

# RECENT EVENTS

## WORLD FORESTRY CONGRESS Paris, France – September 17-26, 1991

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### THE GLOBAL FOREST ISSUE

The World Forestry Congress reaffirmed that forestry was at the heart of many of the solutions to global environmental problems. The congress committed itself to the "Greening of the World" through afforestation, reforestation and sustainable management of the multiple functions of trees and forests and the need for sustainable management. Above all, the congress emphasised the multiple values trees and forests provide. Societies much older than our own have appreciated for centuries that, as a generalisation, a natural forest provides much more by keeping it, than cutting it all down. Traditional European forestry education has been directed toward felling trees rather than forests. But many of the values of forest systems to the community have not been recognised by industrial societies. Natural forest systems are not like agriculture (or an agricultural economy); they are much more complex and shrouded in tradition and mystery. Further, the global understanding of plantation forestry, which some advance as the only solution given the destruction that has occurred, is abysmal.

Foresters, belatedly, have become very aware of the need to know what societies want from forest land so that they can protect forests and provide from them. The concept of private ownership is moot in forestry. In many senses forests are regarded as a public resource: "don't forget that you are not the owner of the forest but just the user". Because forests are a multiple value, renewable but slow grown and complex ecosystem, public appreciation of forests will need to be raised so that the national policy frameworks needed to provide enduring solutions can be developed. Our own forests would be making an even greater contribution to New Zealand's economy and environment if we had such a policy.

Forests are, as the theme at the congress emphasised, a Heritage for the Future. But over the last centuries societies have destroyed forests in the name of survival, or growth and development.

We have been at the forefront in New Zealand. The congress recommended the protection of representative or endangered forests, integrated into national or international networks.

Forests play critically important developmental and environmental roles that are not accorded economic value, but which are critical to our future. There is, then, a logic when seeking solutions to tropical deforestation, in targeting the industrial consumer rather than the developing exporting country. A key element of the deforestation problem is that the real value of forest 'products' is neither recognised nor returned to the 'owner'.

Forestry, from preservation and biodiversity through to gathering fuelwood, is a vital part of many economies. With our plantation crop New Zealand is in a very fortunate, almost unique, position in this global environment.

In representing a position on international forestry matters we need to recognise:

- forestry is at the heart of the global environmental debate, but to find enduring solutions we need to raise public appreciation of the multiple values of forests and to elicit societies' wishes for forests;
- conservation and sustainable development is the UNCED theme;
- any global agreement on forestry principles will concern all forests, not just tropical forests, and will highlight the sovereignty and rights of nations, and sustainability;
- trade restrictions will be counter-productive;
- New Zealand has much to offer, and gain, by sensitively promoting plantation forestry;
- New Zealand needs to consider carefully the position it represents at the UNCED Prepcom meetings.

### PLANTATION FORESTS

There is overwhelming ignorance, or, amongst the traditionalists, scepticism of the plantation forestry that we take for granted in New Zealand. Two consequences are:

- a lost opportunity in many countries where scientifically based development of plantations would provide many benefits and satisfy a desperate need;
- a need, if we are to realise expectations of the value of our plantations, to 'sell' the plantation approach to the consumers in the northern hemisphere.

Forest scientists in Western Europe, where industrial forest management began (and where pollution is killing forests and subsidies are provided to replant surplus agricultural land), are clear that their forest must be managed to at least eventually comprise a diverse mixture of species and age classes. The idea is embraced in the so-called "kind" forestry emerging in North America. Proponents extrapolate their approach across the globe and advance doom and gloom predictions on the long-term sustainability of plantation forestry. While there are many examples of the failure of plantation forests, our own radiata pine plantations are an outstanding success.

This European 'wisdom', shared by many in developing countries who also have traditional forestry education, means there is an extra dimension to the marketing effort we will need to realise the potential of our radiata crop overseas. We will have to be much more active in 'selling' radiata pine plantation forestry if we are to sell radiata pine. We will also need to be sensitive, because we are dealing with different climates, soils and ecosystems in promoting plantation forestry as a solution to a global problem. The base must be that our experience in our country has been an outstanding success.

In promoting plantation forestry and radiata pine New Zealand has a major marketing job to do in the north if we are to:

- realise the potential of our crop;
- help others assess and benefit from our plantation technology.

If we can 'get it right' the opportunities for exporting radiata pine products are almost unlimited.