



MEDIA RELEASE

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Forest owners say Clark Foundation report ignores benefits of forestry

The New Zealand Forest Owners Association (NZFOA) says the just released NZIER report commissioned by the Helen Clark Foundation on New Zealand’s food and fibre exports, fails to appreciate the economic, social and environmental benefits of production forestry.

The [*Pathways to Prosperity report*](#) clings to forestry misconceptions, claiming the sector is a pine ‘monoculture’, producing woody material and sediment in waterways and having a negative impact on rural communities.

Forest Owners Association chief executive, Dr Elizabeth Heeg, says there is evidence to the contrary.

"Forestry shows the greatest growth potential of all primary industries with an increasingly important role in strengthening our rural communities," Dr Heeg says.

"A report from PwC in 2020 found that forestry generated twice the number of jobs per hectare than hill country farming. That’s way outside any margin of error."

"New Zealand’s production forest estate is arguably also the only tool our country has available to meet its 2050 climate change targets."

"Our trees currently offset more than half of the nation’s total carbon emissions. These plantation forests have been solely responsible for reducing gross emissions from 76.8 million tonnes of carbon dioxide down to 55.7 million tonnes."

The lack of appreciation for the scope of worldwide demand for timber and timber products in the future is perhaps the largest failure of the Clark Foundation report.

“Not only will the worldwide demand for timber to replace carbon emitting concrete and steel, rise rapidly in the near future, but so too will the demand for wood-based biofuels and other plastic substitute products increase too,” Dr Heeg says.

“This shift from log exports to higher value forestry bio-products is anticipated to increase the sector’s export value by approximately \$12 to \$19 billion according to the [2023 NZ Product Accelerator report](#).”

The report’s undue emphasis on popular forestry misconceptions also downplays the important role of trees in maintaining a healthy environment.

“The widespread belief there is a monoculture of pines is simply not true,” Dr Heeg says.

“Both forestry and pastoral farming hold important roles in maintaining a mosaic of land uses and both are increasingly planting native vegetation along riparian strips, including sites where it’s too steep to plant trees or farm animals.”

“Both industries have about 15 percent of their area in native vegetation. There is hardly any difference.”

“Production forests are important habitats for supporting Aotearoa’s wildlife too,” Dr Heeg says. “There is strong evidence that native birds such as falcons and kiwi, prefer plantation forests due to greater food availability and the lack of predators, making it a safer environment.”

“Forestry also has a unique role to play in minimising erosion. [Research shows](#) trees and their root systems stabilise the land for long periods, bind the soil and slow slip movement, decrease water runoff and erosion, and help in draining and improving soils.”

“Likewise, our forests effectively filter out water contamination from other land use. These are major issues noted by the Clark Foundation report, but forestry’s role as a water purifier goes unrecognised.”

“It is disappointing that the Helen Clark Foundation and NZIER are exacerbating misconceptions about forestry and missing a major productivity opportunity for New Zealand and its bioeconomy.”

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