
Government urged to set aside forest land

The Government should be holding back Department of Conservation land and other Crown lands such as the South Island's high country, to cope with the devastation global warming is likely to wreak on native forests, Auckland University's director of environmental science, Dr Neil Mitchell, says.

Dr Mitchell told the transtasman Greenhouse 94 conference in Wellington that while the final outcome of global warming was not known, it was likely native plant species already in relatively restricted zones would have nowhere to go in 200 years.

New Zealand's kauri forests could become extinct as the climate warmed and carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere doubled and the climate changes accordingly.

The remnants of kauri forest left in Northland would not be able to survive in the warmer, wetter climate that was expected and would not be able to relocate elsewhere fast enough.

The only area likely to have a suitable climate was inland from Gisborne, where the Government is subsidising the planting of pine trees.

"If we look for equivalent climates in the future, when the carbon dioxide level doubles late next century, we find that for many species the areas of suitable climate are immensely reduced," he said.

"Widespread species such as tawa and hard beech – they'll be okay.

"But work I've done on Northland species such as kauri and puriri shows the only suitable locations for them are going to be over towards the East Coast of the North Island," he said.

"And for some rare species that have a restricted distribution, I can't find any suitable climate in New Zealand."

Rare trees such as the makamaka, found in the uplands of Northland, were likely to become extinct.

"We're talking 100 to 200 years down the track," Dr Mitchell said. Climate change would come in a shift of average conditions, and the bad years would slowly become more frequent than the good years.

"Trees can take 100 years to die and it might not be until into the 22nd century before we realised our forests were not regenerating."

Even with trees such as kauri, where there would likely be small climatic areas suitable to them several hundred kilometres south of their present range, it would take massive human intervention to plant "native" forests.

"I think our native species do have some rights," he said.

While the Government still controlled a lot of land, such as in the conservation estate and in the Crown leases in the South Island high country, it should be looking at putting land aside for future native forests.

"The Government shouldn't sell off the long-term Crown land leases because they are a land bank which is a potential refuge for our native species," Dr Mitchell said.

"It really does need to hang on to that land, and with the conservation estate it should even think of that land as tradeable."

Need for Research

New Zealand could not wait for scientists such as climate modellers to perfect their predictions on global warming.

New Zealand scientists needed to do research and understand the resilience and adaptability of not only native species but exotics.

Moth trapping programme to continue

The Government will continue its trapping programme for Asian Gypsy Moth for the next three years, the Minister of Forestry, John Falloon, announced recently.

"As long as there is a risk of this dangerous pest entering New Zealand, it's

vital that we place a high priority on preventing its introduction," said Mr Falloon.

A temporary trapping programme was carried out last year, after egg clusters were discovered on several ships entering New Zealand ports.

"We were delighted that no evidence of Asian Gypsy Moth was found. However, the moth has now become well established in some parts of Europe, and the danger of it entering New Zealand is probably higher than ever," said the Minister.

"If Asian Gypsy Moth became established in New Zealand, it could spread up to 50 kilometres in a year. In only six to seven years it would have sufficient numbers to seriously damage our conservation and commercial forest estate.

"It's a far more cost-effective approach to be pro-active and prevent these moths from entering the country than to spend possibly millions of dollars in eradication treatment if they arrive undetected," said Mr Falloon.

Future Funding

Last year's trapping programme was funded completely by Government. Funding for the next three years' trapping programmes will come from an increase in the cost of forestry border quarantine inspections at all New Zealand ports. The cost of the 1994-95 programme of \$532,000 is to be met by a less than 20 per cent increase in average import inspection fees.

"After three years, the trapping programme and its funding will be thoroughly re-evaluated," said Mr Falloon.

East Coast Forestry Project – an update

Nearly 7000 hectares of radiata pine have now been planted under the East Coast Forestry Project, Forestry Minister John Falloon announced recently.

"This total includes a provisional result of 3900 hectares for the June to August 1994 planting season and the 3036 hectares planted during the previous 1993 season," said the Minister.

"In the latest round 38 applications, totalling 8765 hectares, were received by the April 30, 1994 closing date. Of these 29 applications covering 4773 hectares have conditional approval," he said.

Proposals to date, covering up to the 1997 planting season under the project, amounted to over 16,000 hectares, said the Minister.

"The project is still relatively new and the interest from landowners and investors in forestry is continuing to grow.

"The use of forestry to counter soil erosion is well known, but the commercial advantages of planting trees and the choices now open to landowners to undertake forestry projects are also becoming better understood," said the Minister.