

## Who does the Institute represent and to what end?

The newsletter is always interesting, and provocative. Both James and Howard raise fundamental questions for the Institute; who does the institute represent and what's the scope of the brief? James asks his question in the context of politics and Howard in the context of engagement in issues and access to appropriate expertise within the institute.

The management of forests, and woody vegetation generally, indigenous and exotic, has long been a focus for debate on a broad range of land use and sustainability issues. Forests hold the land together and provide a broad range of 'services' within the wider landscape and for society. These services translate into 'interests', interests that are all too often in conflict. The effects of unresolved conflict attract attention and demand political interventions. The separation of conflicting interests in the 1980's, conservation and production forestry, was the politicians attempt to clarify the relationship between the public interest and private enterprise. The Resource Management Act has however increasingly blurred the boundaries, and climate change is demanding a global focus on forests.

The current government has moved on from the simplistic separatism of 'left' versus 'right' to occupy a place in the centre where, rather than perpetuating the conflict of interests between public and private, it has accepted the role of mediation; mediating the relationship between the public and private sectors to promote and sustain the 'wellbeing' of both the community and the environment. The role of the government is to foster an environment that supports business by providing the necessary infrastructure, ensuring appropriately skilled people are available, and that the health system delivers what's needed. And with or without the 'greens' the spotlight will be on forests, where they fit in the landscape and for what purpose?

Legislation reviews of relevance to forestry are too numerous to mention. The most significant of these is the review of the RMA. The government has already signalled an intention to implement the review's recommendations, one of these being to develop a new piece of legislation directing the preparation of fourteen regional 'spatial plans' covering the whole country. The purpose of such strategies is *"to promote the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of present and future generations through the long term strategic integration of functions exercised under legislation in relation to...."* In brief, the following are specified; the natural and built environments, infrastructure, climate change, and the relationship of iwi, hapu and whanau and their culture and traditions with natural and built environments. Given that forests and woody vegetation are woven through the landscape, stretching from the mountains to the sea, we might expect forests to feature prominently in spatial plans.

Currently 'forestry' appears to be represented by a broad range of interest groups, from both the public and private sectors as well as NGOs. There are conflicts of interest and there is competition for space. The media all too often conveys an impression of fragmentation and discord, supported by images to shock rather than to enlighten, a world of disconnected 'events' without any elaboration of context. Time and space cease to feature.

So what can the Institute contribute to the ongoing debate? There is absolutely no doubt that forests will have an increasingly important part to play in land use and a culture of 'wellbeing'. The challenge will be to ensure that the full range of services are recognised and provided for in an equitable and inclusive way. To perpetuate the contest of interests the Industry has fostered in recent years will only fuel an outdated politics of separatism and ill will. The Institute needs to provide a forum within which the various interests can be heard and, through a collaborative process, interests integrated into a coherent advocacy that politicians and the public can understand and embrace. To this end Howard is

right; the Institute needs to be inclusive and flexible. The Institute needs access to a diverse range of skills and expertise, generalists and specialists, passionate people who understand the vital role forests have to play in our future.

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