

pany on the West Coast – already wants to send to Japan the entire sustained yield cut of rimu.

Renewed pressures

It is distressing to see these renewed pressures for podocarp logging. Faithful to their 1984 manifesto, the Labour Government had virtually put all North Island podocarp under protection. In 1978 Maruia director Guy Salmon and I stumped the trail together with the arguments against “sustained yield” for podocarps. In the book *To Save a Forest: Whirinaki* (1984) they are carefully set out.

I still believe these arguments, and that they apply – if with less dramatic force – to beech. Guy – if I understand him aright – is telling us we conservationists must not fall too completely for our own propaganda. I don't say this is disingenuous; I'd hold it to be an honest difference by a conservationist entitled from his proud record to high respect. Never a philosophical hard-liner (in the 1979s such ultimate positions didn't arise), Guy Salmon – as I see it – earnestly believes it possible to make accommodation today, with Government and industry, by allowing them to take some reduced amounts of timber, especially beech and perhaps – if they'd accept it – tawa. He would no doubt point to some improved attitudes we've seen from industry in the Tasman Forestry Accord that saved some 40,000 ha mainly in the North Island. Where I'd part company is in wanting – at this stage of the argument – still be to an advocate, rather than joining with Government in patching up solutions time may show to be insufficient. Thus, I take it hard today to be told that – after the 1986 West Coast Accord – the conservation movement is now precluded in good faith from a total opposition to the logging or export of beech.

One argument Maruia would advance, and that it is entitled to weigh, is that export bans will deprive Maori owners of the 'tino rangatiratanga' or true right of chieftainship over their own forests. This wasn't the view Guy or I took when the fine rimu of Waitutu were under threat of logging. But I was also in 1982 one of those willing for the Waitutu owners to have cutting royalties from state-owned Southland beech. It seemed then the best that could be done to achieve the greater good. In view of the later withdrawal by the would-be loggers Feltex, it was a concession that arguably was not necessary.

But it does remind us today of the big question still remaining: the need so to arrange our economy and employment openings that the cost of conservation doesn't fall disproportionately upon an already disadvantaged class. I am thinking here much more about employment than lucrative investment or exploitation gains.

Today Government is considering a land-exchange policy whereby land of high conservation value in Maori hands could be swapped for other holdings. Rather than exchange (with the inference that Maori owners cannot be trusted to look after a forest heritage), I'd want to return to my old suggestion of 'augmentation'. In this way, existing Maori land would be added to, where possible in the near vicinity, with areas that could be farmed for production. A few years ago, this might easily have been done from our public store of lands held by the-then

Lands and Survey Department. It would have made some historic reparation for land loss, as well as good conservation and economic sense. With that old Department's demise, and Landcorp's holdings likely to be sold off privately, such a creative opportunity may have gone for the foreseeable future.

Across the board, and keeping local economic justice in mind, I'd find it hard to accept exemption of one of the races of Aotearoa from the obligation to safeguard our forest heritage. To be mindful of the 'forests of the Treaty' would seem to require that they go on standing. Nor do I hear much Maori dissent from this. When the great waka were carved for the celebrations of 1990, it was not by raiding the few hundred giant totara left standing, but by using the forest's latest bounty in the shape of fallen trees.



Beech chipping: “not much to gaze and wonder at.” Photo: Dean Schneider

Vaunted Right

As a nationwide policy, I'd also view with distrust proposals for a fund to compensate owners prevented from logging. It would be full of pitfalls to enshrine a right of compensation wherever ecological constraints made it necessary to leave a piece of pristine environment unexploited. The economy could not afford, nor would taxpayers agree to go on buying off every assertion of the vaunted right to “do what I like with my own land”.

This is a right – if it ever truly existed – that public policy and planning has much eroded. When the owners were prevented from draining the Whangamarino wetlands, Cooke P – in the judgement of the Court of Appeal – held that they had lost not a compensable ‘right’ but a ‘privilege’, to which the ownership did not indefeasibly entitle them. In planning lawyer's terms, New Zealand has never extracted payment of ‘betterment’ from

those whose property values public action has improved; nor is it time today to pay ‘worsenment’ wherever conservation may have reduced the exploitative yield. Perhaps every title to land will one day be held subject to such a “green equity”.

Our real danger today is that acceptance of indigenous cutting anywhere – as it need not be – will make the conservation principle everywhere so much harder to apply. To bring ourselves back to beech forests, the real question is not *could* sustained yield management be done, nor even the more realistic *would* it, but *should* beech be logged at all?

Even if they have never caught the northern conscience like podocarps, *Nothofagus* forests are superb. We share them today only with Chile. With parkland vistas, open floor, and fine horizontal branching tiers, they are a ‘classic’ forest; in such contrast with the high Gothic drama of podocarps. They are Hadyn, not Wagner. Or to change the simile, the light reflects in high points from a million small leaves as in a Seurat painting.

Let us be thankful we do have a little more beech forest left than podocarps. But we don't have enough to start realising the cash value in pulp and chips. That way, beech would in its turn be reduced to a few remnants and reserves.

Remember, if beech forests could regenerate, they would not be adult for long before a new logging round started. A steady trade, in and out, could leave not much to gaze and wonder at, in the shop window. I want to see these forests in my lifetime, not trade them for an adolescent production line.

Never safe

Even if this would not happen to all beech, while politicians have caught this virus about the continued exploiting of indigenous species, our whole forest heritage can never be regarded as safe for our time.

Over beech, it is now being argued that conservationists should keep faith with the 1986 West Coast Accord. With the late Charles Fleming I at first opposed the Accord for its allowance of beech cutting. I was then persuaded this could put at risk the shaky adherence of the West Coast United Council to the Accord, or the Government's delivery of the concessions hanging on it. So – as an Executive Member of Forest and Bird (who supported the Accord) – I came into line. In retrospect I had lost credibility with both sides. And I believe today that the Accord was unwise, in making compacts or final settlements that would seal us off from future freedom of advocacy.

Should beech logging be done, then? I believe profoundly NO. And can we not, as people of conscience, see why? When, as children, we used to persist “Why can't we?”, for some breach of old or decent behaviour, my father would answer, shortly but quite sufficiently, “Some things simply aren't done”.

Postscript

Since Professor Morton wrote the above article, we have seen a change of government and a renewal of beech chipping in Southland for a further 12 years.