Regarding shelter: it is well recognised that in Canterbury, where we have the hot desiccating nor-west winds, the permeable type of shelter is preferable, as it filters the wind. For cold sou'west conditions we use what I call a higher density shelter (photos 1 and 2).

The greatest form of shelter, I consider, is an agroforestry block, thinned to 240 stems per hectare and planted 25 m or so in the lee of an existing shelterbelt. The marginal trees of the agroforestry block should have their branches down to the ground, thus eliminating draft. Under each tree is an area that remains clear of snow (photo 3).

I was recently invited to return to the farm and it was very humbling to stand before the rows of shelter provided by the much maligned radiata trees. They stood erect, defiant, fulfilling their function of providing the very subsistence for farmer and stock alike.

Canterbury is not the only province to suffer badly this year, and one of the good things that has come out of this is the wonderful rallying of people from all walks of life, in support of the farming community.

Perhaps much of the cruelty lay with the elements.

P.W. Smail

(Editor's Note: Peter Smail is an Honorary member of the NZ Institute of Forestry and is recognised for his development and promotion of shelter on farms. Peter recently retired from farming.)

Forests Amendment Bill – (un)sustainable management?

The Forests Amendment Bill is one of those wonderful exercises in doublespeak so in favour with the “politically correct” these days. Its purported objective is to “promote the sustainable management of New Zealand’s indigenous forests” but it sets out a system of controls, sanctions and policing that will not only defeat all attempts at rational sustainable management of most forests but will almost inevitably lead to an increase in the land area cleared of indigenous forests.

Role of the State in Sustainable Management

The State owns the most suitable forests for indigenous production but has made no attempt either to demonstrate the efficacy of the prescriptions or to carry out any ongoing research into sustainable management. Indeed the impression is that the State would rather the industry died so that it is not forced to make a conscious decision to continue production. It is important to remember that these forests are almost the only ones in the country with a history of any form of sustainable management.

Research

There is little or no research to back up the proposed silvicultural regimes for management. A review of what is known about indigenous forest management done in 1991 by the Forest Research Institute was remarkable for its brevity. It was long on ecology but short on proven management techniques and even shorter on economics and commercial viability of proposed management systems.

The State owes it to the private owners of indigenous forests to carry out adequate research before it imposes requirements on their management. The State must demonstrate that what it is proposing will work and is not some fantasy based on wishful thinking and political influence of the extremely powerful environmental lobby.

Property Rights

There is no mention of the Treaty of Waitangi in the Bill. Perhaps this is because the Bill abrogates Treaty rights. The Minister has suggested that the Bill is not an infringement of the property rights of forest owners. Nothing could be further from the truth: this is a direct attack on property rights. Normally planning legislation preserves an existing use. The Bill takes away an existing legitimate use and replaces it with an unproven unresearched controlled use. To compound the injury, the Government does not offer any compensation or assistance for the change. Indeed they are increasing the costs of private ownership and charging the forest owner for the privilege.

An attack on property rights of this nature hasn’t been seen in this country since the wholesale confiscations of Maori land last century.

The penalties for non-compliance prescribed in the Bill are excessive in the extreme, particularly since felling indi-
The ban on wood chip and log exports is irrational once you have land use controls. What does it matter what the timber is used for so long as it provides the greatest commercial gain to the owner? Once the tree is cut it is gone, no matter what purpose it is put to. Is it somehow more noble to be turned into a toilet seat than a quality printing paper such as this publication is printed on? It may come as a surprise but one of the most valuable uses of silver beech in this country is for the manufacture of tooth picks and ice-cream sticks. The prohibition of woodchip exports, while still allowing sawmilling to continue, suggests that the Government’s agenda is more concerned with stopping wood chipping than sustainable management. Given the interdependence of sawmilling and wood chipping in the beech industry, the closure of one industry will inevitably lead to spilt over effects on the other.

In the absence of a domestic market for wood chips the residues from sawmilling will have to be dumped or burnt, an obvious waste of resource. This lack of a market for wood chips will severely hamstring forest management and considerably increase the costs to the forest owner. It is probable that this will make the “sustainable management” of beech forests uneconomic. If these forests are merely creamed for sawlogs, as will be quite possible under the regimes proposed in the Bill, they will be left in a debilitated state, leaving them prone to pinhole borer attack and windthrow.

The penalties prescribed raise it in one step to the level of a major crime.

**Compensation**

The issue of compensation is not dealt with fairly. If it is in the national interest for native forests to be untouched or their use tightly constrained then the private owner of such forest should be compensated at a fair market value for both the land and the forests. The febrile argument that the Government has already paid out $29 million to those suffering commercial loss as a result of the export ban, and so need not pay anything more for their actions, should be seen for what it is—an admission of a past policy failure and political incompetence.

**Unfair Competition**

The fact that the West Coast Production forests and the 1906 Landless Natives lands are to be exempted from the requirements of the Bill means that private owners of small forests are going to be at a serious economic disadvantage when competing to sell their product in the market place. This is Government cupidity and unfair competition. It is a cynical manipulation of the law for the State to give itself an unfair commercial advantage while hamstringing private individuals.

If this policy is so good for the few private individuals who are actually cutting indigenous forests why is it unsuitable for the biggest producers? Also the lack of a requirement for tightly prescribed sustainable management of plantations means that there is an unfair advantage for the plantation owner over the natural forest owner which will make management of natural forests even less attractive.

**Is the Bill Necessary?**

The Bill has as its purpose the promotion of the sustainable management of indigenous forest land. This is a definition that would fit well under the Resource Management Act. This piece of legislation allows local problems to be resolved by people closest to the coal face in the belief that they probably know best.

Amending the Forests Act is an admission that the Resource Management Act may not provide the result that the politicians want when the conflict resolution moves outside their immediate control.

If Government believes that such tight definitions of sustainable management are so important why are they not imposing them upon all land uses, particularly agriculture and plantation forestry?

Is there a real difference between managed natural forests and plantations?

**Inconsistencies**

If Government believes that such tight definitions of sustainable management are so important why are they not imposing them upon all land uses, particularly agriculture and plantation forestry?

**Consequences**

The inevitable consequence of the imposition of the controls proposed in the Bill is the devaluation of the forests held in private hands. This is true irrespective of what log prices may eventually rise to or how profitable the furniture industry or any other user may be (including tourism). The return to the forest owner will fall to uneconomic levels. With nil or negative values the pressure will then be on owners of privately owned native forests to fell them to waste and convert them to a more economic use. This is surely not the intention of the Bill but is the probable outcome.

Another consequence is that if prices for indigenous forest logs rise they will probably be substituted by imports from countries with non-sustainably managed forests. Perhaps the next step will have to be an import ban.

The Government is currently touting around the world this country’s success with plantation forestry ignoring the fact that it is inappropriate for many countries that still have indigenous forests of their own. What they need, and we can’t help them with is a demonstration that sustainable forest management of natural forests is not only practical but will produce acceptable economic returns. We have the luxury of being able to abandon management of our indigenous forests if we wish—the rest of the world does not have that choice.

**Requirement for Success**

In the final analysis the Bill will only be a success if it actually does lead to a—

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