

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

## STATISTICS

Sir,

I have read your letter and the rearranged version of my paper on the effect of frost on kauri and regret that I cannot agree with you. The paper has been rewritten and tidied up and, while some of this was needed, quite a bit was done to make it conform statistically.

Now I'm afraid that I don't agree with this worship of the great God "probability" and am more inclined to the Disraeli school of "lies, damned lies and statistics".

It's interesting to analyse the influence of statistics in the *New Zealand Journal of Forestry Science*. In the first two issues, in 1971, the proportion of papers relying on statistical proof was 11%; by Volume 13 (1) and (2) it had risen to 83%. I suspect this increase is due to the ease with which computers enable these calculations to be made. That the results of today are any more accurate than those of the pre-computer era I strongly doubt, i.e., the positive correlation of statistical accuracy and value of results is probably lower than  $r = 0.5!$

Admittedly my results are from a fairly small number of trees. But they are consistent, and in practical terms (and practicality is what this is all about) very useful. Artificial establishment of kauri should not be undertaken where frosts lower than  $-3^{\circ}\text{C}$  occur on a regular basis.

In view of this, if you are not prepared to publish the paper as is, please return it and I will try for publication elsewhere.

As well as reconsidering your decision I would be grateful if you and your editorial board could give some thought to the point raised in this letter, i.e., "are statistics really necessary?". Perhaps the letter could be published and other comment sought.

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