

Mechanical tree planting trial given thumbs up by forestry body

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A trial of mechanical forest planting near Nundle in northern NSW may provide a new solution to bushfire recovery planting programs.

Forestry Corporation of NSW did the trial using equipment made by Risutec in Finland for the first time in Australia.

Mechanical planting has the potential to reduce the need for site preparation as well as increasing planting rates and extending the planting season, the Forestry Corporation's manager of innovation and research Mike Sutton said.

"Mechanical planting could be a way of addressing the extra workload ahead of us in replanting burnt forests while maintaining a safe workplace for our crews and contractors," he said.

"The trial is a partnership between the Forestry Corporation and All Above Reforestation Australia with support from Risutec and Komatsu to explore how planting machinery can complement on-ground crews.

"The trial is a great opportunity to advance the forestry industry's knowledge in this area."

The planting technology offered the chance to extend the planting day by operating at night under lights and planting season (with the option of irrigation), spot site preparation and GPS navigation and tagging of tree planting locations. The 40 hectare trial, across two compartments at Hanging Rock State forest, identified the potential benefits of mechanised planting and ways that the equipment and operations could be improved.

"We look forward to comparing the performance of the machine-planted seedlings with hand planting at the six month survival assessment," Mr Sutton said. "The planting head spot-cultivates at the time of planting, removing the need for separate site preparation.

"The trial was able to demonstrate that the spot cultivation was superior to conventional site preparation - ie ripping followed by 'double-dig' planting with a spade.

"Cultivation, planting and the optional application of herbicide, water and a water-retaining gel is done in one pass."

All Above Reforestation leased the machinery from a NZ business to assess its suitability for use in NSW forests, managing director Shay Radcliffe said.

"Despite some initial teething problems, the planting unit exceeded our expectations."

Forestry Corporation NSW is responsible for managing more than two million hectares of forests across the state including around 240,000 hectares of plantations. Around one quarter of the plantation estate was affected by the 2019-20 bushfire season.

The story Mechanical planting of forest trees has been so good first appeared on Farm Online.

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