

A REVIEW OF THE NZ FOREST CODE OF PRACTICE

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SYNOPSIS

The NZ Forest Code of Practice was developed by a multidisciplinary and co-operative working group comprising the forest industry and regulatory agencies. Since publishing in July 1990, the Resource Management Act has been enacted and has introduced significant changes to environmental legislation. This paper examines the Code of Practice and the applicability to the current situation the industry operates within.

INTRODUCTION

The author was a member of the Working Group convened by LIRA in 1988 to consider the development of an industry initiated Code of Practice. A wide range of experiences, skills and both scientific and anecdotal findings were drawn upon in the development of the code, skilfully crafted and moulded by Lindsay Vaughan. In deciding on a format, the Working Group examined a considerable number of overseas examples - the Tasmanian Forestry Commission, and Weyhauser Corporation guidelines gave some good leads.

THE CODE OF PRACTICE

Essential components were considered:

- 1 Applicability - contents had to relate to the field situation, yet give enough detail for forest and harvest planners to use in a meaningful way.
- 2 Readability - legal and scientific mumbo-jumbo had no place, as it was not to be a treatise or regulatory document.
- 3 Versatility - the Code was required to cover all situations, and have relevance to indigenous as well as exotic situations.
- 4 Graphic - particularly for impact of picture/word associations when promoting operational components - whether plans, photos, sketches and cartoons etc.
- 5 Portable and usable - of limited value propping up a bookshelf.

Furthermore, the Code was required to relate sensibly to the Resource Management Act 1991, the essence of which is the principle of sustainability within a permissive statute.

FORESTRY AS A LAND USE

Given the fact that our planted forest production capacity is expected to double by 2010 to 25 million m³ annually, commercial forestry will have an impact on the NZ landscape and infrastructure.

Similarly, other land uses do and will have impacts, pastoral farming, cropping, mining etc.

Under the Resource Management Act, Regional Councils are responsible to ensure such uses are sustainable, consistent with societal, economic objectives, and that intrinsic values such as plant and animal life is maintained or enhanced in water and soil resources.

The principle means of operational procedures to achieve these environmental objectives will be the defining of regional rules. These will replace the present Transitional rules which in most areas are roll-over Section 34 Notices or Vegetation Control Bylaws pursuant to the repealed Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Act 1941.

The Waikato Regional Council has prepared a discussion paper for a regional forestry policy which is currently the subject of an industry/council working group. This will give input to the Regional Policy Statement.

THE ROLE OF THE CODE

It is considered that the NZFCOP has all the basics necessary for most Environmental Impact Statements to be prepared should a land use consent be required for a forestry operation. From a regulatory perspective, it is necessary for a consent to be approved in situations where environmental damage may occur.

Forest Planners and logging planners have to examine the activities, practices or localities in considerable detail to identify the situations where environmental values may be threatened, compromised or where production may be non-sustainable.

Working through the FCOP operations database, and Impact Checklist is an appropriate means of identifying many environmental issues of significance to Regional Councils under the RMA.

When coupled to a mapping process such as GIS, and other databases, which may input more local data, most forest companies will be more than capable of sustainable resource management.

There is a need to identify within forest holdings, the areas which depend on critical management to ensure environmental impacts are minimised. When all the processes are well described, and all staff and contractors are well briefed and fully conversant with performance standards associated with those areas compliance with any conditions set down should not present any problems.

Activities which impact on sustainability of the soil resource, water quality and quantity and biological values of the forest areas, need to be addressed, in order to develop amelioration strategies.

There have been many studies and anecdotal references to environmental impacts of forest establishment and logging. From such information practices and techniques which result in non-sustainable resource management must be rejected in favour of practices consistent with environmental sustainability.

Environmental protection should unite the environmental movement and the forest products industry, not divide them. ⁽¹⁾

Economic prosperity pays for environmental protection

(1) BR Lippke, Director, CINTRAFOR University of Washington World Wood, February 1992.

CONCLUSION

The Forest Code of Practice is comprehensive and forms a solid base on which to undertake forest analysis should the need for EIA's arise. It does not remove the need for good resource information on the physical and biological values of the forest however.

It is a nationally consistent benchmark for operator and regulator to use in a constructive and pragmatic manner.

