forest Service did not have the same conservation concerns as the Department had in earlier times.

That obviously was never my intention.

W.R.J. Sutton
Rotorua

(We apologise for the omission. Ed.)

More market forestry

Sir,

The attempts to apply "more market" to forestry is nonsense. It may apply to marketing products from forests already in production, but that is not always the case either, because there is no such thing as an 'instant' wood-using industry.

There was a famous case in Britain in 1947, when an economist conclusively proved that optimum returns from Scots pine forests were obtained by extracting poles between the ages of 40 and 45 years. If foresters had heeded that advice the market would have been swamped with poles and the price would have plummeted. In any case, a year later high specification poles were imported from Scandinavia in sufficient quantities to satisfy the market and the demand for home-grown poles was reduced to nil.

For forestry, the market lies well in the future — sometime 150 years ahead in the Northern Hemisphere. The path of the future is set about with totally unknown technologies, and the money-commodity market is so vast, and has so little to do with the market for goods, that the relationship between current market values, fluctuating as they do from hour to hour, to the value of forest products is totally unpredictable. In any case, the one thing honest economists agree upon is that their theories are worthless for prediction. In scientific terms this means they are worthless — period.

If one wanted to follow a more market philosophy (if it deserves such a name) one would amortize the wood-using industries while cutting the forests out by the time the plant reached a zero value.

Forestry has to be based on a different criterion — that is, an intelligent evaluation of the needs of people in the future. It is thus an act of faith. Fortunately for posterity, foresters have that faith.

C.G.R. Chavasse, Rotorua

‘Unprofessional’ cover photograph

Sir,

One concern expressed by the NZIF recently is the low public esteem of forestry as a profession compared to professions such as law and accountancy. Imagine my dismay when I received the February 1987 issue of New Zealand Forestry. The cover photograph initially led me to believe I was holding a copy of the PSA journal rather than the latest NZIF journal. A cover photograph such as this does nothing to dispel the public’s misconception that the forestry profession is not comparable to...