FOREST OWNERS ASSOCIATION

Bulletin

New Zealand Forestry News

Winter 2025

Urgent timber salvage operation underway in Tasman

P12

Is commercial forestry really an important land use?

Commercial forestry in New Zealand occupies approximately seven percent of the land area within our shores. By comparison, sheep, beef and dairy farming occupies in excess of 30 percent of our country's total land area. Given these numbers, it's easy to see why many might be quick to dismiss forestry as a significant land use. But is that the whole picture?

In recent land use debates, the role of commercial forestry has come under increasing scrutiny from the public and the media. Concerns have been raised about the perceived threat posed by the expansion of commercial forestry in New Zealand, particularly with respect to how the government's Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) is incentivising the conversion of farmland into forests – be that for timber or carbon sequestration. This shift has led to growing tension between forestry and agriculture, with some arguing that forestry is driving a loss of productive agricultural land.

Forestry Minister Hon Todd McClay has weighed in on the issue, emphasising that the government is committed to maintaining a strong food and fibre sector while also supporting sustainable land use practices.

The rest (towns, roads, etc) **23%**
Fruit and vege **1%** Sheep and beef **30%**
Dairy **10%** Commercial forestry **7%**
Conservation estate (DOC) **30%**

"We remain concerned about the effect that forest-to-farm conversions are having on highly productive land," McClay said.

Despite the concerns, there is strong evidence to suggest that the expansion of commercial forest plantings is unlikely to displace New Zealand's wider food and fibre production systems. As I noted earlier, commercial forestry only occupies a small fraction of our country's available land area – about 1.8 million hectares. This figure has remained relatively stable since the early 2000s, just before a period of deforestation stimulated by a rush to clear pine forests in anticipation of agricultural expansion prior to the introduction of the Emissions Trading Scheme in 2008. Even if another 500,000 hectares of commercial forestry (a 27 percent increase) was planted this decade, which I can't see happening, this would be less than a two percent shift in land use across New Zealand. That's a modest change. One that hardly warrants the level of alarm currently dominating public debate.

As well as considering if commercial forestry in New Zealand is really an important land use by virtue of land area covered, other considerations are important. Biodiversity enhancement, improvements in soil, air and water quality, contributions to gross domestic product (GDP) and employment also play a crucial role in understanding forestry's broader impact.

For many and varied reasons, some New Zealanders (including those in regulatory roles) often focus on the small proportion of challenging land that commercial forestry occupies. This narrow perspective often leads to calls to limit forestry's existence and overregulate the sector, undermining its growth and investment potential. The greater good that forestry achieves across most of its seven percent land occupancy is overlooked. Good for biodiversity, soil, water, air, communities and the economy.

An estimated
40,000
people work in forestry and wood processing, making up 11 % of the food and fibre workforce

'*Biodiversity?*' some may ask, '*Really?*'. In response, I point to an informative article from Save the Kiwi published in July last year, titled *Pine a promising solution to decline of New Zealand kiwi population*. The title and article speak for themselves. New Zealand's native falcon, the kārearea, thrive in pine forests. Just ask *Wingspan, the National Bird of Prey Centre*. This FOA *Bulletin* could be filled with such examples alone, and obviously the benefits pine forests provide extend far beyond birds.

↑ The total land area forestry occupies has remained relatively stable since the early 2000s

If you're into beetles, you'll be pleased to know that Scion Research found that third-rotation pine forests in Kinleith Forest have more biodiversity than second rotation stands. You can read more about this research by looking up Scion Research article "*Rare beetles and promising finds*".

Soil, water and air: It may seem obvious, but it's worth repeating. Forests, both commercial and native, play a crucial role in maintaining soil health, water quality and air purity. Yet, many in our community don't fully appreciate these benefits. That's why it's vital the Forest Owners Association continues advocating for forestry's contributions and benefits, to make sure this message is clear and understood widely by the public. Scion's research provides a strong evidence base to support these claims. For instance, Scion's *Forestry Myths Busted* published in 2019 debunks several common misconceptions. One myth dismantled is the notion that pine forests lower soil pH – a statement shown to be inaccurate.

There are seven other forestry myths the publication dispels, offering objective, well-researched counterpoints in their place.

Forestry is a very important land use and one that has so much more potential.

Turning to forestry's economic impact, FOA's latest 2023/24 Facts and Figures publication highlights that MPI expect forest exports to reach $6.62 billion by June 2028. While this is about half of the projected export value generated from sheep and beef farming, forestry revenues come from only a quarter of the land area of sheep and beef. Producing this GDP contribution are an estimated 40,000 people working in forestry and wood processing – making up 11 percent of the food and fibre workforce.

Consider the 40,000 workers in the forestry and wood processing sectors, whose livelihoods – and those of their families – are supported by this industry. Take a bike ride through Whakarewarewa Forest and you'll see how local communities are connected to and benefit from these spaces. Ask the hunting and fishing communities about their interests – trout, game birds, deer and pigs – each of which relies on well-managed forested areas. These are just a few examples of how forestry is an important contributor that's deeply woven into the fabric of so many of our communities.

Beyond providing for communities, forestry produces sustainable and renewable products. New Zealand's wood processing and nascent biofuels economy could be so much more. With investment in science and research and support of critical institutions like Scion that do this work, there is so much opportunity to increase that $6.62 billion and the tens of thousands of people employed by forestry.

So yes, forestry is a very important land use and one that has so much more potential. Maybe, just maybe, there is a strong argument for commercial forestry to take up more than its modest seven percent land area that it currently occupies.

Matthew Wakelin, FOA President

Building climate resilience now for a stronger tomorrow

Globally, shifts in climate are having an increasingly profound effect. Many of the losses from these events are falling directly on businesses, individuals and governments.

According to Zurich Insurance Group, average insured losses rose by 5.9 percent annually between 1994 and 2023, while global gross domestic product (GDP) increased by just 2.7 percent per year over the same period. This widening gap between insurance and risk highlights a troubling trend – economic growth is being outpaced by climate-related damages. In response, insurers are turning to the catastrophic bond market to raise capital for the increase in claims. This accelerating reliance on alternative financial instruments could carry significant implications for the stability of global financial markets.

↑ A flooded Nelson-Tasman landscape following the second storm event in July

Resilience and protection are of paramount importance to de-escalating this spiralling risk environment. But natural hazard preparedness remains chronically undervalued. Politically, it just isn't seen as sexy. As the Climate Change Commission noted last year, New Zealand still lacks a national funding framework for climate adaptation. An international economic study[1] found that natural hazards have 20 times the economic impact of terrorism and yet, the New Zealand government allocated just $2.7 billion in capital and $563 million in operating funding in the last budget for national security and defence, with a target of increasing our defence spending from just over one percent of GDP to more than two percent in the next eight years. By contrast, countries least affected by climate change, such as Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland have strong governance, advanced infrastructure, renewable energy and climate resilience policies and plans in place. Rather than dedicated investment in climate resilience being a priority for all, it remains fragmented the world over.

Conversely, a report commissioned by insurer IAG found that New Zealand spends, on average, around 0.96 percent of GDP annually on natural hazards – yet the bulk of that spending goes towards recovery efforts following significant events, rather than proactive risk reduction. That's not a small amount, but I would argue that reactive spending is not sustainable. We must shift investment from response to prevention to lower our spending in the long run.

The Independent Reference Group, whose recommendations have been endorsed by the Prime Minister, proposes a shift to a 'beneficiary pays' model, where those that might benefit from an investment should contribute the most financially to the mitigation. In this scenario, central government keeps its powder dry and reserves its spending for protecting Crown assets or supporting initiatives where clear national benefits can be demonstrated. This would enable the Crown to transition away from property buyouts and reduce the level of direct financial support available for individual recovery. In doing so, greater responsibility for climate resilience would be placed on local actors and private beneficiaries.

1. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdfdirect/10.1111/1758-5899.13238

This brings me to our recurrent storm events. Cyclone and storm-induced flood damage creates a lasting economic impact. Prieto and Noy 2024 found that inundation damage has a persistent impact on output due to labour displacement and a decrease in the real value of capital due to asset loss and increased depreciation. The impacts on people and their homes will directly affect business recovery. This stuff isn't rocket science – when communities are displaced and residents leave, rebuilding becomes significantly more difficult – economically, socially and structurally.

We must shift investment from response to prevention to lower our spending in the long run.

So how do we future proof our communities? Having a better understanding of when storm events are coming and how to prepare for them is a good start. In this regard, the Government's recent investments in improving storm radars were a welcome move. But preparation must go further. We need sustained investment in critical infrastructure, including flood protection systems and road engineering, which the National Infrastructure Strategy should help support. Forest owners have supported the idea of introducing tax mechanisms that empower local government to fund adaptation efforts.

Without an objective understanding of how these events affect our landscapes, infrastructure and communities, we can't prepare for or mitigate future risks effectively.

Through local government reforms, targeted rates could be used to finance flood protection or other resilience measures, with communities having a say in how and where these are built. There are also opportunities for adaptation finance tools. David Hall's 2022 paper outlines the potential of adaptation finance mechanisms such as resilience credits. These are now being explored as part of the Government's broader nature credits programme. Clever financial innovation can help us access capital and reduce exposure to climate extremes.

Underpinning all of this is the ongoing need for robust data and constant learning. The forest growing industry is already working with central and local governments, the wood council, and forestry companies in the Top of the South, to learn more from the July storm events. This kind of partnership is critical. Without an objective understanding of how these events affect our landscapes, infrastructure and communities, we can't prepare for or mitigate future risks effectively.

If we can innovate not just in our response to these storm events but also evolve the financial instruments we use to support our transitions, New Zealand will be able to grow and thrive in an increasingly volatile and climate-challenged world.

Natural hazards have
20 times
the economic impact of terrorism

Average insured losses rose by
5.9%
annually between 1994 and 2023

Dr Elizabeth Heeg, FOA Chief Executive

A green neighbour in action

In an era when sustainability reports often read more like polished PR brochures than genuine reflections of environmental progress, Pan Pac Forest Products' 2025 report, *A Sustainable Future Together*, manages to strike a different tone.

It doesn't claim perfection or front with lofty net-zero jargon. Instead, it presents a company quietly and deliberately reshaping what it means to be a good corporate citizen. More specifically, a green neighbour within its community.

Pan Pac has been part of the Hawke's Bay landscape for over five decades, with operations in Whirinaki and Milburn that are as much part of the region's identity as its orchards and coastline. But its vision is clearly evolving.

The company isn't content with being just a producer of wood products – it wants to lead by example, not only in forestry management, but in how it lives alongside the people and environment it depends on.

This year's report is framed around a simple but powerful ambition: to grow responsibly.

Pan Pac's growth targets are carefully underpinned by a framework that integrates sustainability, health and safety and community wellbeing as essential – not optional – foundations of growth. It's a refreshing counter-narrative to the "growth at all costs" ethos still prevalent across many an industry.

That ethos was tested by Cyclone Gabrielle in 2022. When the storm hit, Pan Pac's Whirinaki site was submerged under more than two metres of water and 750,000 cubic metres of silt. Many businesses would have cut their losses. Pan Pac did the opposite, investing more than $300 million into recovery efforts – where they cleaned up, rebuilt and stayed. All the while remaining committed to supporting and retaining its full suite of staff.

Environmental stewardship is clearly central to Pan Pac's strategy. The company holds longstanding Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) certification – an important signal that its forestry practices are audited, credible and internationally recognised. Last year, 100 percent of logs harvested came from certified, responsibly managed forests. Water use is also being tackled with intent: in 2024 alone, Pan Pac reduced freshwater consumption per tonne of pulp by nearly 11 percent and implemented upgrades to wastewater systems to further minimise impact on surrounding ecosystems.

But the numbers only tell part of the story. What distinguishes Pan Pac's approach is its deep embedding in local culture and community. Through the Pan Pac Environmental Trust, the company allocates up to $100,000 each year to regional environmental and cultural projects ranging from reforestation to iwi partnerships. Since 1992, over $4 million has been donated to local causes, including the Hawke's Bay Helicopter Trust and the kiwi conservation programme at Lake Opouahi. These aren't box-ticking exercises – they're deliberate choices to be a long-term partner in the region's future.

Like any industrial operation, Pan Pac has its environmental footprint but is responding to such questions publicly – backing its claims with action and investment.

If there's a lesson in this year's report, it's this: being a sustainable business isn't just about carbon counts and circular economies – it's about relationships.

↑ Concrete armoured deck that will withstand overtopping in high flows

With land, with people, with community. Pan Pac, for all its scale, appears to understand this deeply and in doing so, it offers a model of what genuine environmental leadership looks like.

In a time when "sustainability" is often reduced to a buzzword, Pan Pac's grounded, community-first approach stands out. The report makes no grandiose claims of perfection – instead it presents a principled, transparent account of progress and priorities. And in Hawke's Bay and beyond, this is how a green neighbour should be.

Read Pan Pac's 2025 Sustainability Report here

Planting for the planet – The case for carbon forests

As the *Climate Change Response (Emissions Trading Scheme – Forestry Conversion) Amendment Bill* moves through Parliament, opposition to carbon forestry is reaching a crescendo. It is timely to take stock of why carbon forests exist and the broader benefits they provide.

Carbon forestry refers to planting trees as a public-good service to sequester carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, with an end-goal of slowing climate change. Carbon sequestered by forests plays an important role in helping us to meet our international obligations under the Paris Agreement and can be sold locally through the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) to emitters, creating a market-based incentive to reduce emissions.

Most carbon forests are comprised of exotic tree species, particularly *Pinus Radiata* due to its superior growth rate and capacity to store more carbon in a shorter time frame than most other species, especially natives. This is about creating a tool in the climate response toolkit that works quickly and efficiently.

Importantly, growing trees for carbon sequestration and growing trees for timber production are not mutually exclusive.

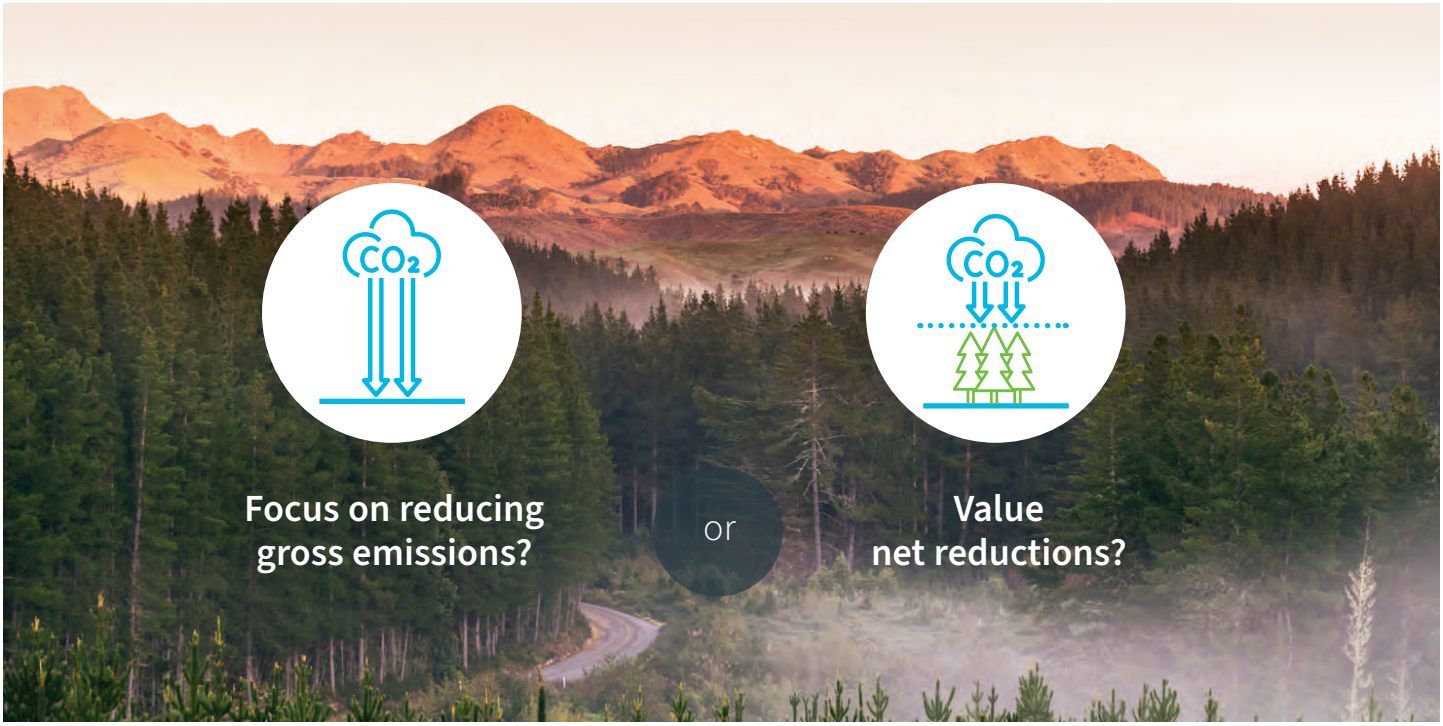
> **This is about creating a tool in the climate response toolkit that works quickly and efficiently.**

While there is limited hard data, anecdotal evidence suggests much of the recent forest planting is for both carbon income and eventual harvest. That dual purpose is both practical and strategic.

The carbon market is a policy construct vulnerable to political whim. Production forestry, on the other hand, is a long-term commodity investment. Relying solely on carbon revenue would be risky. Instead, the income offered through carbon credits can provide critical, early cash flow for tending of a forest to maximise harvest value and support management activities.

In other words, carbon income is not the cake, it's the icing.

While there has been an increase in carbon forestry since 2018, it tends to have been concentrated in particular areas and has not been as widespread as is often reported. Whole-farm conversions have accounted for most of the expansion, with a proportion of



these involving overseas investors. This has caused a degree of angst in the rural sector – although it needs to be noted that the total area of exotic forest now is not that much greater than two whole decades ago.

If we look at the figures from the latest Orme and Associates report[1], by 2024, whole-farm conversions had decreased by over 50 percent from peak conversion in 2022 and are continuing to trend down in 2025. Conversions are now at the lowest rate we've seen in almost six years.

The Bill currently before Parliament is a direct response to lobbying by farmer organisations. It proposes to restrict what land can be registered in the ETS. Landowners would be permitted to plant up to 25 percent of their Land Use Class 1 – 6 land in forest for ETS purposes. Whole-farm conversions would face a complete moratorium on LUC class 1 – 5 land (i.e., cropping and better-quality pastoral land) and a hard cap of 15,000 ha per year of new planting on LUC Class 6 land (good-to-average pastoral land). Class 7 and 8 land – poorer quality pastoral land and steeper "tiger country" respectively – remain unrestricted.

Even so, some farming groups argue that the Bill does not go far enough. They want the moratorium extended to include Class 6 land as well. This would effectively push any future expansion of corporate forestry that wishes to register in the ETS onto Class 7 – land which is highly marginal even for production forestry. Such a move severely constrains the viability, let alone expansion, of a sector that has grown to become New Zealand's fifth largest export earner. Needless to say, the corporate side of town is not happy.

Climate change is accelerating as feedback loops kick in: melting permafrost, shrinking sea ice, and warming oceans all add to the urgency.

There is a broader philosophical debate here. Should we focus on reducing *gross* emissions – cutting what we put into the atmosphere? Or should we also value net reductions, which include removals via carbon sinks like forests?

Some environmental voices insist on an exclusive focus on gross reductions, especially from fossil fuels. While that's the long-term goal, it ignores political and economic reality. Changing consumption patterns in free-market economies built on fossil fuel dependence is a slow process. Carbon removals, particularly from forestry, buy us time.

In terms of impact on global warming, the source of the reduction doesn't matter. A tonne of carbon is a tonne of carbon – regardless of whether it comes from lower emissions or more sequestration.

1. https://beeflambnz.com/knowledge-hub/PDF/land-use-change-pastoral-farming-large-scale-forestry.pdf

Nature-based removals include things such as afforestation and reforestation, wetland and peatland preservation, adoption of farming methods that increase soil carbon, and protecting coastal ecosystems that trap carbon in underwater biomass.

Of these, forestry is a proven, cost-effective and immediately scalable option. We can plant a forest today and it will begin sequestering carbon from the atmosphere tomorrow.

There is also the prospect of engineered removals, such as direct air capture and underground storage of carbon dioxide – but these techniques are still in the early stages of development and likely to be expensive.

New Zealand has a natural comparative advantage in carbon forestry. Our hill country, much of it lower-productivity farmland, is well suited to trees. Many of these landscapes were once forested and would benefit from reforestation, both environmentally and economically.

We also have fast-growing exotics like *Pinus radiata* and a well-developed forestry sector. Forestry is a "get-out-of-jail-free" card in our climate change mitigation deck – something other nations can only dream of.

Natives, while preferred by many, are slower growing and far more expensive to establish. Having evolved without any browsing pressure, they tend to be more susceptible to pest damage too, particularly from possums and deer. Exotics offer a rapid and proven solution – and have the potential to act as a nurse crop for future native regeneration.

When it comes to climate change, timing matters. The benefit to society of reducing or removing a tonne of carbon *now is* far greater than doing so in 10 or 20 years. Climate change is accelerating as feedback loops kick in: melting permafrost, shrinking sea ice and warming oceans all add to the urgency.

This is why near-term removals from forestry are so valuable. Not only is forestry a cost-effective and immediately scalable option, it also delivers real, bankable reductions when we need them most.

Exotics offer a rapid and proven solution – and have the potential to act as a nurse crop for future native regeneration.

To the critics that argue carbon forestry threatens export earnings – it is more likely to have the opposite impact. Remember that, on top of carbon income, a reasonably large proportion of carbon forest will be harvested and exported as logs and lumber. Or be used as biofuel, substituting for imported fossil fuels. This switch is already starting to happen in the likes of Fonterra's processing plants. Moreover, if we fail to meet our Paris Agreement targets, New Zealand is obligated to buy overseas carbon credits, draining foreign exchange. Worse still, our trade agreements with the EU and UK directly link climate compliance to market access. Backing out of our climate commitments would come at serious cost to market access. Longer term, if we develop a carbon surplus at national level, we can sell this surplus on the international market.

There is also the argument that carbon forestry threatens food security, pushing against the general intent of the Paris Agreement. Yes, increased forest planting *might* displace a minor proportion of land used for food production. This is almost entirely high-value red meat production that is sold into affluent and well-nourished (even over-nourished) markets. In reality, the marginal impact on food supply due to carbon forestry in our country is not going to make any difference to food security, nationally or internationally.

Carbon forests should be viewed as an economically rational addition to our land use story that comes with co-benefits for climate, biodiversity and soil conservation. It is a legitimate land use and it is entirely appropriate that forest owners should be rewarded financially for these benefits.

Changing land use is an integral part of a functioning market economy. In New Zealand, land use has been evolving for well over a century. In my own small hill country farming community, we have seen sawmills, a small seeds industry and smallholder dairying come and go over the past 125 years. Properties have been progressively amalgamated into larger economic units. The rural labour force has declined dramatically as capital has substituted for labour. The local store has closed, our local primary school is no more and the church has been deconsecrated.

The proposed legislation may be a useful pause to allow better planning – but it also presents a real opportunity for farmers. It tilts the playing field in farmers' favour by permitting them to convert up to 25 percent of their farm to carbon forestry, as of right and irrespective of the LUC class. This leaves the door wide open to farmer participation in the ETS; establishment of on-farm forestry sinks to meet the increasing carbon-neutral demands of major international customers of our dairy and meat industries; and as insurance for the day we are held to account for on-farm emissions.

If anything, the next phase of the debate should focus less on whether carbon forestry is good or bad and more on how we reward those who deliver the environmental services it provides. Whether it's through the ETS or another mechanism, one thing is clear: we need carbon forestry and we need to get the settings right.

Richard Holloway is an agricultural economist and farm-forester with 280ha of mixed species production forest registered in the ETS.

From forest floor to nursery door: The journey of Enivo Pots

At just 18, Wellington-born Elisa Harley is on the brink of a breakthrough. Her startup, Enivo Pots, crafts biodegradable plant containers from primary industry residues, offering an innovative solution to a pressing problem – some 350 million plastic pots and trays wasted by New Zealand nurseries and gardeners each year.

Elisa's vision began at age 12 selling succulents and native plants through her fledgling nursery venture.

"I had a business growing native plants from seeds which left me with hundreds of different types of plastic plant pots," explains Elisa. "I'd connected with local nurseries which showed me the scale of the problem – not just hundreds, but millions of wasted pots, most of which can't be recycled."

The solution to this problem came to Elisa during a family road trip.

"I saw forestry waste as we were driving and I thought, surely all that raw material left over could be put to better use?" Elisa says. "I remembered all the plastic pots I had blowing around in my garden back home and decided to see if forestry waste could be used to create biodegradable alternatives."

At the time Elisa was participating in *GirlBoss Edge: Primary Industries*, a leadership accelerator programme offering upskilling and mentoring to aspiring young women passionate about a career in primary industries.

"I officially started the process of creating Enivo Pots at the beginning of 2023, using the idea I had developed through the *GirlBoss* courses," Elisa says. "Once I identified primary industry residues as a resource that would be readily available, the challenge became how to process that raw material into products."

From the beginning, Elisa was adamant on crafting the pots in New Zealand using locally sourced materials and innovation.

"When I first pitched the idea, quite a few people told me to produce the pots overseas," she says. "If I'd done that, I'd probably have them in production by now – but for me, making them locally was non-negotiable."

Support from the Young Enterprise Scheme enabled Elisa to seek out technical expertise to help bring the Enivo Pots vision to life, leading her to approach Scion.

> **"If a young person reaches out to you for a coffee to chat about an idea, always say yes. You never know where it might lead."**

"I got such a boost from how seriously they took me," Elisa says. "I ended up doing a half-day visit to their Rotorua labs, where they had the technology to test pulp moulding. From there, things started moving."

Harvesting radiata pine typically generates relatively large volumes of residual material – that is, bark, treetops and branches – which comprise around 15 to 20 percent of the total harvested volume.

"I visited a sawmill to see first-hand how timber is processed," Elisa says. "I got to see the byproducts of the process like sawdust and woodchips and it got me thinking that surely we can apply the pulping process to these other, coarser residue materials to make products like pots and trays that don't need to be as refined."

The plan is to pilot **10,000** **pots** in nurseries across the country to gather data.

Elisa worked with Scion scientists on four rounds of prototyping. Using existing moulds, they made their first usable samples, sent them to nurseries to pilot and incorporated their feedback to refine the design. Eventually, further funding allowed Elisa and the team to develop a custom-sized mould.

"Last year we tested four different sizes of Enivo Pots in nurseries," she says. "Staying close to the nurseries is essential as their feedback shapes the process as they know what works and what doesn't."

Elisa attended the annual New Zealand Plant Producers' conference in Hamilton last year where she brought along the prototypes.

"A lot of nursery managers were in attendance and everyone was so excited. It just makes sense – we shouldn't be planting trees in pots that create more plastic waste," she says.

↑ Elisa (front) and the team of Scion engineers with the Gen 3 Enivo pots they developed

Although the pots aren't on the market yet, nurseries are lining up to take part in the next trial, which is set to begin in late 2025. The plan is to pilot 10,000 pots in nurseries across the country to gather data on performance and practicality.

"If all goes well, I hope to have commercial production set up next year with pots ready for the market by the end of 2026. Producing them in New Zealand makes it harder but it's the right thing to do."

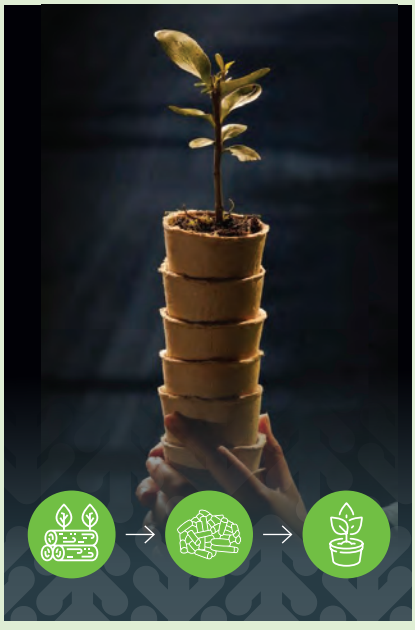
Enivo Pots are already earning widespread recognition, including awards from the Todd Foundation, the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment and the Ministry for Primary Industries. In 2023 Elisa was honoured as the Youth Wellingtonian of the Year.

Despite the accolades, Elisa downplays the spotlight.

"I don't place too much importance on the awards; it's the learnings and experience that are priceless to me," she says. "The people I've been able to meet and the opportunities I've been given have changed my life, bringing me to where I am today.

"I am so grateful for the people in the industry, at school and at home who supported my ideas. I don't want my story to be a one-off. I want other young people to know it could happen to them too.

"If a young person reaches out to you for a coffee to chat about an idea, always say yes. You never know where it might lead."



↑ Enivo pot stack

Feature

Urgent timber salvage operation underway in Tasman

↑ Initial windthrow estimates following the July storm grew from 4000-ha of affected forest to 7500+ ha.

Harvesting thousands of hectares of windthrown forest in Tasman and processing it within a short time frame is proving to be a challenging logistical and operational exercise for the local forest industry.

The July storm came hard on the heels of another high-rainfall event that had already saturated soils. Then, strong winds from a different direction to the usual prevailing wind proved too much for entire hillsides of trees. Videos show blocks of trees slowly toppling as they lost the protection of the trees around them, leaving great swathes of windthrow in some areas.

Tasman Pine Forests executive director Steve Chandler says the company has 1200 hectares of trees on the ground, but to recover those trees will likely require clear-felling up to 3000 hectares.

"You have to square off boundaries because you might leave a patch here and a patch there and it will all be exposed now to the weather and will probably go over as well," Steve says. "There's quite a lot of planning [that] goes into it – what do you take and what windthrow do you leave behind, so it's a bit of a head scratcher at times. But we'll get there."

> **It means processing more than two years' worth of timber in 18 months.**

Most of the trees have blown over rather than snapped, with part of the root plate still in the ground, which Steve says offers a little longer window to recover them.

"In volumes, we have approximately 350,000t of salvageable windthrow that's 19 years or older. But because it's in patches, it will need to be harvested in conjunction with around 500,000t of green standing trees.

"To put that in context, the windthrow volume we are dealing with is approximately 60 percent of our annual planned harvest volume."

The economic loss will depend on how long the windthrown trees stay green.

To get the salvage done, Tasman Pine has brought in three additional local crews. Steve says many contractors have temporarily stopped harvesting standing trees to help with the windthrow around the region. Despite this, it's likely there will be an increase in harvest cost due to productivity being reduced when the trees are extracted.

Likewise, at OneFortyOne, crews are working through what corporate affairs manager, Kylie Reeves, describes as an urgent salvage situation, prioritising several thousand hectares before the timber deteriorates.

> **I think at the end of the day, the big pinch point will be just making sure we can get good overseas markets for this material**

It means processing more than two-years-worth of timber in 18 months and Kylie says it's not the best timing for forest companies.

"This storm occurred during one of the weakest domestic and export markets in decades," Kylie says. "When you have a weak domestic market and there's this sudden influx of timber, they are going to be reluctant to take on that extra stock. It's tricky."

While forest companies pick up the windthrown logs, Steve from Tasman Pine predicts an oversupply of chip logs, much of which will likely be converted into smaller export logs.

"I think at the end of the day, the big pinch point will be just making sure we can get good overseas markets for this material because if we can't do that, we're not in good shape," Steve says. "The local domestic processors can only take so much. They can't really gear up much more than they are in the current markets, but we can still get wood into China and into India and that's where a lot of this wood will have to go."

Wood Processors and Manufacturers Association chief executive, Mark Ross, says it's fortunate the Top of the South has a number of core wood processing facilities which produce $158 million worth of processed forest products each year.

"Having the wood processors there is a [crucial] part of the equation, so it's really important that they [the whole industry] work together and support each other."

His comments come as the region prepares for more change, following the just announced proposal to close the Eves Valley sawmill as part of a consolidation of assets by Carter Holt Harvey. New Zealand's wood processing capacity will not be lost, rather, assets will be redirected to the Bay of Plenty. While it is too early to say, it is hoped that some of the 142 workers that stand to be affected will be employed by neighbouring mills in the Nelson-Tasman region. While national wood processing levels are not expected to be significantly affected, this proposed change could mark another transition for the local sector.

Mark says processors are still assessing the long-term effects of both the storm and this recent news on log deliveries, production schedules and how this will affect export commitments. On top of their usual log supply commitments, Mark says wood processors are under pressure to process large volumes of windthrown timber, stretching capacity and resources. Then there's the uncertainty about whether the "teenage" logs harvested now will create a supply gap in the future.

If there's a cost increase for the mills to access, transport or process the windthrown logs, this could undermine the economic viability of salvage too, says Mark, costing mills more when timber markets are already weak.

While forest companies had to assess damage and adapt harvesting plans following the storm, Kylie says community engagement remained a top priority. Being able to access high-resolution aerial imagery helped OneFortyOne identify damage to neighbouring properties, allowing the company to proactively connect with neighbours through phone calls or a visit.

Information was shared across various community Facebook pages. Kylie says it was a good way of responding to questions and addressing misinformation about forests and storm damage without being defensive.

OneFortyOne held three community drop-in sessions around the regions with other forest owners, transport companies and the local council, providing an opportunity to engage with residents and the wider community directly.

"We had about 50 people attend those sessions," says Kylie. "Some had specific questions about their property, some were curious and wanted to chat and there were some who were devastated by their own losses and it was a chance to talk with someone.

"It was good for us to see how the community was impacted."

Most of the damage in forests was caused by windthrow, exacerbated by saturated soils. The use of best forestry practices meant there was not a great deal of slash either. Steve says a survey combining aerial imaging and random plot analysis along Nelson-Tasman beaches revealed about five percent of the total debris found was from harvest residues. The remaining debris was a combination of non-plantation trees – such as willows, poplars and eucalypts – native tree and other timber, the likes of fence posts, apple crates and firewood, which far exceeded the total debris identified from forestry operations. Steve attributes this to the work being done in forests to reduce slash.

"We have been moving harvesting slash away from the edge of landings for about ten years and the company has been held up as a shining light in terms of best forestry practices for managing harvesting slash," Steve says. "That comes at some cost. We cart it away to stable areas where it won't mobilise. We try and pick everything up from the harvesting site as well – of any size – so, if we get a major event there's virtually nothing that can mobilise. That really has paid dividends in an event like this.

"We have the added advantage that we have markets for chip logs and smaller bin wood and even some of the slash for wood pellets. So, having established markets is really a blessing and something to our advantage as well."

Looking to the future, Steve says Tasman Pine will look at shorter rotations and potentially modifying the silviculture regime on some of the wind-prone blocks. In the July storm, it was the older, larger trees that blew over. He says they could look at harvesting those areas when the trees were 18 years old instead of 26. The logs would not be the same value, but they could grow one-and-a-half rotations of trees compared with one rotation of older trees.

"We could also modify our silviculture regime and have the trees more open in terms of stocking and maybe a little bit more pruning could help. There's a whole lot of things we're continuing to look at to make our trees more resilient."

One forestry blocks covering 120 hectares in the Motueka Valley will be retired as it sits on erodible granite soils which are no longer sustainable for big trees. Replanting in natives is not a solution either as it's likely they will be lost to erosion too, Steve says.

Small woodlot owners face a difficult road ahead too, attempting to recover fallen trees without the infrastructure larger companies have in place after two or three rotations.

While the storm has presented new challenges for the industry, it has also highlighted the resilience and adaptability of those within it.

Jo and Tim Leyland, small-scale forest owners near Tapawera, lost about 65 percent of their 11 hectares of *Pinus radiata* during the second storm. The couple bought the 65-hectare property 16 years ago. The pines are now 23 years old and were destined for harvest soon to fund their retirement.

The Leylands live in an area that took the full impact of the two weather events, delivering two 100-year floods within two weeks. Jo says it was the second storm with wind that blew the trees over and then more went in a third, smaller rain event shortly after.

"We were anticipating harvesting them in about four years and that's our retirement money," says Jo. "We're exploring what the options are [now] and getting a better picture of what we should be doing."

Despite the need to get the windthrow off the ground to protect the quality of the timber, the river flats against the Motueka River are a priority for clearing and resurrecting fences for stock, helped by the Ministry of Social Development's *Enhanced Taskforce Green* programme.

That's their immediate focus and in the meantime, they have been sourcing advice from the local Farm Forestry Association about the windthrow and the remaining standing trees.

"A lot of our trees have gone over with the rootball so we have a little bit more time," Jo says. "But we would like to get them off as fast as we can."

Just when and how they deal with the windthrow, and the remaining trees, is yet to be worked out. They have one track into the trees which are spread over three steep areas and access to the top of the hill is difficult, so more tracks will have to be put in. Then it will be a matter of finding crews. Jo is hoping they will be able to work in conjunction with larger neighbouring forest owners when they clear their windthrow.

"There's a whole lot of things we're continuing to look at to make our trees more resilient."

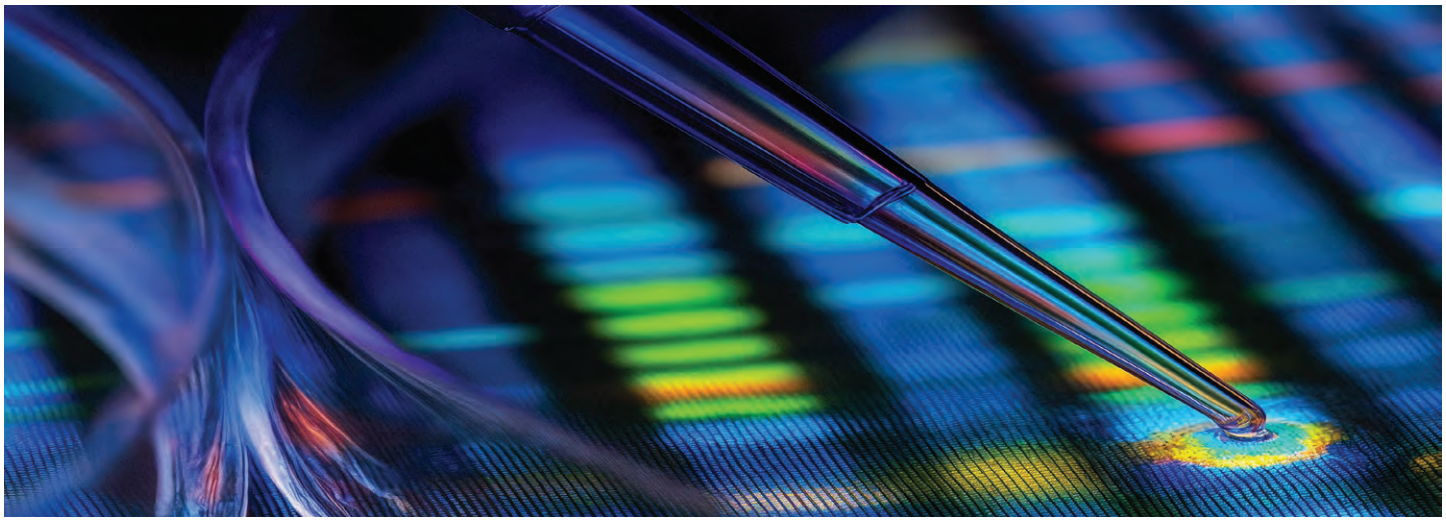
Once the trees are out, the next decision will be around replanting. Jo says they are unlikely to replant radiata because of their shallow roots and the risks of them toppling again. They're looking at what would be the best option for the land. Douglas-fir is a possibility, or redwoods – which would be for the next generation.

While the storm has presented new challenges for the industry, it has also highlighted the resilience and adaptability of those within it. The hard work of salvage and recovery will take time, but the industry's focus on sustainable practices and collaboration with local communities will be crucial for long-term recovery.

As smaller and larger forest owners alike navigate the storm's aftermath, the collective effort to restore and protect these vital landscapes will shape the future of the region's forestry sector.

Feature

Turning the gene tide on wilding pines



↑ GE macro gel on chart. Image, Scion

Wilding conifers have long been seen as an ecological and economic challenge. As New Zealand considers reforms to its gene editing laws, a timely opportunity has emerged for forestry to lead the way in reshaping how we confront wilding conifers to mitigate their impact and unlock value.

Much of the current concern revolves around the uncontrolled spread of wilding conifers across landscapes where they don't belong – invading tussock grasslands, regenerating bush and high-country pasture. The narrative often points a finger at forestry, particularly radiata pine and Douglas-fir plantations, for the encroachment. But this is a simplification that fails to acknowledge the historical roots of the issue.

Most wilding conifers don't originate from commercial forests, but from legacy plantings – shelter belts, erosion control blocks, farmland and Crown land plantings dating back to the mid-twentieth century. Many of these were sown with species like lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*) – a species not grown for commercial timber production – and Corsican pine (*Pinus nigra*). While Corsican pine has been harvested commercially in some areas, it is a minority species and not commercially replanted. Douglas-fir was also sown and has since been identified as one of the species with the highest risk for wilding spread. Forest owners have responded to this risk by removing many Douglas-fir blocks and opting not to replant them. Today, Douglas-fir makes up less than five percent of the national plantation forest estate. Unmanaged legacy plantings, often poorly sited and unregulated, are the true origin of much of the seed source now driving wilding spread.

> **Balanced, ongoing dialogue – with visible scientific, ethical and regulatory perspectives – will be key to gaining broad, long-term acceptance.**

Commercial forests, particularly radiata pine plantations, are managed under strict regulatory regimes, including control requirements for wilding spread set out in the National Environmental Standard for Commercial Forestry (NES-CF). Since its introduction in 2018, the NES-CF has required all proposed commercial forest species to undergo a wilding risk assessment using the Wilding Tree Risk (WTR) Calculator. This tool assigns a risk score indicating the likelihood of wilding spread, which must be submitted to the local council as part of the approval process. Species with high risk scores, such as Douglas-fir, are typically not permitted for planting. As a result, the Wilding Tree Risk Calculator has effectively halted new plantings of Douglas-fir in commercial forests since 2018.

Forestry's naysayers may continue to highlight the visual encroachment of pines on public land, but the sector's response is increasingly one of accountability, collaboration and innovation. Many foresters are involved in wilding control efforts directly and through regional partnerships. Some have even been clever enough to monetise the problem. Wilding conifers, where dense and accessible enough, can be harvested for firewood, biofuel, mulch, or low-grade milling.

1. https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/tackling-wilding-pines-boost-resilience
2. https://www.scionresearch.com/news-and-events/news/2025-news-and-media-releases/world-leading-gene-editing-research-will-benefit-nz

↑ Gene-edited *pinus radiata*. Image, Scion

Several community groups and rural entrepreneurs have built side businesses around the removal and repurposing of wildings, turning them into a product.

In parallel, the Government has spent over $150 million in the last decade[1] trying to combat wilding conifers, mostly through a resource-intensive approach of mechanical removal and chemical treatment.

And yet, science offers a preventive alternative: gene edited, potentially sterile trees, that are hoped to grow but not spread seeds. Scion has already launched a world-first field trial of gene-edited conifers earlier this year with part of the trial focused on achieving sterile Douglas-fir[2]. Yet legacy regulations under the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms (HSNO) Act 1996 mean these potentially sterile conifers – developed using CRISPR editing to knock out reproductive genes – have remained grounded by law, ironically unable to grow past coning which is required to confirm sterility.

The irony is striking. Millions spent suppressing wildings, while there's technology that's legally sidelined which could be the solution to enabling a high-performing primary industry to continue producing quality wood while minimising environmental risk.

This long-awaited reform of gene technology regulations presents an opportunity to finally overcome these barriers. If passed, the reforms would allow forestry to develop and deploy sterile tree stock, beginning with Douglas-fir and potentially radiata pine. This technology has transformative potential.

By rendering trees incapable of producing viable cones or pollen, we can significantly reduce wilding risk without compromising productivity or forest health.

Industry stakeholders – including the Forest Owners Association – have voiced strong support for the reform. Allowing for the safe use of genetic technologies could enable forestry to create sterile Douglas-fir and radiata pine – trees that grow but do not produce cones or pollen – enabling them to be planted back in areas currently considered too high risk of wilding spread. In turn, these genetically modified trees would pose low to no wilding risk, reducing wilding control costs and allowing for more targeted use of resources to address sources of legacy populations.

The redirection of energy from reproduction to wood production could boost productivity too, with early analysis suggesting gains of up to ten percent per breeding cycle.

There's also potential to breed trees with disease resistant properties and a durable timber profile that grow under a variety of climates and conditions.

With the Government aiming to have a new Gene Technology Regulator in place by the end of 2025, forestry will need to take a proactive approach if we want to see and benefit from the change.

From a certification and market readiness perspective, the industry will need to navigate global certification bodies' definitions of genetic technologies to ensure our product continues to have market access.

If gene editing is to move from trial to transformation, substantial investment will be required to better understand market requirements and the infrastructure to support this change. Current industry processes are not yet equipped to support this shift.

Earning public trust throughout this process will be critical.

Gene editing is not genetic modification as the public once understood it. Many of these techniques mirror changes that could occur naturally or through decades of selective breeding, but with precision, efficiency and scientific oversight.

Proactive engagement that's sensitive to New Zealand's unique social, cultural and regulatory context will be central to building an understanding of these genetic technologies, the opportunities they present and establishing trust.

The Wilding Tree Risk Calculator has effectively **halted new plantings of Douglas-fir** in commercial forests since 2018.

Acknowledgement of both enthusiasm and reservations will be central. While many stakeholders see gene editing as a tool for climate resilience and forest stewardship, others raise valid concerns about uncertain market implications, brand reputation and ethical stewardship. Balanced, ongoing dialogue – with visible scientific, ethical and regulatory perspectives – will be key to gaining broad, long-term acceptance.

The pending genetic technology reform is a litmus test for how New Zealand wants to approach forestry's future. A vote for sterile stock is a vote for climate resilience, landscape protection and low-carbon growth in which forestry stands to be part of the solution.

Forestry's challenges not unique to New Zealand

New Zealand Forest Owners Association (NZFOA) environment manager Rachel Millar completed the first half of her international study tour last year, delving into global best practices and innovative approaches to sustainable forest management.

The knowledge gained is helping seed important conversations on how New Zealand's forest sector might collectively improve its practices, strengthen resilience and foster economic growth in the face of increasingly volatile climatic events.

Funded predominantly by the WIDE Trust, the tour focused on lessons from countries that are developing climate adaptation strategies – insights that are proving crucial as New Zealand works to enhance its "licence to operate" in an evolving environmental landscape. Rachel first met with a team of Australian scientists in April 2024, looking at the work they are doing with the Forest Practices Authority (FPA) in Tasmania – developing and implementing an impressive system of state-wide, science-based rules for forest practices.

"The FPA administer the system for Forest Practices Plans (FPPs) in the region," Rachel says. "The rules are easily interpreted by regulators and predictably applied by practitioners while being flexible enough to cover site-specific plans for most situations."

These FPPs have become a legal requirement for any entity intending to carry out forest practices within Tasmania and prescribe how planned forest practices will be conducted.

Forest Practice Officers, trained, audited and supported by the FPA, write 75 percent of FPPs. For more complex cases – such as geologically unstable sites or sites with vulnerable native biodiversity – subject matter experts from the FPA support practitioners with bespoke plan design.

↑ Community foresters with Rachel Millar (third from right) in Pemberton, British Columbia

The focus on social licence by forestry practitioners around the world was even more evident as Rachel's tour progressed.

"The system is independent, relatively self-managing and when challenged in court by the local Environmental non-governmental organisations (ENGOs) was found to be sufficiently robust," Rachel says. "There is a lot we could learn from the FPA in Tasmania. A system like this would serve New Zealand well."

Rachel says the State's investment in science was a standout.

"Tasmania has complete LiDAR coverage and FPPs are underpinned by modern, granular, land management data. It was a stark contrast to the coarse, out-dated and often incorrect Erosion Susceptibility Classification (ESC) system that foresters and council staff alike grapple with in New Zealand."

Rachel also connected with Forico – a world leading early protagonist of natural capital accounting operating largely within the northwest of Tasmania.

"I learnt about their use of natural capital metrics which are featured in Forico's annual reports, detailing their impact and dependencies on the environment," she says. "These reports paint a strong picture of the environmental contribution from the forestry sector and are a powerful tool for improving their social licence to operate."

Capitalising on the metrics we already have could help New Zealand's forest growing industry to tell more of the good news stories, Rachel says.

↑ Landslide remediation with FPA Erriba Tasmania

↑ Klickatat Forest in Washington is mixed land use, shared by ranchers and foresters

"Reporting on natural capital would provide powerful, quantifiable proof of the many benefits production forests offer New Zealand."

The focus on social licence by forestry practitioners around the world was even more evident as Rachel's tour progressed. During her visit to the Northern hemisphere in September, Rachel met with the Forest Products Association of Canada (FPAC), attending an advocacy forum detailing the progress made into social licence from a $4 million Canadian dollar investment (approx. $4.8m NZD). The strategy and digital campaign delivered promoted the benefits of forestry, wood processing and embodied carbon and have helped the public to better understand the connection between forests and the wood products they use.

Reporting on natural capital would provide powerful, quantifiable proof of the many benefits production forests offer New Zealand.

"There is a strong push in the Pacific Northwest (PNW) and Tasmania to build using wood wherever possible, as people highly value the environmental benefits wood provides over other building materials," Rachel says. "This growing demand for wood products has led to the opening of a large, high-tech mill in Mount Vernon, Washington, that I visited. The mill was built in just eight months – from concept to operation.

"People in this part of the world recognise the value of wood products – and the carbon stored within them. They understand that, by using more wood, they're locking away carbon in their buildings and infrastructure.

"The value of wood products is something that is often overlooked by New Zealanders and it's an important message we should actively promote."

↑ Fourth graders visiting one of Port Blakely's education forests in Olympia, Washington

↑ The new Sierra Pacific mill constructed in Mount Vernon, Washington

Forestry companies in the PNW have long understood this and are investing significant resource into community education to raise awareness, Rachel says. Port Blakely organises regular visits for fourth grade students to a forest specifically set up for education purposes, for example.

"At the time of my visit, 110,000 fourth-grade pupils, plus parent helpers and teachers had been shown through the forest," Rachel says. "As a parent of a nine-year-old, I was intrigued to see how engaged these kids were during their visit. They were absorbed in the hands-on tasks that taught them about forests and wood products.

"Whilst forest growers in New Zealand may not have the same level of resources to spend on educational experiences like this, and there is some great work going on through the Discover Forestry programme, there is so much more community engagement we could be doing with pooled investment across the sector."

110,000 fourth-grade pupils had been shown through the forest"

Rachel says she also observed parallels in the history and development of the PNW's forestry rules.

"The Washington Forest Practices were developed over many years by a diverse group including environmental non-governmental organisations (eNGOs), First Nations people, regulators and forestry practitioners.

"Whilst the rules are prescriptive, there has been no litigation in 20 years. Forestry practitioners and eNGOs are generally not in conflict.

"I was reminded of the New Zealand Forest Accord, signed 34 years ago. It's time to revitalise the accord, strengthen relationships and welcome

new organisations into the group to leverage our shared interests and make a positive difference to the environment."

Discussions with our international forest friends also revealed some unique social licence challenges. Foresters in the PNW were particularly perplexed by New Zealand's complex social licence issues, going on to explain that their production forests are multi-use, allowing for grazing of cattle, issuing of hunting leases and the generation of income from timber – which supports further environmental investment in turn.

By comparison land use in New Zealand is compartmentalised. Farmers and foresters are often locked in debates over land allocation This conversation is often intertwined with concerns about overseas investment in our forests and the impact of the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS). Politicians, under public pressure and at times swayed by the angst of losing our iconic sheep, beef and dairy identity, are often forced into creating policies that pick one land use over another. The result is a social licence pressure cooker for forestry, where the interests of farmers and foresters are frequently at odds.

Rachel says one point of similarity discussed at length was the increased intensity of the climatic events that are wreaking havoc across forest estates.

"Wildfire dominated the conversation in most forestry circles," Rachel says. "Whereas wildfire in New Zealand is yet to reach the intensity of what forest sectors across the world are experiencing.

"Forestry operations in the PNW are not only experiencing loss of their estate, they have also been subject to increased scrutiny, with forests in British Columbia (BC) viewed as a net emitter as a result of the fires."

Hearing about the urgency to address climate shifts through adaptive practices like wildfire management and hurricane resilience underscored the need for a more holistic approach.

The British Columbia government was paying $20,000 per hectare to actively manage forests around communities to reduce the speed and intensity of wildfires.

"Forests are now thinned by 30 percent or more and every twig is then raked from the forest floor to reduce the fuel load," Rachel says. "It reminded me of the prescriptive slash limits here."

Hurricanes are becoming just as big a problem for the region, with recent insurance pay-outs to forestry for hurricane damage trumping the amount paid for wildfire damage each year.

Rachel met with foresters in East Texas who are implementing new planting and thinning regimes, trialling different species to mitigate the impacts of windthrow from hurricanes.

"Early results show that the changes being made to mitigate for hurricanes are working," she says. "Such regimes could be explored for New Zealand to generate greater resilience to cyclones or high-intensity winds."

While New Zealand faces its own unique challenges, the tour highlighted that our sector is far from isolated in dealing with the pressures of climate adaptation and social licence.

"By engaging with global counterparts, we have gained invaluable insights into practices that could help shape the future of New Zealand's forestry industry," Rachel says. "From Tasmania's science-based forest management system to the Pacific Northwest's community-driven approach to sustainability, there are clear lessons that could enhance New Zealand's resilience and social licence.

"The importance of a more integrated, multi-use approach to forestry, as seen in the PNW, where timber production, grazing and environmental investment coexist, was a real eye opener for me and is a model that deserves some thought back home.

"Hearing about the urgency to address climate shifts through adaptive practices like wildfire management and hurricane resilience also underscored the need for a more holistic approach."

With the final leg of her study tour to Brazil and Chile scheduled for later this year, Rachel is poised to build on these lessons, bringing a more global perspective to the challenges facing New Zealand's forests.

"I hope that, by the end of the tour, I'll have a diverse set of insights and strategies that forestry can draw from. Tools that can help drive change and advocate for a sector that's not only more resilient but better equipped to navigate whatever complex challenges come our way next."

Feature

Trust in trees – the uphill battle for forestry's reputation

After years of public scrutiny and a whirlwind of policy pivots, New Zealand's forestry sector might finally be seeing the needle shift – just slightly, but significantly.

The latest *Forestry Growers Levy Trust (FGLT) Social Licence to Operate* survey shows that forestry has reached its highest-ever public trust score – 6.8 – tipping us over the rosier side of the reputation scale.

For the first time, we're nearly neck-and-neck with dairy and comfortably on par with aviation – a sector long viewed as both essential and paradoxically, untouchable. That's no small feat.

But before we celebrate, we need to face a hard truth – establishing long-term trust and a respected reputation in forestry is proving to be one of the most difficult challenges the sector has ever faced.

And in 2025, the challenge just got harder.

In late May, Federated Farmers launched its $1 million "*Save Our Sheep*" campaign – an emotionally charged, highly public pushback against forestry, targeting carbon forests in particular. The campaign paints a bleak picture of land use conversion, arguing that the spread of forests is displacing sheep and beef farms, undermining rural livelihoods and reducing New Zealand's capacity for food production.

The impact was immediate and far-reaching. Headlines and media coverage amplified a sense of fear and frustration, especially in farming communities already grappling with tough markets and uncertain futures.

> **Rising public anxiety about land use change is no longer just shaping attitudes – it's shaping policy, squeezing forestry out of long-term land use planning.**

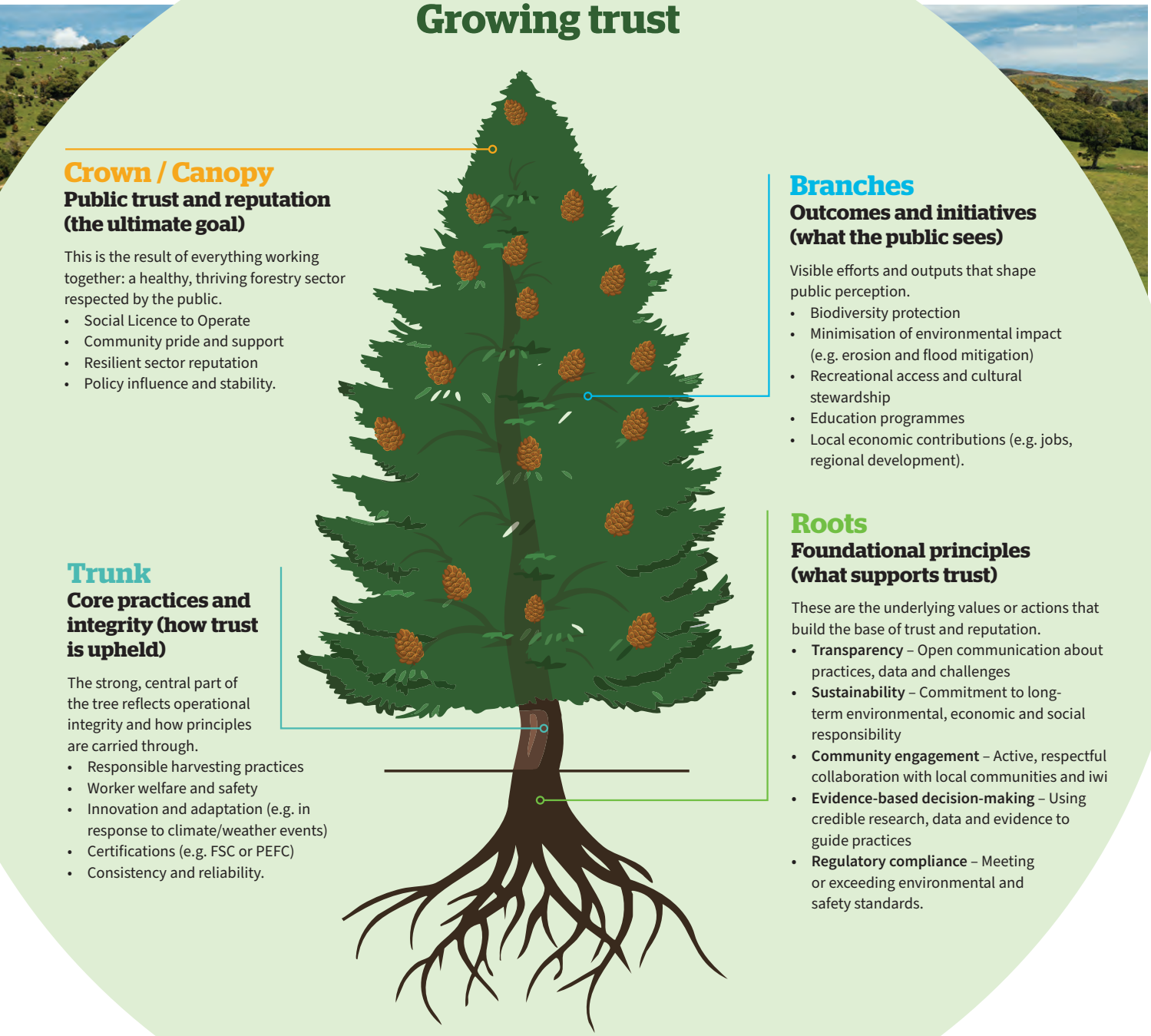
Forestry was framed not as a partner in rural development, but as a threat. A land-hungry competitor contributing to the decline of traditional farming and by extension, rural heritage.

In this climate, trust is difficult to build. Even more difficult to rebuild.

The timing is especially sensitive. Sheep and beef farming – still regarded as the backbone of many rural communities – currently holds a reputation score of 7.0, just ahead of forestry. This narrow gap has become a flashpoint. For some, it's seen as forestry encroaching too far, too fast. For others, it highlights the need to shift the conversation away from competition and toward balance.

And here lies the deeper risk. Rising public anxiety about land use change is no longer just shaping attitudes – it's shaping policy, squeezing forestry out of long-term land use planning.

Growing trust



Crown / Canopy

Public trust and reputation (the ultimate goal)

This is the result of everything working together: a healthy, thriving forestry sector respected by the public.

- Social Licence to Operate
- Community pride and support
- Resilient sector reputation
- Policy influence and stability.

Branches

Outcomes and initiatives (what the public sees)

Visible efforts and outputs that shape public perception.

- Biodiversity protection
- Minimisation of environmental impact (e.g. erosion and flood mitigation)
- Recreational access and cultural stewardship
- Education programmes
- Local economic contributions (e.g. jobs, regional development).

Trunk

Core practices and integrity (how trust is upheld)

The strong, central part of the tree reflects operational integrity and how principles are carried through.

- Responsible harvesting practices
- Worker welfare and safety
- Innovation and adaptation (e.g. in response to climate/weather events)
- Certifications (e.g. FSC or PEFC)
- Consistency and reliability.

Roots

Foundational principles (what supports trust)

These are the underlying values or actions that build the base of trust and reputation.

- **Transparency** – Open communication about practices, data and challenges
- **Sustainability** – Commitment to long-term environmental, economic and social responsibility
- **Community engagement** – Active, respectful collaboration with local communities and iwi
- **Evidence-based decision-making** – Using credible research, data and evidence to guide practices
- **Regulatory compliance** – Meeting or exceeding environmental and safety standards.

In some parts of the country, these fears are restricting forestry not at the margins but at the root – effectively threatening its right to exist. The debate is shifting from how to balance land uses, to who deserves the land in the first place. Unless we reframe the conversation, forestry may continue to be legislated, regulated, or priced out of rural communities altogether.

Yet ironically, our strongest potential allies may already be in our corner. This year's data shows that people involved in primary industries – farmers included – tend to rate forestry more positively than the general population. They understand the realities of land use, economic cycles and diversification. But that nuance is lost in the current debate, where fear is often louder than fact.

The real opportunity lies in changing the frame. Forestry and farming are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they can – and must – work together to strengthen regional economies, protect land and support national emissions goals. The polarising narrative of one replacing the other only holds us back from finding smart, sustainable land use solutions.

This year's survey does offer reasons for hope. More New Zealanders are beginning to see forestry's environmental benefits. Agreement that forestry has a positive environmental impact jumped to 47 percent, while sentiment around post-harvest waste and fire management also improved dramatically. These are significant gains in areas that have long been our weakest links.

Economic value is also climbing as a key driver of positive sentiment. In a difficult economy, people are more likely to appreciate forestry for the jobs, training and income it brings, particularly to rural communities.

But while these practical benefits are increasingly acknowledged, emotional and cultural concerns remain unaddressed.

Many still believe forestry harms waterways, displaces more "valuable" agriculture, or simply doesn't belong. And while fewer respondents now dislike pine forests for not being native, the idea persists that forestry is less aligned with New Zealand's identity than farming is.

A significant number of people continue to question whether forestry is the best use of land, with public support for restrictions on farmland-to-forestry conversions having grown by 17 percent. This is not a minor political issue – it's a live-wire topic that influences regional planning, rural livelihoods, and national carbon budgets.

It's clear that this incessant reputation gap is not just about pine trees. It's a perception problem – not a purpose problem. Forestry is viewed as "productive" and increasingly as being "sustainability-focused", but qualities like "transparent", "caring" or "guardianship" remain among the lowest-scoring traits associated with the sector.

That matters. Because social licence isn't just about what you do – it's about how people feel about what you do.

Nearly 20 percent of people surveyed recalled seeing forestry-related ads in the past year and 60 percent said those ads made them feel more positive about the sector. That's a powerful signal that communication works – but it also shows we're not doing nearly enough of it.

Reputation repair won't come from one advert or campaign or one good news story.

It requires consistent visibility, honest conversations and above all – proof of long-term, responsible land management.

Addressing harvest waste, protecting waterways and planting for permanence – not just profit – will all help our cause. Direct engagement with farmers and rural communities, rather than speaking about or at each other from a distance, will be key to building mutual understanding too.

Of the people who recalled seeing forestry-related ads, **60%** said those ads made them feel more positive about the sector.

Above all, forestry needs to be seen not as a replacement for farming, but as a complementary partner – working alongside agriculture to deliver balanced, sustainable land use.

The path forward is not just political – it's relational. It's about connection, communication and credibility.

The forestry sector is at a crossroads. We've made progress. We're no longer the villain in every environmental headline. But until we are seen as trustworthy land stewards, not just timber growers, the battle for public trust will continue.

And that's a battle we can't afford to lose.

FOREST OWNERS ASSOCIATION

The New Zealand Forestry Bulletin is published three times a year by the New Zealand Forest Owners Association.

Please acknowledge the New Zealand Forest Owners Association as the source when republishing stories or abstracts from the Bulletin.

The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the individual authors and contributors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the New Zealand Forest Owners Association.

Publication date August 2025.

New Zealand Forest Owners Association

93 The Terrace
PO Box 10986, Wellington
Tel: +64 4 473 4769
Website: www.nzfoa.org.nz
Email: admin@nzfoa.org.nz