



The need for the Institute of Foresters of Australia to provide more leadership

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‘Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.’—Sir W.S. Churchill

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to draw to the attention of foresters that the future success of sound sustainable forestry in Australia depends to a large extent on a strong pro-active Institute of Foresters of Australia, responsive to national affairs affecting forestry.

Indeed the word 'Foresters' was preferred over 'Forestry' for the Institute title by those foresters who created the IFA to emphasise that the Institute's members themselves should be aware that their ability can drive forestry forward in the interests of Australia and to support policies that allowed them to give personally their unrestricted best to their work. Since the training of foresters in Australia started a little over 100 years ago, enormous challenges have occurred in a profession of practical scientists working mainly away from populations with long-term plans to do the best for the forests—native and man made.

Foresters, at this time, are seen to be on the back foot in their influence on forest policy. To regain society's support there is a need to heed history, as the Winston Churchill quote says, and recall that 130 years of very little forest management following European settlement were followed by a successful period from 1920 to 1980. Now foresters will again have to fight to maintain sound forest management, hopefully aided by an enlarged IFA administration as described in this paper.

Some history of forestry and the first phase of the use of forests

A search of literature on forest activities from the time of arrival of European settlers in Australia in 1788 to the end of the nineteenth century shows little to be proud of—there was very little forest management in Australia except in South Australia from 1875 (Lewis 1975).

In the late nineteenth century, after many years of pressure from the public and government departmental heads, foresters were invited from the Indian Forest Service (IFS) to report on the state of forests in Victoria. F.D'A. Vincent, of the IFS, reported in 1887, but his report was not published as it indicated a poor state of forest management. However, his inspection resulted in the appointment of G.S. Perrin as the first conservator of forests in Victoria. He had had experience in South Australia and then in Tasmania (Carron 1985).

In 1895 Inspector-General Ribbentrop of the IFS came, having worked in India with eminent German-trained foresters Brandis and Schlich. In his report, published by the government, he emphasised the extraordinarily backward state of forest management. This resulted in a Royal Commission in Victoria and, after a lot of political resistance, a Forest Act was passed in 1907.

At about the same time there were also concerns in other states at the lack of forest management—for instance in 1907 New South Wales had a Royal Commission concerning the state of forests, resulting in a Forest Act in 1916.

These concerns started to have overall national traction; professional forest education at the diploma level for forest management commenced in Victoria in 1910.

South Australia, because it was substantially devoid of commercial forests, started plantations as early as 1875; the stimulus to educate students at a university level in Adelaide probably came from those working in that state. Lord Robinson was the first Rhodes Scholar in 1904 from any discipline from Adelaide University; he was followed only a few years later by N.W. Jolly—both used their awards to study forestry under Schlich, who had become Professor of Forestry at Oxford University. Robinson went on to head the UK Forestry Commission and Jolly was an outstanding career forester in Australia.

Adelaide University made a forestry degree available in 1911 and Cyril Cole OBE, who retired as the Chief of ACT Forests in 1956, was its first graduate in 1914.

A mention too should be made of David Hutchins, an experienced British forester who came to Western Australia in 1914 for a conference on science. He was then invited by the Federal Government to report on the state of forests in each state, which he did, taking some four years to complete the request.

Commencement of forestry education

In 1926, with the blessing of the Federal Government, the Australian Forestry School (AFS), located in Canberra, was founded; arrangements were made with all state governments and Australian universities to provide a forestry degree based upon two years study in science at a university followed by two years study at the AFS, which operated with Federal Government funding. Lane Poole was appointed acting principal.

The commencement of forestry education in Australia was the most useful and significant event in the history of forest management in Australia, and signalled the end of neglect of public forest management.

A second phase

A second phase commenced in the 1920s, resulting in forest management being driven by much forest science, particularly in the silvicultural treatment of native forests in several states on a considerable scale; the successful kiln drying of hardwood timber; the development of a major pulp and paper industry; and the commencement of establishment of substantial plantations.

Research by Ian Boas and Louis R. Benjamin early in the 1920s at the Perth Technical College, and subsequently in Melbourne, successfully showed the potential of eucalypts for paper-making. Forest products research was seminal in the subsequent development of a large Australian manufacturing industry, as well as lifting the standard of living in country areas. The resources generated by this industry enabled fire protection and other forestry objectives to be pursued.

These developments encouraged people like Sir David Rivett, a leader of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR, to become the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, CSIRO, in 1949), to include forest products research in that organisation as a division in Melbourne in 1928. The division played a part between the First and Second World Wars in developing kiln drying of eucalypts. This resulted in more profitable sawmilling of ash-type eucalypts in Victoria and Tasmania, yielding a product suitable for flooring and shop-fitting rather than simply green structural material. Knowledge of the mechanical properties of Australian woods, gained in the 1930s, enabled publication in 1939 of a *Handbook of Structural Timber Design* which became a key reference work and led to development of national and international standards.

Max Jacobs, a young forestry graduate of the University of Adelaide later to become an iconic silviculturist, joined the Commonwealth Forestry Bureau in Canberra as a researcher in 1933.

These positive developments in the 1920s and 1930s led to recognition of a need for advocacy of the three current main influences: professional forest policy, standards of forest management, research and education. The university-trained foresters of those times considered a professional institute could form the vehicle to expand the overall role of forestry. A Western Australian forester, Stephen Kessell OBE, and other senior foresters on the 10 December 1935 formed the Institute of Foresters of Australia, with Kessell as chairman, Max Jacobs ISO as secretary and W.D. Muir (NSW), J. Incoll (Victoria), G.J. Rodger (South Australia) and C. Haley (Queensland) as committee members.

Lane Poole too encouraged the formation of the IFA, as he and Lord Robinson had been the drivers of the founding in 1921 of the world-wide Commonwealth Forestry Association.

The objectives of the IFA

To refresh or remind foresters, the core objectives of the IFA were and continue to be:

- to promote and encourage the study of the science and practice of forestry in all its branches
- to raise the status, advance the interests and improve the technical and general knowledge of persons engaged in or proposing to engage in forestry
- to collect and circulate statistics and other information relating to forestry in all its branches
- to originate and promote, in the interests of the Institute, improvements in the law.

These objectives have served members well and this review of the advantages of expanding the IFA role is now timely, with already a sound base. A future role for the Institute in line with its objectives will be examined in the second part of this paper.

The wave of commercial as well as environmental interest in forestry developed right through the Second World War, and interest in training of foresters expanded in 1945 when the University of Melbourne first offered a degree in forestry science that did not entail attendance at the Australian Forestry School. The second phase of what was the sound development of forestry continued up to the 1980s when, as access to forests increased, some environment lobbies became vociferous about the felling of trees and another political game returned—one more difficult to deal with than the *laissez faire* political attitude of the previous century. This third phase is where we are now.

The third phase

By examining the roles of people and policies with influence on forest management the IFA can combat negative views on forestry. The three main influences are:

The politicians—Politicians allocate funds for forestry-related activities and are responsible for forestry policy on Crown and some private land; their major fault in recent times has been to listen to a small but influential group espousing the locking-up of forests against forest management

The foresters—In the middle are the foresters, who have not been good communicators although having done much good work over many years on a combination of forest and environmental management including timber stand improvement and plantation development

The environmental lobby—The environmental lobby, by skillfully using the media has damaged much of the fabric of forest management foresters have built, and, in the process, caused governments to spend a lot of money on reports in order to satisfy political pressures to little good purpose.

Some examples of the negative bias on forestry matters could include the Australian Broadcasting Corporation which has, over a long time in most Australian states, apparently found it hard to produce balanced reporting on forest management. This is difficult to understand, bearing in mind the high quality of most of its programmes. Newspapers—for example the *Canberra Times* (which has no local competition) and the *Melbourne Age*—are not known in forestry circles for their balanced reporting on forestry matters either.

All those purveying negative views on forestry matters seem to have had little understanding of the real impact of persuading leading politicians, for instance in the Victorian and the New South Wales Governments at various times, on matters affecting the nation and forest management. They certainly have disappointed those working in forestry, who have sound intentions with scientific objectives.

Another example of negativity towards forestry occurred when a leading Federal Cabinet minister in the 1980s decided, after a short period, to disband the Forestry and Forests Products Industry Committee, which had representatives of all states and the Commonwealth, because the advice offered did not suit the minister, even though that committee was one of a number of industry advisory groups set up by that minister.

To make matters worse, some organisations mentioned above have been considered as directly or indirectly responsible for experienced and respected senior foresters resigning because either the implementation of a proposed policy would have led to poor practice, or the preferred use of opinion from multidisciplinary departmental heads having not enough knowledge was impractical, or did not make policy or financial sense.

As well, the volume of logs allowed to be removed from particular native forests and the price that industry paid for pulp and sawlogs may well have been influenced too much by a combination of local politics and representations to politicians by trade associations and industry itself.

It is hard to recall an accurate statement from the environmental lobby about forestry, or any policy supporting anything useful which has been achieved in forestry. And much has been achieved by the forestry profession for both Australia and other countries despite some problems justifying criticism.

The tragedy is that at the time of the rise of environmentalism support was needed for the forestry profession, but the reverse has occurred.

The fallout from misinformation about forest management

So what is the fallout to date from the third phase of forestry which has come from the activity of the environmental lobby in the last 25 years?

The outcome of the misinformation about and bias against forest management have been very hard to contain. Indeed, it might be concluded that this misinformation has put off students, often through their parents, from considering careers in forestry. Poor media reporting has contributed to a reduction of state and federal government priorities in funding forest management. This has resulted in state forest services being managed in large multiservice departments or, for instance in the case of Queensland, forestry being administered at one stage by four or five different departments to ensure little traction. Sales of some government plantations to redress shortfalls in state government finances have been at prices considered in forestry circles to be too modest.

These factors have resulted in several serious losses to forestry in recent times, one being the destruction of the state forestry organisations with a forester as a head. The lack of current investment in establishing either hardwood or softwood plantations for sawlog production is causing a shortfall of at least 15 000 ha of new plantation per annum to hold imports down and to service an increasing population. The expansion of national parks has brought with that decision some objectives that are to be regretted.

Another example of politicians using the politics of forestry to get votes is the recent rejection of forestry as a carbon credit source when the contribution forestry could make to carbon sequestration figures could be large.

The recent loss of research facilities managed by CSIRO for both forestry and forest products is an enormous blow to the best interests of Australia and of a number of other countries with which we interact.

The scope for training of professional foresters and the number of students is no longer adequate in at least one university that, in years past, has taught the majority of forestry undergraduates in Australia. For too long has this position been allowed to continue.

How to rebalance activity

What should foresters do to re-balance forest land-use management and to stop the return of foresters to a political battlefield experienced in most of the nineteenth century and again since the 1980s?

The solution lies in a strong, competent Institute of Foresters of Australia with the backing of the majority of the population.

The Institute of Foresters of Australia has a good reputation for the soundness of its policies, and one hears very little criticism of the performance of foresters themselves. It is pleasing to note that both the current Victorian and New South Wales Governments now have an IFA representative on their forestry advisory boards. One might question, however, the integrity of some in the environmental movement which seemingly acknowledges in conversation the competence of foresters but in fact ignores them.

A number of current factors in forestry need serious attention to get adequate forest management back on track. Some inadequacies are:

Public relations

Once the National Association of Forest Industries (NAFI) was formed in 1987 after years of often self-serving, differing views on policy for the forest industries it was hoped that the Association would be able to promote forestry and its products using consistently good information and TV. There were good intentions and one TV product showing a schoolteacher espousing forestry scientifically was a success, but after a time the public relations projects became too modest to have much impact. NAFI,

however, did well in representations to government over a long period, and has now amalgamated with another forest industry body as the Australian Forestry Products Association (AFPA).

Some kindred IFA organisations were briefly members of NAFI, but not the IFA itself. The forestry community as a whole needs to be pro-active and respond promptly to matters of political and public interest. A priority objective of an expanded IFA should be continual professional public relations, responses to negative media commentary and untrue or biased claims about forest operations and management, and the presentation of accurate forestry information. There need to be several functions a year involving the public, drawing attention to the role of forests and foresters in society on a year-by-year basis. The forest industry and governments need to communicate much more consistently to the public the advantages of multiple use of forests and the importance of wood generally.

Legislation

One means of stabilising forestry's role is to stop public and private forest land going from multiple to single use. Legislation in each state, supported by an Act of Federal Parliament, should define areas in each state for multiple-use forestry in native forests including harvesting and regeneration. Stephen Kessell suggested this to the NSW government as long ago as 1935, but at that time it was rejected.

A legislative approach could be that any change to forest areas above a nominated threshold should be decided by an Act of both a state and Federal Government at the same time, and permitted only at least 12 months before or after state or Federal elections.

This would prevent forests being used as political footballs to gain votes, and ensure the nation has a balanced policy on the amount of forest land for multiple use.

Education

Education standards and the specific breadth of syllabuses of tertiary undergraduate and masters class-work degrees need annual reviews by a professional committee of the IFA. Universities wishing to teach forestry should have IFA accreditation.

There is a need to encourage students to study forestry and to ensure their courses reflect the needs of the profession and of industry.

As a reminder of the scope of forestry training, at least 20 subjects are part of a foresters professional equipment, namely: introduction to botany, physics, geology, chemistry, silviculture and mensuration, forest operations and management, engineering, forest ecology, environmental principles including EISs, fire, surveying, entomology, soils, forest economics and policy, dendrology, statistics, leadership principles, forest products including wood technology, timber marketing, meteorology and OH&S.

Student selection

Most students wishing to enter forestry as a career should be interviewed and selected for either an IFA scholarship or a reintroduced government one, similar for instance to the process used in selecting potential military officers for training. A minimum intake of undergraduate students per year students per year should be established. The reintroduction of Commonwealth Forestry Scholarships would be likely to solve the current shortage of forestry students.

There is no check at the moment either on whether a student is likely to make a good forester or not when they currently enter a university forestry course. Reliance on the level of marks gained in school year 12 exams is not a sufficient gauge of suitability.

Career path

A return of foresters to a career path would result in confidence that the native forest estate in Australia would be more efficiently managed by foresters, including national parks where large areas cost much more per hectare to manage than those managed by forest services.

A ministerial forestry department responsible for forestry should always be headed by a professional forester aided by a senior administrator able to steer graduates to gain experience and maintain interest in their forestry careers.

Policy

There is a need for the IFA to have a stronger relationship with other organisations involved with drawing up or commenting on forest policy for government submissions. Such cooperation should include, where appropriate, the Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA), Forest and Wood Products Australia (FWPA), the national parks associations, the Australian Forest Growers (AFG), forest industry state associations, Timber Communities Australia, and Forest Contractors Association.

As well, regular connections should be made and kept with ministers of the Crown and heads of government forest services.

Finance

There is a need to have a watching brief on the annual budgets for forest management and plantation expansion for each state, and an input from the IFA as to priorities and their levels. Recommendations for a larger administration team in order to allow the IFA to cope with addressing current forestry inadequacies would be helpful for employees' careers.

The objectives of formulating policy on public relations, legislation, education, student selection, career paths, policy and finance can be successfully pursued by the IFA by adjusting the structure of inputs to and outputs from the Institute, but entail a greater work load for the IFA administration.

Current IFA management structure

The IFA Board meets four times a year. Divisions of the Institute have their AGMs some two or three months before the IFA AGM in November each year. As occasion demands members of the Board and divisional committees may hold telephone conferences at other times.

The Board consists of the chairperson of each division, one for each state, plus the ACT (including Northern Territory and overseas members), and the chairman of the Association of Consulting Foresters of Australia.

Branch chairpersons are members of divisional committees, and branches have a chair, secretary and treasurer and at least one committee person. Branches exist when regional members wish to support such an arrangement.

The president is elected by all full members and does not have to be a divisional chairman but has to be a full member of the IFA. The CEO of the IFA is appointed by the board and does not have to be a forester. The CEO acts as the administrator, secretary and treasurer of the IFA, with statutory responsibilities as required for institutes of this nature.

Suggested amendments to current arrangements

Several amendments to the current arrangements would add to the efficiency with which responses considered to be required could be provided. These new arrangements would include a set of formal committees called subject committees, more detail of which is given below.

Appointment of a patron

A patron is desirable whose experience would have embraced forestry matters and who would be a personality well-known in the community.

Supporting deputy president

The president needs to have a deputy who would also be a board member and who would be a point of referral for the office and members to interpret the president's views when that person is unavailable, and who, when necessary, would represent the president at functions. The person would liaise with the CEO on activities of subject committees.

Supporting staff for CEO

An additional member of staff is required for larger IFA inputs (at the moment there is only one support position). A second person is required to ensure dissemination of pro-active IFA views, and prompt responses to policy and PR issues. That person should preferably be a professional forester who could be appointed for a fixed term on a rotation basis from different divisions.

Membership

An annual membership drive at the time of World Forestry Day, combined with year-round encouragement from divisional and branch committees should lift member numbers. There is also a need to examine and enhance the relationship of the ACFA and the category of Registered Professional Forester. As well, practitioners in forested national parks should be encouraged to join those working in the many other facets of forestry.

Meetings

Each divisional committee should meet four times a year in person and have a chairperson, secretary and treasurer and at least two committee members.

The IFA CEO would be responsible for the overall good operation of subject committees.

Publications

The Forester magazine should have a page regularly listing all IFA office bearers, that is board members, divisional, branch and subject committee members, with a very brief resume of each person and their emails and telephone access. Dates of meetings would be listed and summaries would appear in *The Forester*.

After the divisional AGMs occur a report of activities should appear in *The Forester*.

The excellent weekly newsletter would continue. Reports on committee decisions, with a brief explanation, should also appear in *The Forester*.

Reports arising from the wide range of work undertaken by foresters and their immediate colleagues should be made available to national and international audiences through the Institute's journal *Australian Forestry*.

Records

Each member should submit, when they join the IFA, a resume and a photo that then become an archive updated annually with career movements when paying annual fees. This would ensure members skills and experience are easily identified.

Subject committees

Each second year at the time of the biennial conference the board would nominate and declare subject committees, consisting of three persons, to deal with the following matters and to respond to queries by the CEO and the board. Where possible committees should use Fellows of IFA on the basis of their experience, level of interest and time available.

PR subject committee responsibilities

The IFA needs to respond promptly to matters of public interest, and to continually provide professional PR responses. The presentation of forestry information needs to be a top priority. As well there need to be at least three functions a year presented by the IFA in each state, attracting politicians and the media, and the involvement of associated organisations committed to multiple land use forestry,.

The activities in each state should include the celebration of World Forestry Day, a state award for forester of the year and parliamentary dinners, both Federal and state. Compilation and presentation of information of interest for potential foresters is also necessary.

Such activities would lift the profile of foresters and would inform policy-makers about forestry. It would ensure both the divisions and branches have a clear role in educating the public. One approach to the cost of PR would be for all forestry organisations to meet the costs of a person trained in PR and all contribute to the cost.

Policy subject committee responsibilities

Nearly twenty IFA policy statements have been approved by the IFA Board—possibly most members have not read all these, but they should. The statements are most useful; the number needs expanding and they should be used much more in the political and public arena. The statements are about:

- Wood for bioenergy (2002)
- Woodchips from Australia's forests (2002)
- Environmental services from forests and their valuation (2003)
- Use of chemicals in plantation forestry (2003)
- Clearing native forests for plantations (2003)
- Old-growth forests (draft) (2004)
- Conservation and management of rain forests (2005, revised 2010)
- Forest management planning (2005)
- Forest genetic resources (2007)
- Genetically modified organisms in forestry (2007)
- Maintaining forest health (2009)
- Future directions for Australian national forest policy (2009)
- Conservation of remnant native woodlands (2010)
- The role of forestry as a primary industry (2010)
- Environmental credentials of timber as a building material (2011)
- Social values in forest management (2011)

Fire subject committee responsibilities

All aspects of fire, including preparing reports for public enquiries

Awards subject committee responsibilities

Awards and representation for external awards including the Order of Australia should be handled. This could include scholarships.

Education subject committee responsibilities

Forestry education committee would be responsible for encouraging policy for education in Australia and maintaining standards and suitable syllabuses for training foresters. Some travel would be required to discuss courses at teaching institutions once policies have been established.

Ethics subject committee responsibilities

A code of ethics should be handled and is necessary for a variety of purposes, including RPF concerns with employment dealing with product disclosure statements and responsibilities.

Publications subject committee responsibilities

Responsible for the journal and where necessary support the CEO concerning *The Forester* and other publications. The IFA should particularly foster reprints and on-line publication of textbooks on forestry and forest products.

Finance subject committee responsibilities

Assist in expanding the cash flow to the IFA and encourage the further development of the scholarship fund. To undertake an expanded role there would be a requirement for an increase in fees and or other support. At the moment annual subscriptions are below those of similar organisations.

Conclusions

The IFA needs to position itself to be recognised for a strong role for the education of foresters, for setting of standards of education and for the profession of forestry.

The Institute's most important activity must be to provide the majority of the population with correct information about forest management in Australia. This will require a person with forestry training to deal with forest policy and dissemination of information about it.

The third need is the further development of the IFA *Forester* to include an annual supplement for limited distribution to schools and to the public. This would require industry financial support.

An appointment of a patron would make sense. A sympathetic high-profile person would add to the public's view that forestry is important and encourage participation in at the least World Forestry Day.

A deputy president would reduce the work load of the president, and the effectiveness of subject committees would be enhanced.

A review of finance to deal with a larger activity would be necessary.

The involvement of Fellows to be subject committee members, where suitable, makes sense.

The first subject committees to be appointed should be one on education to encourage more students, and one on PR.

The increased influence on forest matters would produce beneficial advantages to the nation, the forestry and forest products industry, and to the community in general. This anonymous quote might spur many more members to assist in the cause of forestry:

Those who turn up usually win!

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Notes

This paper draws on detailed knowledge obtained by the author from participation (1952–2012) in many committees (see footnote on first page) and personal conversations with senior forestry, forest industry and university leaders covering the issues described. The author believes he has reported events correctly but apologises if he has recalled any events incorrectly, or shown bias, because of the march of time.