Leading Edge dissects and traces the complex moves that have given impetus and focus to the birth of the worldwide MDF phenomenon and should be obligatory reading for all in the NZ forest industry. It combines the scientist’s precise analysis of the historical facts with thoughtful comment on social developments. The book faithfully records events of the day, while at the same time putting them in a context that is easily readable.

Forestry in a Global Context

By Roger Sands

Reviewed by Don Wijewardana

Since the Earth Summit of 1992 there has been mounting pressure on the global community to deal with the massive scale of global deforestation and equally alarming, but less apparent, forest degradation. The concern stems for other reasons too. There is now a greater recognition of the non-timber values of forests, which in some circumstances could be even more important, and from the need to use these resources in such a way as not to deny the same facility for future generations.

There has been much written on these issues lately. But to my knowledge there is none that captures so comprehensively the current state of play as in Roger Sands’ Forestry in a Global Context. In less than 250 pages of text, Sands covers the history of human interaction with forestry from the beginning around 350 million years ago to the present day. But the important thing is it is not just a historical account. He looks critically at each phase of development.

The book has a wealth of information and very useful references on each subject covered. While the entire work is important the chapters that I found most interesting were those on the environmental value of forests, deforestation and forest degradation in the tropics, sustainable forest management and forest plantations. Views on these are so polarised that very often what one reads are the entrenched views of one side or the other. It is for this reason that reaching global solutions has been difficult. The value of Sands’ work is that he not only gives the arguments of the two sides but also critically evaluates them to suggest common ground.

On sustainable forest management for instance, he correctly points out that defining it as “setting aside the maximum area of protected forest that can be economically and socially sustained” gives it a negative spin as choosing the least of evils. Instead he suggests considering it in a positive light where products of the forest are appreciated as renewable resources constructed by solar energy and which are environmentally superior to their competitors.

In spite of the rapid growth of the global plantation forest area over the past ten years, criticism, especially of single species plantations, from some groups persists. Sands judiciously reflects the arguments for the two sides in the chapter on plantation forests. It is a must-read to gain a balanced view.

One area where there could be improvement is in the general index. I found some important issues such as illegal logging or criteria and indicators not captured in it. With so many new organisations coming into being recently, a glossary of acronyms could also have been useful.

Forestry is not a subject that can be made easily attractive to readers. But I found Forestry in a Global Context so very readable. That highlights Sands’ ability as a writer who can explain involved issues in an easy-to-understand simple language not only for the student and the forestry professional but also for the general reader. This book is strongly recommended for anyone who wants to understand current global forestry issues.