

indigenous logging operations, including permanent roads and bridges, are not charged against revenue from timber sales, but, like exotic plantation costs, are added to the production forestry deficit.

The department's accounts do not disclose how much of this expenditure could be justified by normal investment criteria, and how much is best viewed as regional aid, administered through the timber industry by a department which has traditionally played a fairy godmother role to the West Coast's timber towns.

Could this large amount of money be put to better use from regional and national points of view? The Forest Service management plan is certainly not the only way — nor, it may be, the most economic way — to provide employment opportunities on the West Coast.

The Government's Indigenous Forest Policy requires the department to demonstrate that no suitable land is available for planting in the region before native forest is clear-felled to make way for exotic plantations. The policy has not been complied with in the Buller.

Conservation organisations have identified almost 26 000 ha of non-forested land suitable for exotic forestry in the Buller region, and only a small proportion of this would be needed to meet the Forest Service planting target. But these lands have been disregarded in favour of the extraordinary choice of remote road-end sites for exotic afforestation deep in the north Buller native forests.

This choice may be largely explained by the desire of Forest Service officials to secure funds for permanent maintenance of the long lengths of arterial logging roads which give access for on-

ward felling of rimu timber in the region.

The wastage of beech

In the Buller indigenous forests the major resource is beech, which has good qualities as a decorative and furniture timber, but is not wanted by Buller sawmillers. Rimu is their traditional fodder, as it is simple to saw and season and can be easily sold as rough-sawn unprocessed lumber.

Present milling practice, which has been tolerated for years by the Forest Service, means a destructive and wasteful exploitation of mixed beech-podocarp forest to extract only rimu. The associated beech trees are destroyed or mortally damaged by the logging process. The rimu logs taken are wastefully sawn and then sold with little or no processing.

The Buller's accessible beech-podocarp forest would be logged out in about 30 years under the strategy favoured by the timber industry and endorsed in the Forest Service management plan. At the end of that time, the sawmills would change to using the exotics now being planted.

Under the alternative strategy proposed by conservation organisations larger reserves would be set aside and the rest of production forests would be conserved for use on a sustained-yield basis in perpetuity. The volume of timber produced would be small and it would be processed for specialist uses such as furniture.

The potential value to the Buller of a small-scale, sustainable style of forestry is illustrated by a Karamea wood turner and furniture maker, Mr Mark Christensen. Sawn timber leaving the Karamea mills for \$250 per cubic metre is converted in Mr Christensen's workshop into beautiful fin-

ished products whose average value is \$4,000 per cubic metre of wood used. The workshop is an eye-opener for people in the Buller because:

- It adds considerable value to what has traditionally been a cheap resource — native wood.
- The benefits are retained in the Buller.
- The workshop uses beech — normally thrown away.
- It wastes very little.
- It depends on a small, sustainable supply of wood.

Conclusion

The Forest Service's draft management plan is open to question regarding its inadequate reserves, its endorsement of a short-term exploitative approach to the indigenous forests, and its proposals for exotic plantations.

The draft plan justifies its adverse impact on the natural environment by appealing to socio-economic considerations. But the Buller region has a wide range of economic growth opportunities, particularly in the agriculture and horticulture sectors, and these appear to represent a better investment nationally than the proposals in the Forest Service plan.

A conservation-oriented development package for the Buller is now being developed with three main elements:

- Establishment of a national park and reserves.
- Conservation of indigenous production forest for use on a sustained-yield basis in future.
- Government investment in an agricultural and horticultural development programme to build on the Buller region's real economic strengths.

Photos by Guy Salmon. ■