NZIF member comment on NZ Forest Accord and Principles for Commercial Plantation Forest Management

The Principles for Commercial Plantation Forest Management were formally signed by six organisations – NZ Forest Owners’ Association, Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society of New Zealand, New Zealand Farm Forestry Association, World Wide Fund for Nature New Zealand, Federated Mountain Clubs of New Zealand, and Maruia Society – in Wellington on December 6, 1995. A full copy of the text of the Principles is included elsewhere in this issue.

Fifty-six members of the NZ Institute of Forestry responded to the questionnaire asking whether the Institute should be a signatory to the Principles for Commercial Plantation Forest Management in New Zealand and hereby acceding to the NZ Forest Accord. This corresponds to about eight per cent of current membership. Some 54 per cent of respondents were in favour of the Institute signing the Principles, with 46 per cent against.

Most concern raised by those who were not in favour was over the definition of natural forests used in the Accord, and the emphasis on preserving rather than managing indigenous forests. Members were also concerned at possible conflict of interests between members and their clients and/or employers. Another concern was that the provisions of the Accord were seen as an infringement of individual property rights, particularly for small-holders and Maori landowners. Some members felt that the Institute should not sign such agreements so that they could bring a neutral opinion to bear on any issues that might arise from them.

Members who were in favour of the Institute signing the Principles felt that the Institute should be seen to be in the vanguard of such agreements and were in danger of being left out completely, that the tenor of the Principles was inevitable in today’s political and social climate and that if the forestry sector did not attempt to come to grips with social and environmental issues themselves then others outside the sector would force the issues upon them. Much of what is contained in the Principles and Accord is common practice amongst forestry professionals anyway, or covered through the Resource Management Act (1991). It would only be a small number of members who would be placed in a moral but not legal dilemma if the Institute signed the Principles.

The NZIF Council felt that the low response to the questionnaire and the nature of the responses did not provide a sufficient mandate for a decision to be made on whether the Institute should sign the Principles and has deferred a final decision to the 1996 AGM. It is likely that members will be canvassed by postal ballot. The Principles specifically makes provision for interested parties who wish to become signatories to do so at any time, provided that the full agreement of other signatory parties is obtained.

Tim Thorpe
Convenor, Environmental Working Group

NZIF AGM and Conference
Invercargill, April 29 to May 1

The Otago Southland section of the Institute is organising this year’s AGM and conference in Invercargill. The theme of the conference is “Alternative approaches to forestry – time for review!”

It has been argued, rightly or wrongly, that forestry in New Zealand has become too focused on traditional Pinus radiata forest management. Nowhere else in New Zealand has the dilution of this focus been more obvious than in Southland with recent large-scale expansion in new plantings of Douglas-fir and eucalypt species. Combined with a history of native beech forest management, Southland is an ideal venue for a conference focusing on broadening the horizons on forest management.

The silver beech thinning trials are in the Alton Valley, which is part of the 12,000 hectare indigenous production forest estate currently managed under contract for Crown Forestry Management Ltd. The trials, established by NZFRI in the 1970s, are sited in an area that has regenerated from seed trees which were left following clearfelling in 1950. There are a number of treatments incorporating various combinations of an early slasher thin to later thinning and multiple thinning. The range of stockings currently varies from around 100 s/ha to the unthinned controls containing in excess of 3000 s/ha.

Since 1981 South Wood Export Ltd (SWEL) have been exporting hardwood

Two-and-a-half-year-old Eucalyptus nitens on Hamish Levack’s 240-hectare Horowhenua forest. Photo: H. Levack

Conference sessions are wide-ranging, dealing with issues such as why alternatives should be considered, a number of real-life case studies and a particularly interesting session entitled “New Horizons – opening your mind” which deals with, amongst other things, alternative crops to wood production. The conference papers are complemented by a full-day field trip visiting sites in Southland that demonstrate new (some are old but different) approaches to forestry.

The organisers of the conference believe that the programme that has been put together will have something to offer everybody interested in broadening their minds.

Field trip
On day three of the conference a field trip will be made to Western Southland. This will include visits to silver beech thinning trials at Rowallan Forest, eucalypt plantings being grown for chipwood in the Lilburn Valley and looking at Douglas-fir and its local potential at Longwood Forest.

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