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Setting the NZIF agenda

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The concluding session of this year's NZIF conference in Wellington developed five key themes of importance to New Zealand forestry. The five key themes were: Carbon Markets, Encouragement of the Provision of Non-Extractive Values, Forestry Sector Strategic Plan, Research Strategy and Communications Strategy

The NZIF now needs to follow up on the themes identified by the conference.

To that end, the NZIF Canterbury section convened a discussion meeting in July of this year which was attended by local members and also members of the NZIF Council. The meeting was charged with answering three questions:

1. What role if any should the NZIF play with respect to each of the five key themes?
2. What specific actions might the NZIF take with respect to the five key themes?
3. What can local sections do to assist the NZIF with respect to the five key themes?

After some introductory comments by the meeting chair and by the national president, the meeting was divided into three groups, who proceeded to discuss questions 1-3 above. The leader of each group then reported the group's findings; the groups did not entirely agree with each other about the answers to questions 1-3 but there was some consensus. The following pulls together the views of the three groups on each question.

1. *Communications Strategy*: A communication strategy for the forestry sector is important. Public policy is ultimately derived from public opinion, so if the forestry sector wants better public policies, it has to tell the forestry story to the New Zealand public.

2. *Encouragement of the Provision of Non-Extractive Values*: New Zealanders and the politicians who represent them are mostly uninformed about the "non-extractive" values of forests, with the exception of recreation and (possibly) carbon dioxide sequestration. If the NZIF were to play a role in a communication strategy for the forestry sector, then it should promote the non-extractive values of forest as an important message.

3. *Carbon Markets*: The role of the Institute in the developing markets for carbon credits should be similar to the one that it plays in relation to forest valuation. That is, the NZIF should develop and promote standards for measurement and accounting for forest carbon credits.

4. *Forestry Sector Strategic Plan and Research Strategy*: The discussion groups generally rated the final two themes (the forestry sector strategic plan and a forestry research strategy) as the lowest priorities. New Zealand forestry lacks a cohesive strategy in these two areas, but the discussion groups thought this was more the responsibility of the wider forestry sector. The NZIF may have a supporting role but this needs to be appropriate to its status as a professional institute.

5. *The role of local NZIF sections*: Although not discussed in depth, local sections are important because they are a forum for members to meet outside the strictures of the workplace. They are also important to any communication strategy, as it is the local sections which do much of the advocacy for forestry at a community level.

In conclusion: The 2006 conference identified five themes for action by the NZIF, but five themes are possibly too many to pursue for a small voluntary organisation such as ours. Perhaps the NZIF needs to concentrate on "doing one thing well"? If so the Canterbury meeting suggested a way forward. The most important themes identified at the Canterbury meeting were:

- There is a need to communicate the benefits of forestry to the New Zealand public.
- There is a need to promote the non-extractive benefits of forestry as a land use.

Therefore, in its role as an advocate for forestry the NZIF's highest priority is to develop a communication strategy. This strategy should emphasise forestry in the broadest sense i.e. as a land use that provides not just timber but many other benefits as well. And last but not least, it should not just be a national initiative but should also involve the local sections of the NZIF.