

2/2006

Weak signals analysed

Latest foresight reports

Other current news

Future of the forest sector in the spotlight

A need to move to processing products of high quality, and the competition of wood between different forms of consumption in particular when the use of wood as a source of energy is increasing, were emphasised in a survey on changing factors conducted by the Future Forum on Forests. In the recent foresight reports new means to use forests and the developing of present products of the forest industry come up as an essential issue on the forest-based well-being.

Weak signals analysed

Changing factors affecting the forest sector were surveyed by the Future Forum on Forests in the spring 2006. The aim was to find the first indications of change (weak signals) in the forest sector and in the sources of livelihoods in forestry.

Most of the factors concerned forest industry and forestry. Much less factors of change were found in the other uses of forests such as those of tourism, energy and environmental services.

Plenty of observations and analogies were also found outside Finland. In China, for example, forests are preferred to be treated by men thus basing the forest conservation in different values than in Finland. Another example was found in the state of Massachusetts, United States, where the amount of forests was increasing but it was concluded that the forest industry had moved elsewhere.

When the factors of change were assessed by significance and probability, the observations could be divided into different groups.

In strong signals, i.e. observations unanimously found significant, the increased use of wood in energy production and a need to move from bulk production into higher value added design products were clearly seen as significant factors.

The factors assessed as significant but at the same time also dividing opinions reflect issues that are becoming the themes of a general discussion. One of the most significant topics of the general discussion were the operators in the forest sector coming closer and pulling together to renew the forest sector. However, there was not much belief in the coming closer to occur in practice.

Weak signals are most likely to be found among those factors of which signi-

fiance was assessed low although opinions were divided strongly. The most peculiar observations are thus to be considered thoroughly. Although they were generally assessed as of least significance, some evaluated those to consist of a strong signal.

When interpreting the weak signals it is worth considering the phenomenon behind its appearance. If a weak signal proves to become a trend, which are the consequences to one's organisation? For example, what would become if a factor described as a weak signal, such as investing in forests without objectives in wood production was to increase?

In the analysis of strong and weak signals the viewpoint used should be defined strictly. Not all changes and phenomena of which the signals describe are significant to everyone. Discussions in groups and different interpretations may open new meanings even to a far-off phenomenon.

The implementation group of the Forum assessed the different groups of factors of change by topics. The group's views on the possibilities and the threats of the phenomena described as well as the data collected and the classification table are available at www.metsafoorumi.fi/hs (in Finnish).

In autumn 2006, there will be a survey made on the ideas of new methods to use forests, wood and products made of wood.

Latest foresight reports

In the beginning of June 2006 there were three significant foresight reports published. The Finnish Forest Industries Federation and The Finnish Paper Workers' Union study in their report the future challenges of paper industry, a group of researchers of the Finnish Forest Research Institute consider forest-based well-being

in the future in their report, and the Academy of Finland and the Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation (Tekes) view outlooks of Finnish science, technology and society.

In the report viewing the future challenges of the paper industry several actions are found to be needed to improve the competitiveness of this particular field. Know-how must be strengthened and it must be linked to the developing of business activities, the price of electricity must remain competitive, emission trade must not enable raw materials to be directly burnt, the rights of depreciation of enterprises must be maintained, growing stock must be increased, the conditions of the transportation network must be attended to, wood availability to the markets must be intensified, and the obstacles and distortions of world trade must be resolved. According to the report, developing new products beside the basic production may not be implemented until on a longer period of time.

The report of the Finnish Forest Research Institute is a minute description of views of development in the forest sector's operational environment. On a basis of the described view there has been prepared researchers' expert assessments of two foresight views on forestry. 'Developing present structures' has been based on the development of current actions by reacting on the changing circumstances. In the 'Active change' the developing is more proactive. Interpreting the present strong factors insufficient in the future would lead to a spontaneous structural change in forestry.

In the Finnish Forest Research Institute's report the policies with which one should be prepared for the future are being discussed. The role and responsibility of the enterprises are considered essen-

tial in preparing for the future. The report has several suggestions for developments in forestry, such as attending to wood supply and wood production, increasing the size of forest holdings, and the rationalisation of the structures and courses of action in private forestry.

According to the report, the future of forestry is based on forest industry's present products and the support received as well as on an intense development of new forms of utilising the forests. An analogous foresight strategy of two objectives was one of the most essential recommendations made in the first phase of the Future Forum on Forests (2003-2005).

According to the final report of the FinnSight 2015 project lead by the Academy of Finland and Tekes, know-how in the forest sector is seen as the strategic strength of Finland. Through the know-how new sources of livelihood may be developed in particular in the production of bioenergy, biofuels, biochemicals and biomaterials. The strong Finnish know-how in utilising great amounts of biomass allows for a good basis in applying new skills in biotechnology and enables Finland to be one of the world's leading developers of biorefineries based on forest industry.

Another potential field in which the forest sector may have new possibilities to develop are the printed functional products in which optics and electronics are combined in a fibre-based material. For example, hybrid media applications may be developed from bar codes into invisible codes, printed intelligent surfaces and onto screens printed on paper. In order to realise possibilities courage and freedom from prejudice are needed as well as innovative people and enterprises.

The annual increment nearly 100 million cubic metres

According to the tenth national forest inventory, the annual increment of the growing stock in Finland is approximately 97 million cubic metres. From the ninth national forest inventory the amount has increased for ten million cubic metres. The increase of the increment is mainly of pine and birch which is due to a rapid rate of growth of the young pine and birch stands as well as the general increase in the growth rate of pine in southern Finland.

Newsletter of the Future Forum on Forests

Publisher:
Future Forum on Forests
University of Joensuu
P.O. Box 111
FI-80101 Joensuu

Editor: Saija Miina
saija.miina@joensuu.fi

Future Forum on Forests on the Internet:
<http://www.metsafoorumi.fi>

The newsletter of the Future Forum on Forests aims to provide updated information on the activities and results of the forum. This informal newsletter is produced and distributed electronically and you can find it on the Internet on <http://www.metsafoorumi.fi/news.htm>. You can also order it to your email address by sending an email to saija.miina@joensuu.fi

