

## Pests present risk to sustainability of New Zealand's natural forest estate

"International forestry officials, in New Zealand recently to discuss sustainability issues, expressed concern over the threat that exotic pests such as possums currently pose to New Zealand's natural forest estate," said the Minister of Forestry, Hon John Falloon.

Senior government officials from 13 member countries and eight non-member countries of the Montreal Process gathered in Auckland in November 1995 to discuss criteria and indicators for sustainable forestry management. The Montreal Process evolved from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), or Earth Summit in 1992. Its members, predominantly from the Pacific Rim, control over 90 per cent of the world's boreal and temperate forests. The Montreal Process met in Auckland to continue discussions on appropriate criteria and indicators for assessing the sustainability of forest practices in temperate or boreal forests of member countries, and then visited forests in the North and South Islands.

"While impressed by the management practices used in New Zealand, and in particular those used in our planted forests, the international attendees were concerned at the damage to our natural forests being caused by pests such as possums," said the Minister.

"New Zealand must demonstrate the overall sustainability of its forest management practices in order to maintain market access and consumer acceptability for its forest products. This is particularly important in increasingly environmentally sensitive markets overseas.

"In many respects, New Zealand is a leader in the sustainable management of its forests, having developed a planted forest estate which has allowed it to virtually eliminate its reliance on natural forests to meet its timber needs.

"The expression of concern by these international officials demonstrates the need for our continuing efforts on the pest management front," concluded the Minister.

## What the public thinks

Recent NZFOA research into the public's perceptions of forestry indicates substantial negativity about issues such as foreign ownership, pricing, exporting, transport and pollution.

The research – conducted by Research International for the third consecutive year – involved focus group discussions. The majority of participants seemed to be confused about the proportion of forestry that is foreign-owned versus New Zealand-owned. There was overall concern that too much New Zealand forestry is foreign-owned, particularly by "the Japanese".

The groups felt timber was too expensive in New Zealand. They also felt too much was exported in log form, and that more logs should be processed in New Zealand.

Logging trucks were perceived to be dangerous because they were overloaded and driven too fast. The trucks also caused road damage, and should be replaced by alternative transport systems such as rail.

The participants were concerned about pollution and waste management in the industry (particularly from pulp and paper mills) and believed "cover-ups" were widely practised. They felt the industry should have a "code of conduct" and be accountable for its actions.

There was some light among the gloom, however. The participants recognised forestry as a very important industry, providing direct and indirect employment. It was aesthetically pleasing, potentially environmentally friendly as a renewable resource, and provided a good long-term investment.

Plantation forestry was seen as having a good environmental effect in terms of erosion control, the use of marginal land, and taking pressure off native forests. – Reprinted from NZ Forestry Bulletin, NZFOA.

## Quality Control Supervisor

### *Invercargill*

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**Jade Mitchell**, Recruitment Supervisor,  
Rayonier New Zealand Ltd  
PO Box 9283, Newmarket, Auckland,  
Tel DDI 0-9-358 9778  
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