



TENURE REFORM: REALITY OR FANTASY?

A term that is mentioned all too frequently these days is “tenure reform.” Can you define what it means? Can you provide any clarity as to what you would specifically do to accomplish it? While many groups and individuals have chosen to make it a mantra of the day and trumpet its necessity, any attempt to find specific and actionable recommendations to achieve the goal of tenure reform would be difficult at best.

Obviously, anything to do with tenure reform in BC's forests lies predominantly with the Province and ultimately with us, the voters. Achieving any substantive changes in the current allocation of timber will be a task requiring leadership and political will. Why? Consider the many hands asking for a piece of the pie and asking for it under totally divergent agendas.

If you are an existing licensee and secure in your current rights, tenure reform is likely not on your priority list. In fact, your efforts are probably directed towards maintaining the status quo or further expansion and consolidation to deal with BC's very high cost structures.

If you are a smaller player in the sector, you're always looking at ways to increase your supply of wood to help your business, to expand, and provide steadier jobs for your employees. For you, tenure reform could, if done right, be something very tangible and beneficial.

If you are a community, you may already have some community forest tenure or want one. For those communities experiencing success, you're likely looking for additional volumes in order to work on decreasing your fixed costs and improving the potential for increased community dividends and job creation.

If you are decidedly on the green side of the equation, perhaps you see tenure reform as a surrogate for increased outright protected areas and adoption of practices on the remaining land base that reduce overall harvesting levels to achieve your

perceptions of what's required to address climate change.

cussion, some of the factors that should be considered in any change would be:

Obviously, anything to do with tenure reform in BC's forests lies predominantly with the Province and ultimately with us, the voters. Achieving any substantive changes in the current allocation of timber will be a task requiring leadership and political will.

If you are First Nations in BC, you're looking at any change and tenure reform to enable a more progressive path towards constructive reconciliation and enhanced benefits from the resource that's been your backyard forever.

If you currently work within and derive your living from the forest resource, you've likely heard this sort of talk for many years now. What you want, is to know you have a future in the industry, can continue to provide for your family, and contribute to your communities. Your message to all involved may be to ask that folks just don't mess it up with whatever is done.

So, you are the government and you get to sort out all of these competing agendas at play. Is it realistic for us to expect anyone can accomplish real change in our tenure system or is it merely a fantasy?

The fact is that there is likely a high degree of agreement on what needs to be done out there to make our industry a better and more prosperous one. Pick some topics such as intensive silviculture, protection of the working forest, utilization standards, innovative logging practices, improved investment climates, or reconciliation; you'll probably find a lot of us nodding our heads in approval for what needs to be done. Other points such as diversifying current forest tenures, log exports, climate change strategies, and transition strategies to increase value added may cause more heated discussions.

From our perspective, real discussions should happen on these fundamentals in order for us to collectively make our sector even stronger. As a suggestion for dis-

- Are the proposed changes going to strengthen the overall forest industry?
- Will the changes enable businesses to be more prosperous?
- Will the investment climate be such that it promotes real and sustainable investment in our forest resource?
- Will the investment climate improve to such that value-added businesses will prosper?
- Are the needs of First Nations and communities better addressed?
- Are the needs of current tenure holders addressed?
- Are we factoring climate change into the changes?
- Has more certainty been brought to the working forest land base?

Since many interests are at play, it is with certainty these suggestions will be incomplete in the minds of many. However, this should not detract from the need to begin to tackle the task.

From the TLA's viewpoint, we feel it is time to start tackling these broader issues. Hopefully all can agree on that as a principle. If there is ever a time for increased cooperation and coordination amongst all of us, this is it.

Towards that objective, we welcome any ideas from both our members and others on what needs to be done to ensure the improved prosperity of our industry. We look forward to talking to you about them.▲

Bob Brash, RPF, MBA, Executive Director, TLA
Tel: 604-684-4291 ext. 1
Email: bob@tla.ca