

"Clearcutting mimics natural forest processes", according to logging companies. It would be difficult to find any natural coastal forest in British Columbia that renews itself in quite the same way as a human-induced clearcut. Photo: Adrian Dorst.

So what do conservation groups want for B.C.'s forests, I ask.


"Adding more value to what we cut, choosing to be more than simple hewers of wood, holds the key to creating meaningful jobs. And by cutting fewer trees, we open the way to retaining natural expanses of forests for the benefit of all," answers Foy.

Instead of retaining the great forests, the response of the B.C. Parks and Forest Ministries has been to give conservationists rocks and ice. About 5.5 percent of the province is fully protected in parks, and another 1 percent is protected in recreation or wilderness areas, where roads, mining and in some cases logging are permissible. Few of these protected areas include lowland forest.

Foy's message to Fletcher Challenge is that they should translate their excellent environmental record from New Zealand into the way in which they manage old growth forests in Canada.

"From what we hear Fletcher Challenge is

a responsive company in New Zealand. I hope they'll come to their senses in Canada before it's too late. British Columbia is my home. I have children and I want to know that we will have ancient forests forever. Can the people who run Fletchers understand that?" he asks.

In the 1990s that will be the test of Fletchers' commitment to the environment - not whether they are upgrading their pulp mills (which they are) or whether they are replanting the areas they are clearfelling (which they also are). The more difficult question the company has to answer is whether they are prepared to leave some of the centuries old forests - which they have every legal right to cut - alone. That test of Fletchers' commitment to the environment is something that not only Canadians and New Zealanders have a stake in; what happens to ancient forests today is of vital interest and concern to the global community. 

Response from Ian Donald, President and Chief Executive Officer, Fletcher Challenge Canada:

FLETCHER CHALLENGE is a decentralised organisation. Our Canadian company of course shares the Group's values and commitment to environmental sensitivity in all operations. But decisions regarding British Columbia forest management issues are made in B.C. by managers who have full knowledge of the relevant facts and concerns. It would be unwise for New Zealand to interfere in Canadian political and environmental affairs.

It serves the purpose of the extreme elements of the environmental movement - some of whom are quoted in Mr Hutching's article - to present a misleading, inaccurate and unfair view of Fletcher Challenge Canada's forest management philosophy and practices.

Fletcher Challenge Canada is in fact an organisation of over 9,000 people, most of whom live quite close to the forest - in communities that depend largely on the forest for their livelihoods. All of us have a very real concern for and stake in the long-term sustainability and intelligent management of British Columbia's forest resources.

Far from being a "cut and run" enterprise, our company is investing immense amounts of capital and effort to consolidate the ongoing strength and stability of our activities in B.C. and the communities they support. For example, we have spent or committed more than C\$2 billion to capital projects since 1983 - with some C\$450 million dedicated exclusively to environmental projects.

There is no doubt that - when judged in the light of society's new environmental awareness - many forest management

practices of the past can be justly criticised. Certainly, examples of poor forestry can be found in many parts of B.C. However, the industry has been learning and changing and forest management practices are continually evolving and improving.

Mr Hutching's article would lead one to believe that the industry operates virtually unfettered by environmental rules or standards. In fact, because 95 percent of the land in B.C. is publicly owned, the provincial government controls - and strictly regulates - the way the forest resource is managed and harvested.

Before one tree is cut, our plans must be approved by a host of government agencies, including the provincial Environment Ministry's Fish and Wildlife Branch, the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans and finally the B.C. Ministry of Forests. These agencies will withhold approval until they are satisfied our plans provide proper protection for the non-timber values in the forest, including fish and wildlife as well as unique ecological and recreational features.

The law also requires that we make our plans available for review and comment by the public. For example, in a number of operating areas we have established local advisory groups through which various community interests - such as municipal councils, Native bands, unions and environmental organisations - have an opportunity to provide input at an early stage of planning. And our plans often are changed as a result of public consultation.

Our company is participating in the provincial government's Old Growth Strategy Project to find appropriate levels

and methods of preservation. It is important to understand that of the 95 million hectares of land in B.C., approximately six million hectares have already been set aside for parks and ecological reserves (more than in any other Canadian province). More than one-third of the preserved area is old growth forest - or 1½ acres of old growth for every man woman and child in B.C. As well, over 50 percent of the publicly owned land base is *de facto* wilderness - unsuitable for development.

Only 26 million hectares (30 percent) is considered to be the "working forest" - suitable for timber harvesting - and less than one percent of this area is harvested each year. This harvest is vital to B.C.'s economy. In 1990, the forest industry provided employment for 17 per cent of the province's labour force and contributed \$2.6 billion in taxes to all levels of government - supporting a wide range of services such as education and health care. Obviously, these benefits must be considered in any decision to remove additional old growth from the potential harvest.

The future of British Columbia and its residents will clearly be affected by the quality of solutions developed for the complex and often highly emotional issues surrounding forest resource management. Numerous task forces, committees and community groups are working hard to find the appropriate balance between a sound forest economy and the environment. Fletcher Challenge Canada, as a leader in the B.C. forest industry, is participating fully in this co-operative process.