

MEMBERS' VIEWS OF THE NEW ZEALAND INSTITUTE OF FORESTERS AND ITS ROLE

W. R. J. SUTTON* and J. J. KENNEDY†

ABSTRACT

When members were asked in a questionnaire what they thought was the most important role the New Zealand Institute of Foresters (Inc.) could fill, most said that the Institute should be an advocate for forestry; but opinions varied as to the form that advocacy should take. There was also considerable support for publishing the Journal and for promoting the exchange of information and ideas. Advocacy of the forestry profession also had support, but few members suggested that the Institute be a completely professional organisation. Social contacts and fraternity within the Institute were thought important by some members.

Of the responding members, 23% had at some time considered resigning; most because they believed the Institute to be generally ineffective. Membership criteria, subscription levels, and personal considerations were also given as reasons for possibly resigning.

Members overwhelmingly favoured the Institute maintaining a dialogue with other conservation groups, and gave strong support to the principle that the Institute should be a major force in the conservation movement.

There was a 2:1 majority in favour of the Institute changing its name to the N.Z. Institute of Forestry.

INTRODUCTION

The 1978 Questionnaire (Kennedy, 1978) sent to members of the New Zealand Institute of Foresters (NZIF) included the following questions concerning the Institute and its role:

In Section I (open-ended questions)

- Q 25 — What do you think is the most important contribution the Institute can make?
- Q 26 — Have you ever considered resigning from the Institute of Foresters? If yes, please tell us when and why.

*Forest Research Institute, Private Bag, Rotorua.

†Department of Forestry and Outdoor Recreation, Utah State University, Logan, U.S.A. (formerly NRAC Fellow, Forest Research Institute, Rotorua).

In Section II (agree-disagree questions)

- Q 59 — The Institute of Foresters should maintain a dialogue with other conservation groups.
 Q 60 — The Institute of Foresters, itself, should be a major force in the conservation movement.
 Q 61 — Given that many members of the Institute of Foresters are not foresters, its name should be changed to the N.Z. Institute of Forestry.

This paper presents an analysis of replies to these questions.

Overall Response Rate

Although the overall response was 77.5%, classes of NZIF members did not respond evenly. As Table 1 illustrates, response ranged from 83% for Full Members to 36% for Veteran Members. Eighty percent of the questionnaires returned were from Full and Associate members.

TABLE 1: QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSE RATE

<i>Class* of NZIF Membership</i>	<i>No. Mailed</i>	<i>% Response</i>
Full	204	83
Associate	336	79
Affiliate	124	69
Student	17	76
Veteran	11	36
Honorary	7	57
Total	699	$\bar{X} = 77.5$

*Classes of membership are defined in Appendix 1.

ANALYSIS OF REPLIES

Q 25 — THE INSTITUTE'S MOST IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION

More than 100 of the first returned questionnaires were studied and used as the basis for a coding system. This system was eventually expanded to 76 separate codes which were co-ordinated into five groups (*see* Table 2) and 19 sub-groups.

Responses were allocated to sub-groups and to basic codes on the basis of the general principle believed to be embodied in the response and on the presence of key words. Some examples of typical responses are given later.

Of the 542 respondents to the questionnaire, 62 (11.4%) did not answer the question. Of the 480 that did, 68% stated only one contribution while 32% gave two or more, only the first two of which were classified. This variation in response complicates the presentation of results, especially as both responses of one person could be included in the same group

TABLE 2: MEMBERS' VIEWS OF THE INSTITUTE'S ROLE†

<i>Response Group</i>	<i>Frequency of mention*</i>	<i>%†</i>
As an advocate for forestry	356	74
As an advocate for the forestry profession/ professionalism	68	14
As a forum between members	140	29
As providing a social-fraternity role	30	7
Others	39	8
Total number responding	480	
No. of questionnaires returned with no response	62	

*Up to two per member allowed (32% gave more than one).

†Frequency of mention as a percentage of the total number of members responding — total percentage therefore adds up to 132%.

(e.g., some respondents saw the Institute as having more than one advocate role). This means that in the presentation some aspects, and especially the advocate role, have received more emphasis than they might have done had the analysis allowed only one contribution per respondent.

Advocate for forestry

Responses are grouped into 10 sub-groups — see Table 3.

The sub-groups have been arranged loosely in order of increasing strength of advocacy.

TABLE 3: ADVOCATE FOR FORESTRY

<i>Response Sub-group</i>	<i>Frequency of Mention</i>
General advocate, unspecified	61
Provide impartial, unbiased, informed opinion	75
Obtain and/or present a consensus opinion	14
Act independently of Government and/or private sector	39
Act as mediator/encourage public involvement	37
Influence policy and/or Government	7
Public education, publicity, public relations	68
Be a watchdog (of Government and/or company)	15
Take specific action on issues	20
Be a pressure group	20
Total mentions	356

General advocate for forestry

Typical of the 61 responses were:

- " . . . as the only body of professional foresters, promote the wise development of forestry . . ."
- " . . . represent forestry to the public as a legitimate, responsible, and valuable land-use . . ."
- " . . . put forward a case for forestry . . ."
- " . . . improve the image of the forest industry . . ."
- " . . . to promote the theory and practice of forestry".

Provide informed opinion

The qualifying criterion for this group was an emphasis on the Institute providing informed, but impartial, opinions and comments.

Typical key words in the 75 qualifying responses were impartial . . . unbiased . . . meaningful . . . objective . . . constructive . . . balanced . . . factual.

Typical responses were:

- " . . . provide an independent panel of experts . . ."
- " . . . sound opinions backed by facts and figures . . ."
- " . . . present balanced and factual viewpoints . . ."
- " . . . establish the respect of the public as an expert body capable of expressing an unbiased and unemotive opinion".

Obtain and/or present a consensus opinion

Typical of the 14 responses were:

- " . . . obtain members' consensus viewpoint — not just council's . . ."
- " . . . a consensus opinion . . . to permit the profession to speak with one voice on issues of contention . . ."
- " . . . assess nationally forester reaction . . . and be their voice".

Act independently of Government and/or private sector

The 39 responses classified here contained an expressed view that it was necessary to act independently especially of Government, company, or employer. For example:

- " . . . maintain a separate opinion from that of the Forest Service . . ."
- " . . . shake off the public image of spokesman for forestry establishment . . ."
- " . . . get rid of some of the people who determine policy at Government level and hence Institute policy . . ."
- " . . . to express opinions that are truly independent of State and private management".

Act as mediator/encourage public involvement

These two aspects have been linked because some of the 37 responses clearly felt the Institute should act as a mediator by encouraging some public involvement. It was not always easy to distinguish between those wanting greater public involvement and those wanting the Institute to take the role of mediator.

Many mediation roles were specified. Some saw the Institute as being a liaison . . . link . . . agent . . . forum . . . mediator between the forest industry and the public . . . conservation groups and forestry . . . foresters and the forest industry.

Others saw the mediation role of the Institute being achieved by public seminars and by encouraging public discussion and debate.

Influence policy and/or Government

Most of the members' responses discussed above imply a degree of passiveness. However, many members felt that advocacy should be more active, as this sub-group and those that follow show.

Perhaps the most typical reply of seven classified as wanting the Institute to influence policy and/or Government was: "To review, revise, and promote New Zealand forest policy".

Public education

Some of the 68 responses were general, *e.g.*,
". . . educate the public . . ."

". . . public relations . . ."

Others were more specific, *e.g.*,

". . . public education on a wider basis than possible by NZFS . . ."

". . . the Institute should lead the way in devising methods to make the public aware of forestry . . ."

". . . they should make a better job of keeping the New Zealand public informed on the developments and reasons for New Zealand exotic and indigenous forest management".

Be a watchdog

The 15 supporters of this view were divided between those who saw the Institute as watchdog over both the Government and the private sector and as watchdog over forest policy and practice (several specifically mentioned indigenous forest practice).

Take specific action on issues

The 20 responses clearly stated that some action should be taken on specific issues. Two examples:

- “ . . . stress utilisation of indigenous forest before over-maturity renders them useless . . . ”
- “ . . . spell out the truth about *Pinus radiata* and its benefit to New Zealand ”.

Be a pressure group

Although the classification suggests extreme action, most of the 20 responses in this sub-group were either “to do something rather than talk” or to provide opposition to other pressure groups.

Advocate for the forestry profession and professionalism

Although many members thought that an advocacy of forestry is the most important contribution the Institute can make, there was also some support for the Institute as an advocate for the profession of forestry. Two separate aspects are recognised: an advocate for the profession, and the promotion of professionalism.

The 50 responses classified as suggesting that the Institute should be an advocate for the profession included statements that the Institute should promote . . . protect . . . improve upgrade . . . enhance . . . defend the status/standing/image of the forestry profession and those who work in it.

Only 18 responses specifically mentioned professionalism or that the Institute should be a completely professional organisation. Typical responses were:

- “ . . . strive for more professionalism . . . ”
- “ . . . become truly professional, *i.e.*, set its own internal exams . . . ” — this was submitted by a non-degreed member

As a forum between members

From its beginning, one major role of the Institute has been the exchange and dissemination of information and ideas. Members still feel this is an important role as 140 of them in their returns specifically state that the Institute should provide the means to exchange . . . communicate . . . pool . . . disseminate ideas and information among members. The need for the dissemination of technical information was often mentioned, as was the importance of the Institute's journal. Some members (28 in all) saw the Institute as providing the means by which members could discuss and debate issues independently of their employers.

As providing a social-fraternity role

The provision of social contact between members is considered by 30 members to be a major role of the Institute. All of the responses classified here included a direct or implied mention of the need for social and/or work contact between members.

Other responses

Into this group fall all the responses which did not in themselves gain much overall support. They included statements such as:

"... carry on with the good work ..."

"... be more practical ..."

"... stop being so out of touch with ... the real world ..."

"... leave manufacturing and marketing to the appropriate people and organisations ..."

"... useful for job applications ..."

"... stay out of politics ..."

Most of these statements could not be grouped but there were two issues which did receive some support. One was the salary claim of the NZIF forester group. The other concerned species diversification; six members wanted the Institute to find species other than radiata pine for planting!

Q 26 — HAVE YOU CONSIDERED RESIGNING FROM THE INSTITUTE? IF SO, WHEN AND WHY?

This question was asked to gauge the level of membership satisfaction. It was also thought that it might highlight issues where Institute policy differed from that of members.

Of the 542 questionnaire respondents, a total of 123 (23%) said they had considered resigning. A breakdown by age group showed that those members in the 35-44 group were most likely to have considered resigning (30%), while those in the 55-64 group were least likely (17%). Other age groups had similar percentages (all were in the range 20-24%).

As almost all respondents ignored the request for information on *when* they considered resigning, this aspect of the question has to be excluded. This is unfortunate for it was obvious from the replies that many respondents were referring to conditions past. For this reason the criticisms given below should not all be thought of as applying to the present.

Of the 123 who had considered resigning, 92 (75%) gave only one reason. The remaining 31 gave two reasons and both were classified (any additional stated reason was ignored). Coding of responses followed a system similar to that adopted for Q 25 above. A total of 87 basic codes (most of which had only one response) were combined into five major groupings (see Table 4).

TABLE 4: REASONS WHY MEMBERS CONSIDERED RESIGNING FROM THE INSTITUTE

<i>Reason related to:</i>	<i>Total No.* Support</i>	
	<i>First or only</i>	<i>Second</i>
Personal considerations	13	1
Subscription or expense	18	7
Membership criteria	21	5
Institute (control and policy)	64	14
Other aspects	7	3
Total	123	30

*First or only = classification for those giving either only one response or the first if there were two or more.

Second = classification of the second given response.

Personal considerations

The 14 responses grouped here related to non-Institute aspects, namely, forestry only a fringe interest, respondent leaving forestry, or now retired and too old to continue membership.

Subscription or expense

Of the 25 responses, 10 considered the fees too high, nine thought there were no benefits from membership, and the rest had individual views on such aspects as the high cost of the Annual General Meeting and the wastage of money on council meetings. One member frankly stated that he personally was too mean to pay.

Membership criteria

Of the 26 members who considered resigning over the criteria for membership, 21 thought the criteria too restrictive* while five thought it not restrictive enough. Typical responses were

"... disapprove [of] ... an exclusive professional organisation closed to non-qualified outsiders ..."

"... [the Institute] is diluted by too many subprofessional people".

Although restrictive membership criteria were generally criticised by non-graduates and vice versa, this was not always so. Both of the above statements, for example, came from young graduates.

*Almost all of these were written in the past tense and clearly referred to restrictions applying before the 1975 constitutional change.

Institute (control and policy)

By far the most common reason (78 responses) given by members considering resigning was some aspect of the Institute's control and policy (other than membership criteria). Criticism can be classified into three loose groups:

Domination by an unrepresentative group

Dislike of council and its actions

General ineffectiveness of the Institute.

Domination of the Institute by unrepresentative groups was mentioned by 24 members, and few groups escaped — foresters, scientists, professionals, the N.Z. Forest Service, N.Z. Forest Products Ltd, the "old boys", and even exotics, were specifically mentioned at least once.

Council of the Institute was specifically mentioned in eight responses. Council was seen as "secretive" and dominated by a narrow group — "old school" being mentioned three times.

However, the most common reason given for considering resigning (46 responses) related to a general ineffectiveness of the Institute and the absence of specific action (especially public statements) on important issues. Some criticisms were general and included key words such as narrow . . . academic . . . ineffective . . . conservative. Other criticisms were more specific, *e.g.*:

" . . . apparently doing little for members . . ."

" . . . feel embarrassed at the naivety of motions passed . . ."

" . . . sit on the fence [re environmental issues] . . ."

" . . . unable to form an opinion . . ."

" . . . ineffective in explaining forestry . . ."

" . . . too timid an organisation . . ."

Other

The 10 unclassified responses grouped here included criticism such as the failure of the Institute to take up the salary claim for N.Z. Forest Service foresters, the absence of a local section, and dissatisfaction with the *Journal* contents. One member considered resigning "when the Director-General announced that the top positions in the Forest Service were to be restricted to professionals".

Q 59, 60, AND 61 — THREE AGREE/DISAGREE QUESTIONS ON THE INSTITUTE

Section II of the questionnaire included three questions on the Institute. Those questions and the response to them are given in Table 5.

TABLE 5: MEMBERS' VIEWS ON THE INSTITUTE

Statement	Response (%)						Total
	SA*	A	N	D	SD	No	
59. The Institute of Foresters should maintain a dialogue with other conservation groups	32	62	4	1	0	1	100
60. The Institute of Foresters, itself, should be a major force in the conservation movement	21	43	19	13	3	1	100
61. Given that many members of the Institute of Foresters are <i>not foresters</i> , its name should be changed to the N.Z. Institute of Forestry	17	34	19	20	5	5	100

*SA = strongly agree. A = agree. N = neutral. D = disagree.
SD = strongly disagree. No = no opinion.

On the question of maintaining a dialogue with the conservation groups there was overwhelming support — 94% agreed or strongly agreed. Only three members (0.6%) disagreed.

On the question of whether the Institute should be a force in the conservation movement, support was not quite so strong — 64% agreed to some extent and 16% disagreed; 19% (104 members) expressed a neutral view. Although statistical analysis showed that the age of the respondent had a highly significant effect on the responses to this question, examination failed to show any obvious trend of increasing agreement or disagreement with increase in age. Differences arose because of varying proportions of respondents stating a neutral position, especially among the younger members. For example, 29 and 24% of the 20- to 24- and 25- to 34-year-olds, respectively, were neutral compared with only 9% of the 55- to 64-year-olds.

Although opinions were divided 2:1 in favour of the Institute changing its name to the N.Z. Institute of Forestry, 103 members (19%) were neutral and 27 (5%) preferred to express no opinion on the question. The age of respondents was not significant.

CONCLUSIONS

Our general interpretation of the questionnaire returns is that members want their Institute to take a more active advocacy role in forestry and related environmental issues, and to do more in presenting the case for forestry to the general public. There was also support for the Institute to promote the forestry profession, but few saw the Institute as a completely professional body.

Members also see the Institute as having an important role in producing the means for contact, discussion, exchange and dissemination of information and ideas through the *Journal*, meetings, and local sections.

There appears to be a fair degree of dissatisfaction among members, especially in the 35-44 age group, mainly on the grounds that they felt that the Institute was generally ineffective and inactive.

The views and criticisms of members could be fairly said to be consistent with the Institute's constitutional objective, namely:

The object of this Institute shall be to further the development of forestry and the interests of the profession of forestry in New Zealand (NZIF, 1975).

However, many of the present members feel that the Institute should be making a greater effort to achieve this objective.

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REFERENCES

- Kennedy, J. J., 1978. Questionnaire on N.Z. Forestry and Forest Managers. Sent to NZIF membership with their *Newsletter*, 9 (3).
 N.Z. Institute of Foresters, 1975. Constitution and Code of Ethics (approved, 1975).

APPENDIX 1

The NZIF has 6 classes of membership*:

- Full — Must be engaged full time, at the time of his application and for at least 5 years previous, in some branch of the profession of forestry. Must have been an Associate member for at least two years.
- Associate — Must be engaged full time in some branch of the profession of forestry and have completed a formal course in forestry or allied discipline.
- Affiliate — interested in forestry but not eligible for associate membership.
- Student — Must be currently receiving formal training in forestry or allied discipline.
- Veteran — Must be retired from full-time employment and have been a member (any class) for at least 35 years.
- Honorary — Elected for outstanding service to the Institute or contribution to New Zealand forestry. Limited to twenty in number.

*A summary only. Full details are given in the Institute Constitution (see NZIF, 1975).