

## EDITORIAL COMMENT

*The editorial comment does not necessarily represent the opinion of the New Zealand Ecological Society as a whole.*

### A NEW FEATURE

Journals evolve and the "Proceedings" is no exception. Each Editor brings a different approach to the task (and no one who has had editing experience will be under the illusion that it is not a task!) and changes are introduced. A new feature in this issue is the appearance of an editorial. It is expected that the content of the editorial will cover matters which the Editor feels should be brought to the attention of the members. These may include, for example, internal policy matters and ecological items, either general or specific, of which members of the Society and the wider audience who may read the "Proceedings" should be informed. It is not proposed (by this Editor anyway) that the feature be wholly written by the Editor. Persons with specialised knowledge and demonstrated interest will be invited to contribute. The end result, it is hoped, will be a feature that readers will want to examine and will consequently be better informed.

It is always helpful to receive feedback (even negative, though the ego may suffer somewhat). Do you want an Editorial or is it a waste of space? Do you want it in the form in which it appears or would a changed format be more useful and sought after? Comment is solicited.

### "PROCEEDINGS" COSTS

The income of the Ecological Society is used in a variety of ways as examination of the Treasurer's report, circulated at the Annual General Meeting, will show. However, by far the bulk of the income of the Society is used in meeting the cost of producing the "Proceedings". (Of the income for the financial year 75/76, 86% was devoted thus.) This means that the subscription rates are necessarily closely related to "Proceedings" costs and any change in printing charges (and these are presently rapidly escalating) must be reflected in a change of subscription rate. It appears, however, that the subscription rate is close to, or at, the point when resignations because of cost will offset any increased revenue from the new subscription rate.

The "Proceedings" has a print run of 600 copies

which is only just adequate to supply a copy to each member and to the various libraries, abstracting journals and like organisations who subscribe. On a costing based on the production of Volume 23 (1976) this results in a cost of \$26 per page, which, compared to the costs of some other scientific journals published in New Zealand, is highly competitive. Probably the major reason why this is so, is that the editorial input is unpaid (a situation that may not always prevail).

A change of paper quality would not result in any significant saving and it appears that a very substantial number would need to be printed before economy of scale became effective; certainly many more than the existing demand. A completely changed format (e.g. letterpress) could reduce the cost significantly but this would result in a journal that would be considerably less attractive; such an economy may be counter-productive.

The Council of the Society is very conscious of the problems outlined and it is clear that easy solutions do not exist. The "Proceedings", at least in its present form, is at a crossroads.

### COMMUNICATION

There is currently widespread disillusionment with science and technology. We are bombarded daily via a variety of media with expressions of concern about over-use of resources and environmental deterioration. There is a deep mistrust of science (and scientists) and this schism grows steadily wider. A result of the concern and mistrust is a strong doubt in the ability of science, in its various guises, to provide solutions for all the ills that apparently beset us.

This disillusionment appears to stem from a failure in communication between scientists and society, together with an irrelevance of scientific activity in meeting, or even identifying the needs of society. Communication is the name of the game and it appears to be an activity in which many scientists have only poorly developed skills. The scientific paper is regarded as the final act in an investigation. It would appear, however, that a paper is read in many cases only by scientists; this may result in good communication between scientists but it certainly does not improve the communication gap between science and society.

How then, can this parlous situation be changed? Each scientific investigator must clearly identify the

questions the project is designed to answer (not always an easy task) and, once equipped with the answers, ensure that these are communicated to the users. Each scientist has an individual responsibility to do this and if the user cannot (or will not) read the scientific paper then other forms of communication must be employed. While each scientist has this clear responsibility the scientific administrator also has a responsibility. The bogey that promotion depends on scientific publication only should be laid to rest and a structure that employs persons skilled in all forms of communication must be established. An extension and liaison group should be regarded as an essential part of any research institution, and not merely consist of a person to answer those irritating pieces of mail from persons with the temerity to actually ask for information. Some scientists will have to become part of an extension group and those who do should not be regarded as second-class citizens in the scientific pecking order.

Until the scientific community recognizes the credibility gap between science and society, and makes a serious effort to correct it, many of society's ills will go untreated.

#### THE CHANGING STATUS OF INTRODUCED MAMMALS IN NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand has long been a classic example of the problems that arise when alien animals are introduced to pristine environments. Of these animals the mammals in particular, dominate any discussion of the country's terrestrial ecosystems and have provided both the stimulus and the raw material for much of the ecological research.

Most of our mammals were introduced deliberately, often with much cossetting from Acclimatisation Societies, sportsmen, or farmers. Gradually opinion changed until, today, virtually any terrestrial mammal in the country, if it is not stock or a pet, can be trapped, shot, poisoned, snared or otherwise killed under the provision of at least eight different Acts of Parliament (Hayes and Dingwall, 1976).

Not everyone is convinced of the wisdom of this all-embracing mandate to kill. A continuing and well-organised protest comes from sportsmen who see a national and international recreational resource diminishing year by year.

Other, more subtle, reservations have also been expressed by scientists. In 1968, R. H. Taylor demonstrated the need for more discrimination in managing island ecosystems that contained mammals and showed how well-intentioned "control" might do more harm than good. The present approach to island management, especially in the subantarctic,

suggests that this point has now been accepted.

More recently, it has been suggested that some of our mammal species have an intrinsic value. Several, such as sheep, goats, pigs, and cattle, are erstwhile domesticated stock, now running wild. There is growing international concern at the specialisation of farmed breeds, loss of genetic variation, and the complete extinction, as commercial fashions change, of previously important breeds. It seems that this country may therefore have a role in preserving some populations of these feral mammals where their existence does not threaten native flora and fauna, land stability, or the health of the national herds (Whitaker and Rudge, 1976).

New Zealand ecologists and wildlife managers (in the widest sense) have become accustomed to treating free living animals as pests in all places at all times; and present legislation reflects this view. Historically such pragmatism has been justified, indeed without it the degradation of bush, land form, and fauna would have been even worse than it is. But as we gain ascendancy over the worst of the problems we should take time to reflect on how to live with what mammals are left. Many mainland populations can never be exterminated anyway; and those on islands are the ones which most deserve reprieve because they are isolated and, in some cases, are already evolving distinctive traits. With sufficient discrimination, populations of "alien" mammals can be accepted as respectable albeit adventive, elements of "The New Zealand Fauna". This will of course require some effort from today's senior administrators who were yesterday's dedicated exterminators. Nevertheless there are recreational, aesthetic, ecological, and commonsense reasons why this effort is now worthwhile.

#### REFERENCES

- HAYES, J. B.; DINGWALL, P. R. 1976. The legislative and administrative situation regarding feral farm mammals in New Zealand. (In Whitaker and Rudge.)  
 TAYLOR, R. H. 1968. Introduced mammals and islands: priorities for conservation and research. *Proceedings of the New Zealand Ecological Society* 15: 61-67.  
 WHITAKER, A. H.; RUDGE, M. R. 1976. The value of feral farm mammals in New Zealand. Department of Lands and Survey Information Series 1: 1-84.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORTS

Impact reporting was begun in 1973 and since then the system has been under review on several occasions; the most recent review is currently in progress. The Society has made the following points in its submission.

1. The public is very much more informed and aware than when impact reporting began, and has demonstrated that it is willing and able to participate in the open appraisals that Environmental Impact Reports (E.I.R.s) offer. This, the Society feels, is a healthy trend.

2. It is felt that the 28 days allowed for appraising some of the more complex reports is far too short. The criticism levelled by some developers and local authorities is that E.I.R.s hold up vital projects. Even if this is true it is surely a poor long-term plan that cannot withstand the delay of a few months. Good planning, with built-in environmental safeguards, must in the long-run be cheaper and better for the community than hasty development that later needs

extensive remedial work.

3. The task of auditing E.I.R.s is often beyond the financial resources of groups which are otherwise well equipped in skill and local knowledge to do it. A case exists, the Society believes, for consideration of Government financial aid to be made available so that the community can undertake environmental advocacy through its action groups. Such policies are already operated in Australia, Sweden and the U.S.A.

The important tasks of planning for minimal environmental damage cannot be left to private parties or even Government Departments. At some stage developmental programmes impinge upon the general public and it is important to allow the public access to such plans at an early and uncommitted stage.