

Address to United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

New Zealand Side Event

Bonn, June 22, 2004

Tony Smale

I'm going to take a somewhat different perspective – that of the development practitioner. Underpinning the conventions and accords you are all so familiar with are many, many micro initiatives, each tailored to suit local circumstances. These are the practical end of climate change mitigation and I am going to tell you a little about the region of Marlborough in New Zealand.

Marlborough is but a speck in global terms – but we have taken an approach to development that has caught the attention of many people and agencies across New Zealand and well beyond.

We are a region of exceptional geographic, biological and economic diversity. Geographically and ecologically we range from subtropical to alpine, from flat river plains to rugged exposed coasts and cloud piercing mountains. Marlborough is located on the East Coast that is expected to become hotter and drier with climate change.

Our strategies from the outset acknowledged that New Zealand is very much part of the so called “global village”. As a trading region and nation we are acutely aware of our interconnection with the global market place and we feel the impacts of global climate change acutely. Our goal as a development agency is to maintain and enhance the quality of life for our residents. In doing that we have taken a fundamental position that environment, social interests and enterprise are not only closely related one to the other, but that we cannot, long term, have one without the other. Perhaps because of our small size, we were inspired by a quote from Charles Handy that went something like this –

“In the world at this moment there is a shortage of great people doing great things. It is therefore up to each of us to light our own small fire in the dark.”

We discovered a great willingness in our community to tackle the difficult issue of climate change – and this was driven not by rules and regulations but by the strong sense of environmental stewardship. New Zealand has a strong history of dedicating private land to conservation. Ron Marriott who you have seen on the video is a pioneer in the field of dedicating land to carbon sequestration – practically applying the principles of carbon sequestration and at the same time leading the thinking of people at home and abroad. Further, the wine and aquaculture industries both have sustainable management programmes in places and in the case of the mussel industry a comprehensive world first Environmental Code of Practice. These industries are now exploring carbon offset in addition to their energy management strategies.

To properly understand our thinking and our approach to climate change management it is necessary to understand a little about our landscape, economy and even a little of our history.

As an economy based on primary production we had to learn from the very beginning to grow, to process and to transport our goods, whether that was butter or wood, more efficiently and to a higher quality than our competitors. We became and remain very good at growing things – NZ is a fertile land.

Judy has mentioned that in 1986 – over night agricultural subsidies were ended. Totally! Not only that but user pays for Government services were introduced. Guy Salmon on the video and Judy have both referred to the marginal land that resulted. It is important to recognise that this land is marginal in terms of its farming economics, not its fertility and productivity.

Marlborough as a region has undergone dramatic land use change over the past three decades – driven very much by changing market demands. We have changed from a predominant pastoral farming regime to one where that traditional farming, plantation forestry, horticulture and wine growing all share or compete for the land resource and interact – some might say “collide” with our aquaculture and tourism.

And so now another land use that has both an economic basis and moral imperative is evolving. It is estimated that between 1 & 2 million Ha across New Zealand would now be more economically used for permanent forest carbon sinks. There are two things about NZ forests and the marginal land that are important to understand. We refer to our forests as “native bush”. In fact they are better described as jungle – they are virtually impenetrable uninterrupted biomass from soil to canopy. The second and most important aspect is that there are abundant natural seed sources. When we stop grazing the marginal land, native bush starts growing. With proper pest management – and there is only one pest of any significance – an imported marsupial – reforestation is very rapid . No land preparation or planting is required. There is no energy expenditure and therefore no carbon deficit created in the establishment of the forest. We think that is unique.

Of course we understand that carbon sinks are only an interim measure – but they are an interim measure that in our case at least will restore indigenous forests, increase biodiversity – and leave the land the better for our actions. Paralleling our efforts therefore to generate carbon offsets through the permanent forest sinks are a series of strategies, just kicking off, that are designed to achieve long term carbon emission reductions. As the first step we are currently developing tools to measure the region’s total carbon footprint. Our ultimate goal is to declare our entire region carbon neutral and that will require a combination of energy conservation and offsets.

I think it is important too to understand that in many instances – peoples’ actions are guided by what they intuitively sense is “the right thing to do”. I have a colleague who is a planted forest consultant. When I left he was working on a vineyard project. In developing the vineyard an area of what the locals describe as “gnawly old trees” – poor quality – low health trees had to be removed. Without any conscious connection with global climate change I suspect, the vineyard owners have contracted the forestry consultant to develop a compensating area of permanent forest. A number of our wineries are developing or restoring wetlands. The aquaculture industry already measures and seeks to manage its energy usage.

What particularly appeals to us as a development agency with a mission of improving quality of life is that in our own – perhaps not so small way – we are lighting our fires in the dark – we are changing the world.

Ron’s project represents a complete virtuous cycle. It is commercially viable. It is sequestering carbon. It allows industries locally and abroad to offset emissions – and it changes the way people think.

I would like to conclude therefore with a quote from an e-mail that Ron received from one of his quests – a North American Supreme Court judge who had retreated to Marlborough to contemplate a major constitutional issue

“We have just arrived in Christchurch and wanted to let you all know what a fantastic experience we had at your lodge. Thank you so much for the terrific tramping, delicious fare and warm hospitality. Above all, thank you for sharing with us your important vision of how to get this planet back on the rails and the wonderful product of that vision – your wilderness park. Our stay provided us with a fantastic chance to let go of our everyday lives and think without distraction about what life’s really

about (and maybe do something about it). In any event, I think we both feel that we are better people than when we arrived at your beautiful home.”

And that I think – changing the way people think about the world we all live in – is an even more important contribution to our global village than the carbon we can sequester in our permanent forests.