

## **The NZ Forest Policy Project**

A précis of progress of the NZ Forest Policy Project  
8<sup>th</sup> August 2017

### **Introduction**

Representatives of the NZ forestry community have developed an optimal set of policies for the future of forestry in New Zealand. While the substantive report of their work is not complete – sector consultation is being meticulously undertaken – the Forest Policy Project Team is providing this preliminary précis to permit consideration and adoption where appropriate.

The Project encapsulates all New Zealand forests – and those people who work in and with them or process and trade their products.

The Project highlights the significant values of the many products and benefits which accrue to the economy from its trees and forests. The more apparent are those commonly traded – logs and lumber. Less obvious but also hugely significant to our nation are the:

- Sequestration of large amounts of atmospheric carbon;
- Improvement of the health and clarity of the country's waterways;
- Enhancement of biodiversity;
- Provision of employment and export earnings through on-shore processing;
- Protection of soils from erosion and infrastructure from consequential damage;
- Provision of ambient environs for human activities (tourism and recreation).

So vital are these products and benefits, that the central recommendation from the Project, exhorts the nation to urgently establish more forests.

### **The need for a Forest Policy**

New Zealand Aotearoa does not have a Forest Policy to guide the use, protection and development of its trees and forests. Yet even

the simplest of forestry systems requires decades to reach maturity. Some of our iconic native trees are hundreds of years old. All native forests are heavily modified and remain at great risk from pests, disease and other catastrophe.

Meanwhile our commercial forests earn more than eight billion dollars from exports and domestic sales annually. Collectively and with all benefits included, plantations deliver an annual value to the economy near double this figure. In other words – the 'hidden' benefits pretty much double the 'traded' returns of logs and lumber.

Forests provide building materials for homes, paper and packaging for goods, energy for fuels, raw materials for complimentary and novel products (some replacing oil-based items), as well as shade, shelter and aesthetic ambience for various human endeavours, all the while securing eroding soils and purifying run-off water .

Despite the endeavours of more than 800 years of human settlement and modification of our forests, four fifths of which are indigenous, they still cover one third of the country's land area.

The forest community perceives that all forest benefits will not be fully realized, nor their worth fully optimized, without policy and a strong commitment to it.

### **Natural capital and Ecosystem Services**

New Zealand's forests are a significant component of the country's natural capital. The benefits of natural capital are delivered by ecosystem services. Mostly there are no costs for ecosystem services; they continuously arise from well managed and maintained forests. Consequently we take them for granted.

An expansion of forest areas will automatically mean better ecosystem services contributing further to the economy. But the expansion of forestry cannot occur without encouragement;

nor without careful consideration of other land use priorities. Forests take a long time to develop and provide benefits – which is why long term planning and carefully chosen strategies are essential.

### Climate Change and New Zealand's commitments to the Global Community

It is significant that New Zealand's plantation area can easily be doubled within a few years. This would involve initially the afforestation of poor quality pasture land; land which happens to be at risk of erosion and is capable of only low production, at best.

So, new forests established on marginal soils will have an insignificant impact on the nation's important farm production. But new forests would immediately – and increasingly with time – benefit the nation's environment and economy.

This is of particular relevance to New Zealand's Climate Change commitments under the 2016 Paris Agreement. New forest plantings will quickly commence sequestering carbon from the air. In sufficient numbers new trees will come close to meeting our international obligations – substantially without purchasing overseas credits.

### The On-shore Processing of Logs

Forest harvests are increasing. Over fifty per cent of harvests are presently exported as unprocessed logs. There are opportunities to increase on-shore processing to raise the export values of harvests. But again that requires focused planning at both a regional and national level under the guidance of a widely supported forest policy.

### The Use of Wood in Building Construction in NZ

New Zealand is capable of beneficially using more wood in domestic and commercial construction. The country has developed

'design and build' expertise necessary to erect structures – of a number of storeys – from engineered timber products.

The key attributes of timber construction include wood's significant advantages of earthquake resilience, low embedded energy and zero greenhouse gas emissions. These attributes should anyway be firmly embodied in the nation's psyche and its development policies.

The evolution of Kiwi ingenuity in wood building is entirely complementary with other forest policy proposals.

### Finale

Planting new forests on poor pasture land, processing more logs domestically and building in wood – while contemporaneously sequestering atmospheric carbon and clarifying run-off water – at first blush – sounds too good to be true.

But the logic of focusing New Zealand's economy upon these opportunities by adopting sound forest policy is manifestly apparent to New Zealand's forest community. Its policy development team has highlighted public benefits which are clearly a grand treasure trove of environmental, social, cultural and economic imperatives.

*This progress report of the Forest Policy Project was distributed by the FPP Management Team on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2017. In seeking support for this work from the NZ forest community, the Management Team is consulting extensively with the sector. It is anticipated the Project's detailed final report will be ready for release in a few weeks.*

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