

Australian Forestry: The challenges of sustaining a strong regional journal

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Introduction

Australian Forestry is a peer-reviewed publication published by the Institute of Foresters of Australia that is important to both the forest industry and the forestry research community in Australia. In recent years the journal has struggled to remain viable in the face of a number of structural changes in the Australian forest industry and forestry research community, and increased tension between pressure on academic researchers to publish in journals with a high impact factor and the desire to communicate research results to an industry readership at tolerable cost. In 2014 the management of the journal was changed, including the establishment of a new editorial board to oversee a strategic review of the journal and provide strategic management into the future.

As part of this review an extensive survey was commissioned of members of the Institute of Foresters of Australia on their views of the journal. The survey was conducted to get a better profile of both the market within Australian foresters and the expectations of that market. Along with this survey the journal publishing report was reviewed for the previous 2 years. The review was intended to gain insight into the publication results but also see how the publication metrics aligned with the perceptions and expectations provided by the readership survey.

The Survey

With 170 respondents, the survey gave a good overview of the Australian foresters who are members of the Institute of Foresters of Australia, and this a key part of the journal readership. Just over 1/3 of the respondents identified themselves as contributors as well as readers and about 1/4 had acted as reviewers. Over 70% of the respondents identified themselves as a forester, government staff or industry consultant. Less than 8% identified as an academic, which seems low but is not inconsistent with the ratio of forestry academics to industry foresters in Australia. All segments of the industry were represented with the greatest proportion of the readership identifying themselves as working in commercial native forestry or plantations. The journal was thus reaching this component of the industry target market.

The journal publishes editorials, book reviews and peer-reviewed articles, all of which are read in similar amounts by the surveyed audience, though over 80% of respondents indicated that they read less than half of the content. *Australian Forestry* is available both in print and electronically, and the respondents indicate that about 1/3 access just the printed version, 1/3 only the electronic version and 1/3 use both. Over 70% rated the content, layout, writing and ease of reading very good or better, which indicates quality expectations are being met by the journal.

Looking forward, nearly half of the readers indicated they would access additional electronic material linked to the journal like videos or interviews, while a similar proportion indicated it would depend what the content was, and only 10% said they would not use such extra content.

The Publishing report

From 2013 to 2014, the number of full text downloads from *Australian Forestry* increased from 4200 to just over 5200, with just under half of those downloads occurring in Australia and the Asia Pacific. The top ten downloaded articles from issues 75 and 76 published in 2012 and 2013 were downloaded between 69 and 126 times. The top organisations accessing and downloading the journal content are government agencies and universities, even though the membership of the Institute of Foresters of Australia included much more industry practitioners. This may indicate the extent to which the journal is accessed by individuals who are not members of the Institute of Foresters of Australia.

Since these studies were done, the flow of manuscripts from international authors, especially in South America and China where Australian species are industrially significant, has increased. However, English is

not a first language in these regions, which typically generates a need for significant assistance from reviewers and editors.

Conclusion

Australian Forestry has a very diverse readership, many of who do not judge the quality of the journal by traditional academic metrics of citations and impact factor. While it important to the journal to perform well in these areas so it can continue to attract quality publications from the academic community, it must build that quality without compromising the value to industry readers seeking to access knowledge that can be readily applied in operations and policy. With increased interests by the research community in regard to achieving impact, research outputs that can track and quantify the impact of the journal in Australian industry and government provide an opportunity to give *Australian Forestry* a key point of difference, and attract both authors and readers who value that transfer of research to practice. Going forward, the board of *Australian Forestry* will aim to build the academic credentials of the journal as well as increasing its recognition for having impact.