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Disappointment over Lack of Historical Context and Crown's Role within Ministerial Inquiry into Land Use Report

The New Zealand Institute of Forestry (NZIF) expresses deep disappointment in the Ministerial Inquiry into Land Use causing woody debris (including forestry slash) and sediment-related damage in Tairāwhiti and Wairoa; especially in regards to the absence of historical context, the Crown's accountability and the geology of the area.

NZIF President, James Treadwell said “the Ministerial Inquiry has failed to acknowledge the Crown's significant role in promoting the planting of protection forests, subsequently marketing and selling them as harvesting rights to international buyers. Furthermore, the inquiry neglected to recognise the post-cyclone Bola subsidies and support mechanisms provided by the Crown for planting initiatives”

James Treadwell believes the Ministerial Inquiry's report findings is recommending measures which will stop the very activities which are vital for the region's recovery.

“The report fails to examine the region's economic options, nor suggests solutions to mitigate against the effects of climate change, within this highly erodible environment”.

Treadwell says the focus seems to be just on dealing just with forest waste, rather than wider land use issues.

“All land users will be looking at their practices and seeking ways to improve, including forestry, and all land users will need to make changes to ensure the effects of events such as Gabrielle won't occur again.”

“The inquiry seems to have concentrated only on forestry with inadequate coverage of the ongoing impact of pastoral farming and its contribution to sedimentation. While the report briefly mentions the unsustainability of current pastoral farming practices, it disproportionately targets the forestry sector with stricter controls.”

“NZIF agreed changes are required within forest practices, and our submission was very clear on what potential changes should be implemented, however I have a strong concern the inquiry has added to the hyperbole of social media, placing forestry as a scapegoat, and this is stopping the much needed conversation about how to manage the most erodible land in NZ and mitigate downstream effects.”

“Some serious conversations are required, but will not occur if media continues looking for a scapegoat rather than examining the very real issues of highly erodible soils, steep country and humans placing themselves within nature's way.”

Treadwell is concerned at the lack of thought the inquiry has shown for social factors. “All forestry companies harbour important community benefits, generating economic activity.”

“They provide one in four people in the Tairāwhiti region with employment. These companies – whether New Zealand or foreign-owned – must also meet stringent criteria in order to operate.”

“Without the economic activity generated from forestry, jobs will be lost and reinvesting in infrastructure to mitigate against future storms will be incredibly challenging.”

“Regrettably, without a full land used conversation and long term plan, there is likely to be a flight of forestry capital from the East Coast, resulting in significant repercussions for the region.”

“The report broaches the complexity of Tairāwhiti’s landscape and details the aftermath of Cyclone Gabrielle but offers no real or specific solutions to land use problems or mitigating the effects of climate change.”

On average, according to a reports released by the Hawkes Bay Regional Council, over 56% of woody debris deposited within Hawke’s Bay was made upon of willows, poplars, whole radiata trees and native trees and of the remainder only 10% was ‘slash’ being pine which has had a saw go through it – a figure omitted from the report. This highlights the need for a review of all land uses.

“Regardless, the forestry sector accepts its clean-up responsibilities, and most companies are doing all they can to help in Tairāwhiti’s recovery,” James Treadwell says.

NZIF urges all stakeholders involved to reconsider the Inquiries findings and work towards a more balanced, comprehensive, and inclusive approach to address the challenges facing land users within the region.

Contact:

James Treadwell

New Zealand Institute of Forestry

0220 434511

President@nzif.org.nz

www.nzif.org.nz