

Forestry sector stresses 'right tree, right place' approach as debate over carbon farming continues

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As the debate over carbon farming continues, forestry groups say the solution to the country's afforestation question is planting the "right trees in the right places for the right reasons".

The New Zealand Forest and Wood Sector Forum - a collective of the country's forestry sector representatives - says that means taking a "measured approach to the question of land use".

"Rather than buying a title and saying it will be solely for one use or another, we need to examine the land under the title, and decide what the best use is for each piece of land," the group said in a statement on Tuesday.

"In other words, some hill country farmers would benefit from having some of their land under forest, while some forest land could be better used for food production."

The group said it was important to look at each piece of land in terms of both its primary and multi-use potential, taking into account water resources, environmental considerations, access and proximity to processing or export centres, such as mills and ports.

"For the forestry sector, this means planting a range of forests for a range of reasons, from permanent forests stabilising land and capturing carbon, to forests for manufacture of high-value products, through to short-rotation energy forests. It may also require conversion of some existing production forestry, either into farmland where the land is better used for food production, or into permanent forest / native forest where the terrain or instability of land makes it unsuitable for productive forestry," the group said.

"For the farming sector, this could mean incorporating more forestry into existing properties, to improve income from poor land as well as reap the additional benefits forests can provide such as biodiversity and water protection."

The issue of afforestation has been a cause of debate in the rural sector for a while now, but has made even more headlines after the Emissions Trade Scheme (ETS) was passed last month.

Minister for Climate Change James Shaw called the scheme one of the most effective tools the country has for reducing climate-polluting emissions, but industry groups have expressed concern at some of the reforms.

With New Zealand's goal to be carbon neutral by 2050, the ETS has effectively turned carbon into a currency. People receive credits for planting trees which can then be sold to companies to offset their emissions.

The main fear for many is the bill incentivises the acceleration of productive farmland being converted to pines planted for carbon credits.

Many farmers have said the scheme could lead to the destruction of rural communities as farms disappear in place of pine forests.

But the New Zealand Forest and Wood Sector Forum said if the farming and forestry sectors work together, both could benefit.

"Forestry and farming work best in partnership. A positive, collective outcome will deliver the combined financial, environmental and social benefits from sectors."

Earlier this month Labour pledged to revise rules around the Resource Management Act RMA) if it is reelected in the general election later this year.

The party said it would require consent from the local district council to plant forestry blocks larger than 50 hectares on "elite soils" - those classified as land use capability (LUC) classes 1-5, which means they are more suitable for agricultural production.

Source: <https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/rural/2020/07/forestry-sector-stresses-right-tree-right-place-approach-as-debate-over-carbon-farming-continues.html>