

Rural Life

'Right tree, right place' plan proffered

25 April 2022

Environment Southland has proposed a "right tree, right place" policy in response to concerns about forestry taking over pastoral land as climate change bites.

In an extraordinary meeting of the council earlier this month, Environment Southland discussed its response to a document released by the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) which proposes changes to forestry settings in the New Zealand emissions trading scheme (ETS).

The MPI is considering changes to the ETS, including a blanket ban on exotic forestry receiving carbon credits or a ban on nominated exceptions. Keeping the status quo is also being considered.

There is a concern good pastoral land is being eaten up by forestry being planted to earn carbon credits, which have more than doubled in price since June 2020.

Environment Southland suggested a fourth option — a regional response, under which a central government framework would be put in place to enable regions to adopt a "right tree, right place" framework that would be contextualised to local areas.

"Exotic forestry covers a range of different trees and not all of them are bad. In some cases, even the ones that might be classed as bad aren't necessarily bad in the short term," Environment Southland principal adviser Janelle Rees said at the meeting.

The response would ask the ministry to replace the term "exotic" with species-specific terms, highlighting the species that had known environmental risks such as Douglas fir.

Environment Southland said a blanket ban would result in minimal climate change benefits, and maintaining the status quo would be unlikely to lead to behaviour change.

"Emitters would be able to offset 100% of their greenhouse gas emissions from tree planting, reducing overall investment in cleaner energy technologies and behaviour change."

The ministry needed to consider the reason for the reform, questioning whether it would still be able to achieve the 2050 climate change targets set by the New Zealand Government to meet international obligations.

Environment Southland also cautioned against the number of reforms proposed by central government.

"We again want to express our concern about the number of reforms being advanced by central government, the pace at which change is occurring and whether the breadth of reforms is being integrated across a whole-of-government approach.

"We wonder if the proposed options will ultimately achieve climate change outcomes or instead act to protect existing land uses. If the latter, we query if this is the best outcome for New Zealand in the long term."

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