



Obituary - Ian Barton B Sc, M.Phil, JP, FNZIF

11 September 1937 – 7 February 2025

'Kua hinga te tōtara o Te Waonui a Tāne.' (The tōtara in the great forest of Tāne has fallen.)

A few days ago, the foundation Chairman of our Trust, Ian Barton, passed away.

Ian was a forester, botanist and ecologist - and outside of work, also an active historian and archivist and sometimes several of these at the same time – and while not exactly a multi-tasker, he often had several projects underway at any one time.

For those of us who worked with him regularly, he was marked by an approachable and open attitude. But alongside this his commitment to his work and his interests were notable for being focused and steadfast - once he embarked on a job or a mission he seldom gave up until he achieved his objective, and he did the job well. He also had a spirit of collegiality, frequently involving others in the project, and so widening the spread of interest and support in the task at hand.

Ian's forestry career commenced with the NZ Forest Service when he was accepted as a trainee in 1956 and attended Auckland University. His first summer vacation was a posting to the Forest Service's Waipoua Forest working amongst some of the country's most iconic kauri trees, and like most young foresters working in that area he soon fell under their spell – the start of a career which always had a focus on native forests and particularly kauri.

In 1961 Ian, now married, was invited to apply for a position



with Auckland City Council and a little later was appointed the Council's Chief Forester with responsibility for the large native forests of the Hunua Ranges and a new plantation establishment programme. Although much of the native forest had long since been cutover there were some excellent kauri remnants and second growth forest and this permitted Ian to develop his interest in native species. His trials with kauri were particularly notable and led to him completing a Masters' degree at Waikato University while keeping his other work going.

The little fiefdom of the Hunua forests gave Ian particular opportunity to experiment with a number of species and part of his heritage is a number of trials exploring different approaches to silviculture, species mixes to determine how one species reacted to the presence of another, thinning and growth plots and so on. His applied research-by-management approach provided many demonstrations of innovative options for establishing and managing native forest including the role of exotic species, which has become highly relevant in current research programmes.

Ian took some pride in his forestry involvement and became a member of the NZ Institute of Foresters in 1959 and progressed through the ranks in a timely manner, spending time on the local branch committee and then the national Council, finally becoming Vice-President.

He had a number of papers and other notes published in the New Zealand Journal of Forestry and he was also one of the first members to be appointed a Fellow of the Institute.

After retirement Ian developed a forestry consulting business and was also elected a Franklin District Council councillor. In this latter capacity he advocated for more focus on retaining worthwhile remnants of the natural environment – a move which resulted in the allocation of subdivision rights to landowners who were prepared to permanently protect worthwhile wetland and native forest areas. He also provided guidance and assessments to landowners wishing to take part in this programme and to date several hundred landowners have used these provisions to protect natural areas around the Auckland,

Franklin and North Waikato area and the contribution to the landscape and biodiversity is very significant. As part of his community commitment Ian was also appointed Justice of the Peace in 1994.

In the late 1990s, some concern was expressed that while NZ had an enviable record of plantation establishment and a burgeoning forest industry, our native forests were largely being ignored, and at some cost. It was ironic that a naturally forested country such as ours, and with a suite of trees with particularly useful wood properties, had not included any native species in its forestry portfolio. A group was elected to do something about it and part of the drive was, firstly, to set up Tāne's Tree Trust (TTT) with a vision of encouraging all landowners to consider planting native trees, and secondly to appoint Ian as Chair of TTT recognising that he would be willing to put the necessary effort into establishing an effective organisation and a worthwhile work programme. As they say, the rest is history – despite a heart valve operation and other setbacks Ian provided the necessary impetus and the Trust was soon recognised for its ability to undertake some key work, and as a champion of native forests. This recognition was not limited to forestry colleagues, but more widely in the community. Ian's part in all of this was substantial – not only did he help assemble a great team, he also continued to develop his own work. In 2008 he authored a book on the application of Continuous Cover Forestry to NZ forests and for more than a decade TTT was the only organisation fostering this approach more widely until today, when everyone, it seems, has become much keener on close to nature forestry. After 10 years at the helm Ian retired as Chairman, by which time TTT was very much an established organisation. He continued as a Trustee for several more years, regularly contributing to the work programme and publications for much of the remainder of his life.

Other letters, reports and books attest to Ian's interest in history - his interest overflowed into the partial restoration of the Pokeno Redoubt, a legacy of the Waikato Māori Wars, and most recently into an account of the Amakiwi Forest, a unique partnership between a group of US and NZ based investors in the Waikato region.

If I was to make one final comment it is to note that Ian was seldom bored, he always had a project underway and was tireless in his pursuit of completion although quality never suffered as a consequence. However it was his particular commitment to understanding, enhancing and protecting New Zealand's native forests that stands out and for which he will be most remembered.

- Peter Berg, 20th February 2025.



The Hart property looking over the lake



Walking through cattle on the Hart property



Redwoods within the Piwakawaka Loop track

In mid-November we joined members of the NZ Farm Forestry Association Indigenous Section on a field trip to Hawke's Bay.

Our trip included a walk around Te Mata Peak, with stunning (if soggy) views over central Hawke's Bay. We looked at the beautiful redwoods on the Piwakawaka Loop track.

A highlight of our field trip was a visit to Mangarara Farm, owned by Greg and Rachel Hart, to look at the large amount of native and exotic planting they have undertaken. A huge thank you to Greg and Rachel for hosting us.



The view from Te Mata Peak on a wet day

POISONING THE NATIVES

Perverse outcomes resulting from Part 3A of the Forests Act not accommodating a novel forest ecosystem

(A version of this article was first published in *Tree Grower*, February 2025)

John Wardle, a living legend in New Zealand's world of sustainable indigenous forestry, is poisoning the native trees regenerating within his pine forest. Why? Because they are invading his forest, and – in contrast to the pines – the law makes the natives worthless to him in this situation. This is particularly sad because he would prefer to be managing a mixed-species, mixed-aged forest in that area and he is sure that it could be done. Ironically, at the same time, elsewhere, farmers and foresters are being encouraged to plant or allow more natives to regenerate on their farms and within their pine forests.



John Wardle would like to manage a mix of exotic and native species within his continuous cover forest. However, the present regulations disincentivise this by making the natives worthless to him. Photo: Paul Quinlan

So, what is behind this odd situation? In short, it is a perverse outcome of well-intended, but inadequate legislation. In this case, primarily the Forests Act and its lack of provision for the productive management of *naturally regenerating* native trees outside of pure native forests. This oversight discourages the integration of regenerating native species within some production forests and farms. This article highlights the need to legitimise the harvest and use of native trees in non-native forest situations.

Mixed exotic/native species in continuous cover forestry with pines

John and Rosalie Wardle are well-known names in sustainable forest management. On their property, Woodside, near Oxford, they manage 70 ha of black beech forest according to a Sustainable Forest Management Plan (SFMP), as provided for under Part 3A of the Forests Act. However, they also apply a unique management approach to 27 ha of pine forest, that John calls target-diameter-harvesting (TDH). This is a form of continuous cover forestry (CCF), which reflects their preference to avoid clear-fell plantation forestry on this site.

In theory, this type of close-to-nature forestry should suit the development of a mixed-species, uneven-aged forest. And, in practice, that is exactly what John has observed. “Ten to fifteen percent of the *Pinus radiata* has really good beech regeneration underneath it.” Indeed, John believes that on the better soils and shadier gullies, TDH management would see the native regeneration eventually replace the pines. A mosaic-like pattern of mixed native-exotic species would naturally occur.

Originally, John was happy to allow the natives to come in. He is confident that black beech trees regenerating in this situation can be pruned and managed to produce harvestable trunks of 45 cm DBH in about 45 years. Indeed, he has such trees in the forest. However, if they sustain any bark damage while selectively harvesting the pines, they will be ruined by rot. So, it would make sense to be able to harvest them then too. Clearly, this could be an excellent example of mixed-species, close-to-nature forestry, starting with *Pinus radiata*. However, frustratingly, this outcome is precluded by a regulatory Catch-22 situation. Part 3A of the Forests Act applies – but it cannot be practically applied.

What is the issue with the Forests Act?

There are two main provisions in Part 3A of the Forests Act that enable the legal [harvest and] milling of native timber on private land. These are known as Sustainable Forest Management Permits & Plans (SFMPs). These attempt to limit harvest yields to a



John and Rosalie Wardle manage a pine forest under a continuous cover forestry regime. The native black beech invades into this exotic forest and could also be pruned up and sustainably managed for timber. However, the natives can't be legally milled under the Forests Act in this situation. Photo: Ben Tyas

sustainable rate and require management to ensure maintenance of the forest's natural values in perpetuity and to protect the forest from fire and threats etc. SFMPs have proven to be applicable to many remnant native forest areas, but difficulties are experienced when trying to apply them to native trees and forest in other forms (e.g.,

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immature regenerating forests, highly modified forests, and naturally regenerating trees within exotic vegetation such as plantation forests and pasture). Unless the areas can be defined as *indigenous* forest and discreetly mapped as such, the SFMP provisions cannot be applied.

The Act defines indigenous forest as “*land wholly or predominantly under the cover of indigenous [native] flora*”. This means a SFMP can be applied to the Wardle’s 70 ha of black beech forest to legally allow sustainable harvesting from it, but not to the same species regenerating within their commercial CCF pine forest. This disincentivises allowing black beech or other natives to establish within that forest area and from being sustainably managed.

Similar situations occur with naturally regenerating tōtara in Northland. There, tōtara are also colonising pine forests and pasture areas. Yet these are not legitimate ‘indigenous forest areas’ for SFMP provisions of the Forests Act. This reinforces the perception that regenerating natives are unproductive elements within any primary production system. Furthermore, fear that such native regeneration may be mapped as a Significant Natural Area (SNA) in District Plans, encourages landowners to clear or destroy it to protect their future land-use options. This is a rational action, but a perverse result similar to John spraying out his native regeneration.

Paradoxically, if those same *naturally regenerating* natives were instead, *planted*, then they could be certified as “Planted Indigenous Forest” and exempt from the sustainable management requirements of the Act. Milling statements could also be issued allowing the timber to be legally milled and sold. In some situations, differentiating between planted and naturally regenerated natives becomes absurd. Likewise, if the pine forest had been planted after 1989, and entered into the permanent forest category of the NZ Emissions Trading scheme, then harvesting and milling the naturally regenerated black beech could be legally possible. Nature just doesn’t seem to understand the rules.

Weaving native forest into our working lands

Landowners and managers are increasingly being encouraged to integrate more native plants into their local landscapes. The reasons for this include the multiple potential benefits and associated values such as indigenous biodiversity enhancement, soil and water conservation, carbon sequestration, cultural landscape values, environmental resilience, and timber and non-timber products. However, the ‘weaving in’ of natives will need to occur at a large scale to have significant impact. Fortunately, there is scope to integrate native species across the landscape in various roles and forms beyond conservation forests and existing stands of regenerating native forest. Indeed, those indigenous biodiversity ‘islands’ of existing native forests could be complemented by increasing the indigenous component of commercial exotic forests, particularly carbon-forests, and CCF forestry, but also out into non-forest situations such as small

woodlots, buffers, shelterbelts and even trees on pasture.

However, a key point to make here is that while the *planting* of natives will have an important role to play in this, planting is very costly. In contrast, *natural regeneration* is cheap.

Encouraging natural regeneration will be the critical

complement needed for large-scale establishment and maintenance of native vegetation.

Encouraging natives within the messy landscapes of the Anthropocene

Regenerating native trees and forests already exist in a diverse range of forms. This includes hybrid exotic/native ecosystems, and novel constellations within production systems – such as the beech colonising the Wardle’s commercial exotic CCF forest. This will increasingly be true of the future. There is a need to accept this reality and recognise the value of integrating native species across this range to support indigenous biodiversity conservation. At present the Forests Act does not.

As we enter what some people are calling the Anthropocene, legitimising the productive use of naturally regenerating natives within these ‘messy’ and evolving landscapes will become more important.

Conclusion

This article has highlighted a perverse outcome resulting from a lack of legal provision to accommodate the use of native species within a mixed exotic/native forest situation. In this case, the Wardle’s still have a wonderful example of transitioning a radiata pine plantation to a continuous cover forestry regime using a target-diameter-harvesting approach. However, if it weren’t for the law, it could have also been something even more. The forest could include native species in the mix.

This story has only raised one of many legal issues disincentivising indigenous forestry. Further articles will outline others. Collectively, they will build the case for a comprehensive review of the regulations in relation to the harvesting of indigenous trees and forests.

- Paul Quinlan



In Northland, tōtara naturally regenerate in paddocks on previously cleared land. Such trees could be pruned up for valuable timber, but the Forests Act does not provide for native trees sporadically regenerating outside of native forest areas. This encourages landowners to clear them. Photo: Paul Quinlan