



Wooden homes withstand the shake

ONE OF THE SAFEST PLACES TO BE IN AN EARTHQUAKE IS IN A WELL-CONSTRUCTED LIGHTWEIGHT WOOD-FRAMED HOME.

When the 7.1 magnitude Darfield quake struck Canterbury in the early morning of 4 September most residents were asleep in wood-framed homes typical of most of New Zealand's housing stock. No-one died.

Television camera crews wanting to depict the destructive force of the quake mainly focussed on the older unreinforced masonry buildings where major damage was most obvious.

Well-made wood-framed buildings stand up well to earthquakes for several reasons. Among them:

- The numerous nailed joints make them ductile – which means they flex when hit by the enormous forces of a quake. If one of these joints fail, other joints and nails can often compensate.
- The forces in an earthquake are proportional to the weight of the structure. Therefore, properly built wood buildings tend to perform well in part because they are lighter than most other forms of construction.

In a study of the effects of the Darfield quake, Andy Buchanan and Michael Newcombe of the University of Canterbury say most wood-framed houses performed very well. Very little structural damage was caused by ground shaking except where dwellings were close to, or astride, ground ruptures.

The most widespread structural damage was due to soil liquefaction. When water-saturated loose sandy soils are

Bridging troubled water



The forest and wood processing industries have offered to rebuild at their own expense the footbridge over the Avon River at Avonside in Christchurch (shown above). Already, offers of support have come from forest owners, processors, fabricators and contractors, architects and engineers. "We want to make a useful contribution to the rebuilding of Christchurch after all its citizens have endured," says Jason Guiver, director of the NZ Wood Design Advisory Centre. "Ideally it will have some heritage qualities in keeping with the general tone of the city ... something that local people can identify with." A concept design is being developed as a basis for consultation with the local council and community. The rebuild is expected to be completed in 2011. *Wanting to contribute or participate? Contact jason@nzwood.co.nz*

shaken in a prolonged large earthquake, the water pressure in the soil increases to the point where the soil starts flowing like a liquid. Sand 'volcanos' occur at the ground surface, heavy buildings start sinking and buried hollow objects like fuel tanks and swimming pools start to float.

This happened in some Christchurch suburbs. Buildings started to sink and tilt, with heavier ones – those with tile roofs and heavy brick cladding – more likely to be effected than their lighter neighbours.

Where foundations settled unevenly or walls moved outward, damage was often severe. Where houses settled fairly evenly, damage was likely to be limited.

In general, pile foundations performed much better on liquefied sites than concrete slabs. The authors sug-

gest this may be because a concrete slab cannot accommodate the uneven settling of foundations as readily as a timber floor.

Properly installed claddings of all types – weatherboards, brick veneer, stucco – performed well, as did houses made of solid timber. Most houses in non-liquefaction areas had little or no cracking of gib-board linings, implying that the linings worked well to provide most of the bracing to the buildings.

The most common type of damage to buildings more than 15 years old was chimney collapse, with further damage occurring where those chimneys then fell through a tile or slate roof. Steel roofing was normally effective at preventing falling chimneys from penetrating the house structure.

More? www.tinyurl.com/2e5gan7

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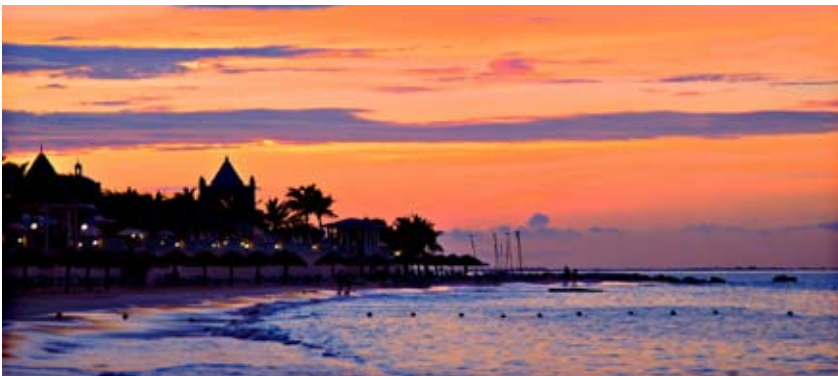
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Rhodes plays Cancun

FOA CHIEF EXECUTIVE DAVID RHODES HAS BEEN PARTICIPATING IN THE UNITED NATIONS CLIMATE CHANGE NEGOTIATIONS IN CANCUN AS PART OF THE NEW ZEALAND DELEGATION.



The Cancun beach resort in Mexico has been home for the UN climate change negotiators

His main focus has been the Land Use and Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) talks.

“Some good progress was made a year ago in Copenhagen with the rules around afforestation and reforestation, offsetting, recognising the contribution of harvested wood products, setting of baselines and how natural disturbance

is dealt with. So there have been reasonable hopes that, at least in this arena, further progress will be made,” he says.

“It is essential that any agreed LULUCF rules can be applied to New Zealand’s unique farming and forestry systems. “We – the New Zealand indus-

try and government officials – have shared objectives. We were working closely together before the talks and are being mutually supportive in Cancun. We also have different channels of influence which we are utilising to best advantage.”

While in Cancun, Rhodes has been helping other members of the International Council of Forest and Paper Associations to run a stand on the role of planted forests, including a video that uses examples from six countries including New Zealand. He is also presenting at a side event organised by the Australian forest industry to profile how various countries are going about meeting their Kyoto commitments.

The FOA is a member of a Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) carbon working group. The group has delivered a communiqué in Cancun on accountability for and stewardship of forest carbon resources. Rhodes will be back in the office in mid-December.

Guidelines create a legal bind

A DECISION IN A RECENT HIGH COURT CASE HAS MADE IT MORE COMPLICATED FOR FOREST OWNERS AND CONTRACTORS TO COMPLY WITH THE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ACT.

The judge’s ruling means that any documents referred to in resource consents or district plans must be complied with, even for permitted activities. Parties to the case are not expected to further appeal the ruling.

In Auckland Regional Council v Holmes Logging Limited charges were laid against Holmes Logging, for breaches of sections 9 and 15 of the RMA. These were dismissed in the Auckland District Court. The ARC then appealed to the High Court on points of law.

The ARC alleged that Holmes had undertaken logging in a manner that contravened the rule in the relevant regional plan that dealt with sediment control, contrary to section 9 of the RMA. Holmes was also charged with discharging sediment into the Puhoi River and tributaries of the Mahurangi River, contrary to section 15 of the RMA. Evidence was presented that Holmes had not complied with the original and revised ARC technical publications, TP2 (referenced in the resource consent) and TP90 (referenced in the Regional

Plan) which set out erosion and sediment control guidelines for the specific activities undertaken on site.

The District Court had agreed with the defendant that compliance with TP90 and TP2 was not compulsory, as they were intended merely as guidelines. However, the High Court ruled that the words in the regional plan and resource consent that “these measures should be implemented in accordance with” TP90 and TP2 respectively made them mandatory.

“For forest owners and contractors the ruling means that the onus is on us to prove that any activities we undertake in our forests are expressly allowed by a resource consent. In order to avoid prosecution for breaches of the RMA, this will include complying with technical publications referred to in consents and regional and district plans,” says FOA environmental committee chair Peter Weir.

“This creates a number of challenges. At the top of the list, there’s the need for anyone doing earthworks or other

land-based activity to have access to a list of the guidelines, codes and other documents that might apply in their district and region. In some cases, these documents may be outdated and out-of-print.”

The FOA is now considering the decision and the implications it has for the proposed National Environmental Standard for Plantation Forestry. *Case reference: HC Auckland CRI-2009-404-3*

Without our sponsors ...

Without sponsors the FOA would not have had a conference with speakers of the high calibre members enjoyed this year. About 80 delegates attended the half-day event held in mid-October at Te Papa, Wellington.

The sponsors were:

- Blakely Pacific Ltd
- EECA Business
- Genera
- Hancocks Forest Management
- Natures Flame
- Rayonier/Matariki Forests
- Timberlands Ltd
- WHAM Public Relations

NZTE also helped facilitate some of the overseas presentations.

Trials needed before the debate

FIELD TRIALS ARE NEEDED BEFORE NEW ZEALAND CAN HAVE AN INFORMED DEBATE ABOUT THE MERITS OR OTHERWISE OF GENETICALLY ENGINEERED RADIATA PINES.

However, the trials are likely to trigger an emotive response from groups and individuals opposed to field trials of GE crops.

In a submission to ERMA supporting a proposal by Scion to field test GE radiata pines in containment, the FOA says this is the main risk posed by the trials. Scion needs to manage this risk carefully to ensure the public knows what's going on and New Zealand's wood product markets are not put at risk.

"We have good evidence from earlier Scion research that GE pines pose no threat to soil micro-organisms and insects. But beyond that we lack hard facts," says FOA senior policy analyst Glen Mackie.



GE papaya
Now on menus in the US and Japan

"We need more information about possible risks and benefits. We need to know whether GE pines could be commercially viable."

World-wide, there are now many trials of GE-modified plantation species underway. To remain competitive, New Zealand needs to conduct its own trials to maintain its status as a leader

in radiata production and processing technology.

As yet there are few examples worldwide of commercial GE tree crops. Two successful examples are insect-resistant poplars and virus-resistant papaya.

Scion senior scientist Christian Walter says about 1.4 million poplars modified to express the *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) caterpillar toxin have been planted on about 500 hectares in China.

"The trees are grown in an area where it was previously uneconomic to grow poplars because of high insect pressure. The GE trees, the oldest of which are now 15 years old, are now established and have successfully resisted insect attack.

"To prevent the development of Bt resistance – the main environmental risk posed by the use of this gene – conventional non-GE varieties have been planted as insect refugia within the crop."

In Hawaii, papaya trees have been modified to express the viral coat protein gene of papaya ringspot virus (PRSV), a serious threat to the industry.

Since the release of PRSV-resistant GE papaya plants in 2001, production has recovered and earlier this year Japan – a major market for the Hawaiian crop – cleared imports of the GE fruit for human consumption.

In the proposed Scion trials, which will be in containment, radiata will be genetically modified for rapid early growth, herbicide tolerance, wood density, reproductive development, biomass utilisation and wood dimensional stability. All are important economic characteristics.

The trials are not expected to pose any threat to native plants or ecosystems. New Zealand does not have any native tree species that could be cross-pollinated by GE pine pollen if it was to be inadvertently released. But to be absolutely safe, Scion will remove all trial trees by the time they reach 8-years old and any reproductive structures if they emerge earlier than this.

There are many potential environmental upsides. Trees modified for fast early growth would compete better with weeds, reducing the need for herbicide. Trees modified to resist glyphosate could be over-sprayed with this

benign herbicide instead of more toxic chemicals. As radiata are typically only sprayed 2-3 times in a 30-year rotation, weed resistance to glyphosate would be highly unlikely to develop.

GE technology may also be used to switch off normal reproduction so that energy that would have been channelled into pollen and seed production can be used by the tree to produce more wood. The environmental benefit? No seeds means no wildings.

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) currently prohibits the use of GE in certified plantations, but it notes the potential environmental and social benefits of the technology. For example, GE trees may be more easily established in marginal environments for firewood production, soil conservation, shade or windbreaks.

By introducing herbicide, virus or insect resistance, pesticide use may be reduced. By using trees with modified lignin, the FSC says it may be possible to reduce the environmental impact of pulp production.

"A potential risk of modifying radiata to withstand insect or disease attack is that resistance may build-up in target organisms. Finding out how significant this risk is and how it can be managed, is one of the reasons we need the trials," Mackie says.

"The use of refugia, as the Chinese have done with their poplars, is a well-proven technique and may have an application here."

Submissions on the Scion application were heard in early November and are now being considered by ERMA which is expected to announce an interim decision in early 2011. Read the application at <http://tinyurl.com/264u2pu> and the FOA submission at <http://tinyurl.com/29qqupn>



Dr Walter Christian



The carbon tide rolls in



By FOA
chief executive
David Rhodes

THE MOMENTUM TO IMPOSE A PRICE ON CARBON CONTINUES TO BUILD. YES, WE HAVE GONE THROUGH A GLOBAL FINANCIAL MELTDOWN. YES, WE HAVE HAD THE COPENHAGEN TRAIN WRECK AND POLICY PARALYSIS IN THE UNITED STATES.

But the repeated message from our government that our ETS is here to stay reflects the international reality. World-wide there is a growing recognition by both governments and business that a price on carbon is both desirable and inevitable.

For a country reliant on clean green positioning for its food, fibre and tourism, having a credible ETS is a no-brainer.

Already, the modest penalties NZ imposes on fossil fuel emissions are encouraging fleet operators and earthmoving contractors to switch their trucks and earthmoving machines to biodiesel blends. As the penalty levels increase, so will the incentives for more businesses to become carbon efficient and for land owners to plant carbon forests.

The quantum and timing of future penalty levels and whether they will be extended to other sectors will be a major focus of the government's ETS review next year – with decisions strongly influenced by what's happening around the globe.

International negotiations

A lot of pessimism surrounds the UN climate change talks now underway in Cancun, Mexico. But even if world leaders fail to agree on a binding treaty to replace Kyoto it seems inconceivable that they will get away with "oh well, never mind, let's focus on something else".

The likely alternative to Kyoto II would be to build on the Copenhagen Accord pledges. While not binding under international law, they will still be weighed in the court of public opinion. If this then influences consumer buying decisions or is reflected in trade policy, there may not be much difference in the long run.

For forestry, this means the big game has to be the ongoing deliberations around Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) reporting. Why? Because LULUCF rules will almost certainly underpin whatever system evolves – legal or voluntary, international or regional, tax or emissions trading.

And in striking contrast to what has been happening on the Kyoto front, progress on the development of LULUCF rules has not stalled. There's also quite a bit happening in countries New Zealand trades with.

Australia

Some on this side of the Tasman cite the lack of progress in Australia as a reason why New Zealand should not be taking action, but even there carbon emissions are coming at a price.

Since August 2009, Australia has had a target of having 20% of its electricity supply derived from renewables by 2020. In June this target was amended, notably with bipartisan support, to accelerate investment in renewable energy projects.

In August the commonwealth government launched a carbon farming initiative. Even though projects will not begin to be assessed and approved until next year, the launch was quickly followed by the first forward trade in Australian Assigned Amount Units (AAUs). In contrast, the decision by former prime minister Kevin Rudd to backtrack on the proposed CPRS (Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme) – sup-

ported behind the scenes by his successor Julia Gillard – was a spectacular failure. Problem is, the only thing a lot of people hate more than going in an uncomfortable new direction is going in no direction at all.

Gillard's decision to set up a gaggle of wise citizens to determine the best way to establish a price for carbon probably wasn't the cleverest alternative – quite apart from the obvious challenge of whether such a group exists in Australia – but she clearly recognises that action on carbon emissions is a political necessity.

BHP Billiton and the giant supermarket chain Wesfarmers say their investment decisions are already factoring in a carbon price, which they see as inevitable.

China

Much has been made of the need for China to show leadership on emissions reductions and rightly so. However it is by no means a laggard. As *Point Carbon* points out, the implicit carbon price in China is about three to four times higher than in the US or Japan.

China aims to cut carbon intensity as much as 45% from 2005 levels by 2020 and increase the share of renewables to 15% of primary energy consumption as part of its five year plan starting 2011.

Beijing recently told 2087 steel mills, cement works, aluminium smelters, glass and other energy-intensive or high emission factories to close by 30 September 2011.

Carbon trading between state-owned power companies is expected to start shortly and 13 pilot low-carbon cities and provinces have already been asked to submit emission reduction plans for 2011-2015, including their use of trading platforms.

Certainly, all these efforts face monitoring, measuring and other challenges but, nonetheless the political intent has been clearly signaled.

United States

Plans for a federal cap-and-trade scheme stalled earlier this year and now, with the Republicans in control of the House of Representatives, the draft legislation is a dead duck. But as with Australia, paralysis at the helm has tended to hide the progress being made by individual states and groups of states.

The most ambitious of these is the Western Climate Initiative (WCI). Involving several US states and Canadian provinces, it aims to cut emissions by 15% below 2005 levels by 2020.

An oil industry funded referendum in California, calling for the initiative to be delayed until unemployment falls below 5.5% from its current 12%, was resoundingly defeated in the November elections.

Pundits now expect carbon trading to start in California and at least five other states by 2012. The only doubt surrounds the interpretation of another election referendum result – one requiring some fees levied by the state government be approved by a two-thirds majority. However, Mary Nichols, chair of the Air Resources Board, dismisses these concerns, saying the state's cap and trade legislation is now "well and truly on track".



Worldwide the carbon pricing tide continues to roll inexorably in
The message from our government that our ETS is here to stay reflects the international reality

Britain and the EU

According to a survey of six major economies by London-based Vivid Economics, Britain is leading the major economies in encouraging investment in cleaner energy, thanks to steep carbon price incentives.

In the survey report, Britain's implied carbon price was \$US29.30 a tonne – double that of its nearest rival China at \$US14.20 a tonne, followed by the United States at \$5.10, Japan \$3.10, Australia \$1.70 and South Korea \$0.70.

Britain's 2009 \$US11 billion investment in a low-pollution economy is largely due to its membership of the European Union. The EU began its ETS journey in 2005, capping CO₂ emissions on nearly 12,000 factories and power stations and allowing them to buy and sell credits.

Although the scheme was wounded by an initial over-allocation of permits, in recent years it has proved to be reasonably effective in encouraging industries to reduce their emissions. Indeed it underpins the world's largest carbon trading bourse, with trades totalling \$US 118 billion in 2009 – 64% of the world total.

The third and most ambitious phase of the EU ETS is scheduled to kick in from 2013, with the aim of cutting emissions by at least 20% below 1990 levels by 2020.

Asia

Outside China, the implementation of carbon pricing in Asia has been slow, but nevertheless the policy direction is clear. Japan, the region's second largest economy, will from April 2013 be introducing a compulsory emissions trading scheme which includes the use of offsets. It plans to cut its emissions to 25% below 1990 levels by 2020.

India is already taxing imports of pollution intensive products like coal and will soon be starting a pilot ETS in Gujarat and Tamil Nadu, two of its most industrially intensive states.

Since the 1960s South Korea has relied upon carbon-intensive heavy industry to drive the rapid expansion of its economy. In a sharp change of tack, it is now pursuing an ambitious "green growth" strategy to wean itself off fossil fuels.

According to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, it aims to expand the role of renewable energy from less than 5% of its energy mix to 11% in 2020, and nuclear from 26% in 2008 to 40%

in 2030.

Fourteen model carbon markets are now operating in Korean cities and the government remains intent on introducing a cap-and-trade system for carbon dioxide as early as 2011.

Conclusion

Like all major journeys, progress toward a low carbon future has been – and will continue to be – uneven. But for every setback, like the demise of US climate change legislation, there is a resounding 'yes we can' from somewhere else – in America's case, from the strong support of Californian voters for carbon pricing and a greener economy.

In a recent *Global 500* survey, 90% of companies identified significant commercial opportunities arising from climate change. Many are acting on these ahead of any policy requirements. More and more are measuring and reporting emissions and 48% are incorporating climate change initiatives into their overall business strategies.

In New Zealand, there's not much evidence yet of carbon forest planting apart from the relatively small areas that are eligible for direct government subsidies and grants. But combined carbon/production forestry clearly stacks up as an investment, so it's probably just a matter of waiting until the mood of investors changes.

The government could help this process by amending the ETS to provide cover for force majeure events and to give participants the option of averaging credits and liabilities during the life of a forest. These tweaks could be done at no cost to the taxpayer.

In the meantime, the FOA is working with officials to make sure that the NZ ETS is practical and fairly rewards those forest growers who are most efficient at sequestering carbon. Last month we submitted on a MAF proposal to replace carbon measurements based on conservative averages with more precise test plot measurements.

All in all, the carbon pricing tide continues to roll inexorably in. Regardless of one's view about the causes of climate change or whether humans can do anything effective to mitigate it, carbon pricing will not be departing any time soon. It's a political and commercial reality that forest owners and businesses cannot ignore.



Long NES march continues

THERE IS STILL SOME WAY GO BEFORE A NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARD (NES) FOR PLANTATION FORESTRY BECOMES LAW.

The draft standard has attracted 117 written submissions and there's been good attendance at public workshops. Most forest sector groups and companies, with one or two notable exceptions, have given their conditional support. Most regional and some district councils are opposed.

Done properly, such a standard has the potential to remove red tape and legal costs from the forest industry.

In all but the most erosion prone terrain or sensitive environments, consents would not be needed for normal forestry operations. Permitted activity standards for harvesting, culverts and bridges, setbacks along waterways and the management of slash would be consistent across the country. Only where soils were particularly prone to erosion, or where unusual circumstances applied, would councils be able to be able

to add extra conditions.

Forest owners have battled for a decade for such a standard and are not about to chuck in the towel in the face of some determined opposition – particularly from regional councils.

Forest Owners Association environment committee member Kelvin Meredith says association representatives will now be working with officials and other interests to come up with a revised draft that addresses the major concerns of submitters.

“As with all such things, the devil is in the detail. So it is a great reassurance to know that the minister won't allow an NES to become law unless it addresses the key concerns of forest owners. The challenge is to achieve that, while still ensuring that environmental standards are maintained.”

He says the proposed NES as presented will not achieve what was intended.

“Not only will standards become tougher in most regions, councils will still be free to impose additional local

standards without any scientific justification. This means investors thinking of planting new forests would still be uncertain about future roading and harvesting permissions and constraints.”

A key objective of the NES is to provide that certainty to land owners and other investors contemplating planting a new forest that they will be able to harvest their tree crop.

To this end, forest owners have agreed to ‘front-end loading’. This involves assessing any terrain that is highly susceptible to erosion before a new forest is planted, with a view to future earthworks and harvesting requirements and including these as conditions of a resource consent for afforestation.

Meredith says this will give certainty for new forests. More complicated is the situation facing owners of existing forests.

“As written, the NES will require resource consents for harvesting in districts where it is already a permitted activity, even where there are no concerns about environmental impacts. This is a make-or-break issue for the industry.”

The ability of councils to force forest owners to replant following harvest is also of concern. As Meredith points out, no other land use is required by law to be continued in perpetuity regardless of the economics of doing so.

A counterpoint is the ability of councils to dictate mandatory setbacks along waterways where forests cannot be replanted after harvest. Such requirements may work well in some districts, while in others they may create a breeding ground for aggressive weeds. There may also be expensive implications for a forest owner under the ETS if significant areas are not replanted after harvest.

A concern expressed by submitters from both sides of the fence is the inconsistent treatment of forestry and farming. At present, many councils require time-consuming and costly resource consents from forest owners harvesting their crop, but not so from pastoral farmers who graze erodible hill country.

Under a fair NES forestry would be treated equitably with other land uses. But FOA senior policy analyst Glen Mackie says this not the time for a clean-slate exercise.



Glen Mackie
Not the time for a clean-slate exercise



Certainty is needed

Before planting a forest, land owners need to know the rules that will apply when they come to harvest their crop

“We are looking at what exists with the aim of making it work more efficiently. Ensuring consistent standards across all land use sectors can come later.”

Next on MfE's agenda will be a series of technical workshops involving major stakeholders including forest owners and CRI science experts, aimed at developing mapping systems that identify terrain that is highly susceptible to erosion and sensitive freshwater receiving environments, both of which are necessary to underpin a Mark 2 NES proposal. Normally this would then go to the minister for consultation at a political level before the drafting of legislation. In this case, the new mapping and revised NES proposal may go back to submitters in hope of achieving a high level of consensus.

The latest on the proposed NES is on the MfE website: <http://tinyurl.com/2avueby>

A bach in cooe of the White House



A long way from the National Mall
An artist's impression of the *First Light* house in a NZ mountain setting

A SOLAR-POWERED WOODEN HOUSE, INSPIRED BY THE TRADITIONAL KIWI BACH, WILL BE SHOWCASED IN THE NATIONAL MALL IN WASHINGTON DC IN THE FALL OF 2011.

The *First Light* house is being developed by a team of architectural students at Victoria University. It will be the first southern hemisphere entry, ever, to compete in the prestigious US Department of Energy Solar Decathlon.

Twenty student teams from around the world will compete in the 2011 contest to design, build and operate a house that is cost effective, energy efficient and attractive. They are also being put through a series of 10 contests in the lead-up to the 21-day event in September/October.

The project is led by four masters students, Eli Nuttall, Anna Farrow, Nick Officer and Ben Jagersma. They say the Kiwi bach is primarily a summer destination, where life takes place as much outside, on large decks and patios, as it does inside.

"The *First Light* house brings the ideals of bach life into a contemporary setting, providing a permanent residence where recreation and social activities are united with environmentally sound technologies.

"So the on-the-deck lifestyle can be enjoyed year-round, an indoor deck has been created to act as a cooking and dining space."

The house has a timber frame and cladding and a timber canopy to support the solar panels and provide shade. Laminated veneer lumber (LVL) gives the modular design its structural integrity and provides the accuracy needed during onsite assembly.

The ceiling and wall linings are plywood. The frame and canopy are expected to be made from a combination of glulam and dressed timber. Cedar is being used for shading slats and weatherboards. An external timber canopy houses the photovoltaic (PV) panels and solar water heaters, and elegantly integrates the panels into the bach.

The house will be split into prefabricated modules that can be constructed within the 7-day time constraint of the competition. Construction will begin in early 2011 in a covered site in Wellington.

The modules will then be transported to Frank Kitts Park on the Wellington waterfront on 30 March, where the team will perfect the assembly sequence. The completed bach will then be put on public display during April, before being dismantled and shipped to Washington.

More? www.firstlighthouse.co.nz

From Russia with logs

Russia did New Zealand a favour when it imposed a 25% export tax on unprocessed logs in 2008. Together with the recession, it appears to have triggered a long overdue economic realignment in the Russian log industry.

The harvest has dropped about 35%, log exports are down 60% and domestic Russian log prices have gone up \$US10-15 m³, Gerry Van Leeuwen of the International Wood Markets Group told the FOA conference in October.

China, the biggest buyer of Russian logs has partially replaced the drop in log supply with lumber sourced largely from new but basic Chinese-owned mills in Russia. But it still leaves a big gap that's now being filled by other Pacific rim suppliers including New Zealand.

Although Russia has by far the biggest forest cover of any country, log prices hadn't reflected production costs for many years. Many forests can be harvested only during the bitter Siberian winter when the ground freezes. It's an extremely hostile place to live and work. Harvested logs are then freighted to railheads that may be hundreds of kilometres away, for loading onto trains that are short of rolling stock.

Russian red pine is a beautiful timber which Russian mills prefer to sell to lucrative markets in Europe, Japan and elsewhere. China is seen as a low price market for lower quality lumber.

For their part the Chinese see Russian red pine as a premium product, with the best North America lumber in the second slot. New Zealand radiata is perceived as a lower quality product with prices \$US20-35/m³ less than Russian red pine.

For the full Russian market paper and other FOA conference papers, go to <http://tinyurl.com/2b8mese>



Gerry Van Leeuwen

Heard it on the grapevine?

If you're writing something about the forest industry please check your facts. Things are changing fast.

For example, did you know log exports have finally broken the \$1 billion barrier? In the year ended June 2010 we exported 9,916,213 m³ of logs worth NZ\$1166 million. To reach that mighty total, the harvest was also a record – reaching 23.5 million m³, beating the previous record of 22.5 million m³.

The easy way to keep up-to-date is to have a copy of Forestry Facts & Figures on your desk or in your vehicle or briefcase. Co-published by MAF and the FOA, it can be ordered from the FOA at <http://tinyurl.com/2epwvg5>



Fumigant controls tightened

THE ENVIRONMENTAL RISK MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY (ERMA) HAS COMPLETED ITS REASSESSMENT OF METHYL BROMIDE (MB), A GAS USED WORLD-WIDE TO FUMIGATE MANY EXPORTED AND IMPORTED GOODS.



Logs awaiting shipment from Shakespeare Bay, Marlborough. Shipments to India must be fumigated with MB before they leave New Zealand

In order to increase public confidence in the measures being taken to protect people and the environment it will be redefining exposure limits and imposing buffer zones. It will also be requiring air quality monitoring, notification and annual reports.

By 2020 the MB used to fumigate logs, either under tarpaulins or in ship's holds, will need to be recaptured – a time frame which ERMA expects will be long enough for users to either find a replacement for the gas or to develop new ways of capturing and inactivating it.

“Existing recapture technology cannot be simply scaled up from that used on a shipping container,” says FOA senior policy analyst Glen Mackie.

“Recapturing MB from a 40-tonne container involves the use of a couple of drums of activated carbon, which then need to be stored because they are not accepted at landfills.

“Applying this technology to a log shipment weighing several thousand tonnes would involve the use of up to 80 tonnes of activated carbon, creating all sorts of logistical nightmares. It takes 4 tonnes of carbon to soak up 1 tonne of MB.”

The FOA supports research into new and improved biosecurity technologies by STIMBR (Stakeholders in Methyl Bromide Reduction) and funded by a voluntary levy on MB use.

The FOA and STIMBR are working closely with MAF Biosecurity to try and achieve parity with the Canadians and Alaskans who are now allowed to fumigate their shipments on arrival in China. Negotiations are also continuing with India to have logs carried in ships' holds fumigated en route with phosphine – a procedure which China allows.

The ERMA decision acknowledges that existing rules ensure there is negligible risk to public health from MB use. The adverse effects on society that ERMA seeks to address with its decision are the “effects caused by concern about the potential for adverse effects”.

For full details of the ERMA decision: <http://tinyurl.com/2awbkny>

Year of Forests

Next year is the International Year of Forests and the industry and MAF would like to identify one event a month that could be used to illustrate the diverse contribution forestry makes to society and the economy.

If you have a bright idea, contact the FOA, especially if you are willing to put your hand up to take ownership and management of the proposed activity. While the focus is on forests the wider wood industry will be included.

Some activities are already booked in. The US Department of Energy Solar Decathlon model house will be on display on Wellington waterfront in March (see p7), the forestry and recreation section of the NZ Wood website will be launched in July and arbor day is planned for August. In September there will be a wood expo, ForestWood Conference and Timber Design Awards in Rotorua.



FSC National Standard closer

New Zealand hopes to have a National Standard for the management of certified forests approved next year by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Public submissions on the draft standard have now closed.

Project coordinator Colin Mauger says the standards development team is now analysing submissions and subject to reaching agreement, hopes to be sending a final draft to the FSC before Christmas.

The draft follows several months of negotiation between representatives of the forest workforce, conservation and outdoor recreation groups, Maori interests and forest owners.

Mauger says an attempt in 2003 to get agreement broke down over three issues – the use of agrichemicals, the ability of Maori to convert manuka scrubland into plantation forest and the proportion of a holding that must be kept in managed indigenous vegetation. There was also concern among farm

foresters that FSC paperwork was too onerous for owners of small forests.

“With goodwill on all sides and by using a skilled independent facilitator, we have found ways forward,” he says. “Basically, we’ve made the rules more flexible without weakening the standards that make FSC certification meaningful.”

Bill Gilbertson of Forest & Bird says more than a million hectares of NZ plantation forest are FSC-certified and about 10 per cent of this area is being actively protected and enhanced in what are effectively privately-owned conservation areas. This is in addition to the habitat provided by plantations to native plants, birds, bats and invertebrates.



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