

Guest editorial

Collaboration between the Australian and New Zealand Institutes of Foresters

The ANZIF Conference held in June 2007 marked some 27 years since the first such conference involving collaboration between the Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA) and the New Zealand Institute of Forestry (NZIF). Closer collaboration to help underpin the scientific basis of forestry, policy directions and standards of forest management within our region has been discussed by the membership and boards of the institutes. What has been achieved to date and what directions should future trans-Tasman collaboration take?

The first ANZIF Conference was held at Rotorua in 1980, with enthusiastic collaboration between Wink Sutton of the New Zealand Institute of Forestry (NZIF) and me. We shared the view, as did our respective institute governing boards, that our two economies would become increasingly integrated and that we had much to learn from each other in relation to forestry. Subsequent meetings were held in Hobart in 1985, Christchurch in 1991, Canberra in 1997 and Queenstown in 2003, with Coffs Harbour the location in June 2007. The increasing frequency perhaps reflects an increasing awareness of the interwoven environment in which the institutes now operate.

If the published reports and personal memories of these meetings are any guide, they were professionally useful and convivial. They were not, of course, the only source of interchange between members of the two institutes, thanks in part to the decline of real (i.e. deflated) costs of air travel between the two countries. But ANZIF is distinctive in embracing all elements of forestry¹ in membership and attendance, rather than involving a highly specialised audience or single topic. Both institutes are rightly proud of their orientation towards the professional practice of forest management and the forest science to guide it, without being precious or exclusive about that orientation.

Many changes have occurred in forestry and other interchanges between the two countries over this period. The extent of trans-Tasman changes of employment of members and potential members has grown as privatisation, commercialisation and formal collaborations have proceeded. The 2003 conference coincided with the 20th anniversary of Closer Economic Relations between the two countries — a relationship that has resulted 'in unprecedented integration' between the two economies according to the Director-General of the New Zealand Ministry for Agriculture and Forestry². Industrial

plantation and forest industry ownership now reflects that integration, as well as the growing trends in globalisation. The respective national institutes of forest research are collaborating through a partnership under the Ensis flag. Through that and other collaborative arrangements, regular interchanges exist in tree breeding, forest and timber disease and pest issues, valuation, fire protection and other areas. The Primary Industries Ministerial Council and Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council include New Zealand representation and have replaced the earlier Australian Forestry Council.

Understandably, both institutes have been somewhat passive towards these changes because most have been beyond the reach of their influence. The aftermath of the 2007 ANZIF Conference provides a timely opportunity to review the relationship between the institutes and to chart some future strategies in the light of further changes of similar character in the future. Three questions loom large in addressing these changes:

1. Would a strengthened and/or more formal relationship help the respective institutes to meet their aims and objectives?
2. Would a strengthened and/or more formal relationship provide better services and/or lower costs to members?
3. What form should such a relationship or structure take and should it be restricted to the two nations?

Effectiveness

Most of the policy issues of concern to the respective institutes relate to specific state and national concerns, so these are not primarily the basis for a strengthened relationship. Some issues, such as illegal logging, forest practices in neighbouring countries, international trade and marketing, poverty alleviation and climate change are of mutual concern. It might heighten the public standing of both institutes if they could speak with a common voice on these matters. Certification seems likely to become much more common within both countries and in our near neighbours. This raises issues concerning mutual recognition of registration (Registered Professional Forester (RPF) and Registered Forestry Consultant (RFC)) schemes, national plantation standards, valuers and certifiers, and mutual offerings for professional development, both in relation to plantations in the two countries and more generally in the South Pacific and Asian regions.

Regrettably, the history of mutual recognition of standards for timber grading suggests that mutual policy goals are not always simple to achieve, as witness the recent advent of different standards in the two countries. However, recognition and acceptance of irreconcilable differences is as essential to effectiveness of an integrating entity as adopting common ground, as the Australian history of differences between the IFA's state divisions has shown from time to time.

¹ 'Forestry', according to the IFA website, is 'the practical application of scientific, economic and social principles to the establishment and management of ecosystems dominated by trees, or at least where trees are major components of an ecosystem'. The NZIF website defines it as 'the art and science of managing forests so as to secure a wide range of environmental and socio-economic benefits'. Users of MS Word[®] software (and the institute boards) may wish to contrast these definitions with those in the Word[®] dictionary which collectively limit the scope greatly.

² See Stephen Jacobi (2003) ANZIF — Seeing the woods through the weeds. *New Zealand Journal of Forestry* 48(2), 2–3, http://www.nzjf.org/contents.php?volume_issue=j48_2

Efficiency

Efficiencies, be they in lower costs, better services, or both, loom large in any consideration of the future of two relatively small institutes. The IFA currently has about 1240 members, NZIF 750. Some growth in membership is likely to follow from the harvesting and marketing of the increased potential supply of wood over the next two decades, together with (hopefully) some increase in fire management and farm forestry roles. That growth is unlikely to be dramatic, being limited by the economies of scale we are now seeing materialise. The combined number, though still relatively small, offers scope to explore and develop efficiencies in administration, communication and registration, so there is a pressing need to look for cost savings and/or service improvements within current costs.

Administration is in some ways the most difficult area of change because the two Institutes have somewhat different systems and annual charges at present. The IFA has a full-time Executive Director and Member Services Manager, and the NZIF only a part-time administrator. Consequently annual IFA membership fees are almost twice those of the NZIF for voting members. Both use extensive voluntary and quasi-voluntary support (via honoraria) for editing, and in the case of the NZIF for Board Secretary work. A detailed investigation would be appropriate because there are potential economies of scale and scope involved. Location of the administration should not matter much in an era of increasing reliance on electronic communication, especially if the head of any joint body or arrangement rotated between the countries, assisted by each president.

Communication is an area most likely to undergo radical change over the next decade or two. Older members may lament it but purely newsletter-type publications will be replaced by internet newsletters, as witness the uptake and success of the *Friday Offcuts*, published by Innovatek Ltd in partnership with the Australian Plantation Products and Paper Industry Council (A3P), Ensis, and others.

The scientific publications of both institutes are available on the web but unfortunately they are not indexed by the leading global abstracting services and will therefore be ignored by the scientific community. This indexing has become essential in the scientific world³ and, in my view, dooms both journals to the scrap heap of history, unless changed. Efficiencies are also needed with respect to editing, which I suspect has outstripped or will soon outstrip volunteer or quasi-volunteer efforts. A merger would provide scale for two publications (one scientific and one professional) to replace the present four, greater attractiveness to libraries, greater administrative assistance to the editorial panels, and a better opportunity to bear the costs involved.

As noted earlier, registration is an area likely to increase substantially over the next decade or two, in line with the earlier observations regarding certification and illegal logging and poor forest practices in neighbouring countries. Privatisation and commercialisation in combination with certification and an increasingly litigious world will also push this along. The two

systems of the institutes differ, but not so radically that common ground could not be found. That common ground might also assist employment interchanges and opportunities across the Tasman because the two economies are seldom exactly synchronised. The annual NZIF charges for registration on a continuing basis appear to be higher than those of the IFA.

Structure

If there is a role for greater integration between the IFA and NZIF, what form should it take? The devil is in the detail, and the preceding sections have charted some of the detail that needs to be worked through jointly before seizing on some grand plan. Greater integration need not imply a merger, although in my view that might well be a long-term (10-year) goal if my concerns about the future membership, financial viability, communication and employment trends are shared. There are many potential intermediate steps, especially in communication and administration, that would assist in strengthening the bridges between the two institutes. Such moves could be managed by a joint not-for-profit company with a board consisting of a chair and the two presidents overseeing joint administration services operating under supply contracts to the parent institutes.

Nothing would dissuade each side more quickly and absolutely than to propose a take-over of one institute by the other. Maintaining national identities and regional structures is therefore a paramount consideration in any discussion of greater integration. That means the governing bodies and their key committees would need to operate on a federal system, with an agreed hierarchy of powers, especially in relation to policies and practices that are often inherently national or regional in character.

If, in the long run, a merger was to be contemplated, thought might also be given to our near-neighbours and their involvement, building on the IFA board's recent initiative in launching the Tropical Forest Interest Group. Clearly, that would be a second-order issue until the trans-Tasman house is in order. But many of the arguments extend to our near neighbours with even greater force because of their stage of development. Extension to a South Pacific entity would obviously need support and funding from our two governments and/or aid agencies.

Conclusion

If the Australian and New Zealand memberships and their respective boards share any of the concerns expressed above, the two institutes need to chart some strategies to investigate the issues prior to the next ANZIF conference, so that joint action might then be considered and set in motion. This requires a lot of detailed work by small joint committees based on clear terms of reference and reporting requirements, with some champions to drive them along. This may seem like an old fart's 'hasten slowly' dictum, but is as much a case of 'hasten surely' — there is much at stake; not least, survival of the institutes.

Ian Ferguson FIFA

*Professor Emeritus of Forest Science
The University of Melbourne*

³ See Alan Brown (2006) Visited a library lately? *The Forester* 49(4), 26.