

# Timberlands thrust in political spotlight

The logging policies of Timberlands West Coast Ltd have become a hot political issue in the lead up to the general election. The publication of a book by peace campaigner Nicky Hager, accompanied by widespread television coverage, pushed Timberlands into the spotlight. This was followed by the announcement that Timberlands West Coast has received government approval to start logging native beech trees.

The shareholding Ministers of Timberlands West Coast Limited said they had formally accepted the economic viability of Timberlands' proposed sustainable beech management plans.

SOE Minister Tony Ryall informed Timberlands that the Government has accepted the conclusion of the Board of TWC that the sustainable harvesting of the Crown's West Coast beech production forests is commercially viable.

This means the last Government hurdle for the management plans has been passed and beech production can now commence within the Grey Valley area. Further north, in the Buller region, Timberlands will need to seek resource consents from local authorities before work can commence.

The plan was attacked by Labour leader Helen Clark who said the party would release its policy on the scheme shortly, adding that it was debatable if it was sustainable. And the National Party's environmental policy arm, Bluegreen have expressed disappointment at the move, with convener Rob Fenwick saying a deflated royalty to be paid to the government for beech timber did not reflect the true value of the forests and the environmental costs of logging.

However, Mr Ryall said that the scheme was a significant step forward for sustainable forestry and the West Coast region.

"It means that Coasters can begin using local resources sustainably for jobs and investment," said Mr Ryall. "In December last year the Government announced that it would legislate to end unsustainable logging of rimu in the Buller six years earlier than originally agreed to."

"At the same time we said we would support Timberlands' sustainable beech management plans subject to being satisfied of their economic viability. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, in consultation with the Department of Conservation, has already certified the plans as meeting the sustainability criteria of the Forests Act.

"Now, government officials, including The Treasury, have audited and reviewed Timberlands' business case for sustainable beech production. Officials have advised that the business case is conservative and is economically viable.

"The business case is premised on forecast beech production of: 4,000m<sup>3</sup> in 2000; 10,671m<sup>3</sup> in 2001; 20,147m<sup>3</sup> in 2002; 29,707m<sup>3</sup> in 2003; and, 39,500m<sup>3</sup> in 2004. "There has been a great deal of nonsense talked in the past about sustainable beech forestry on the West Coast. Labour has been particularly trite and misleading in its comments. In September 1998 Helen Clark said that no market existed for beech timber. That wasn't true then, and it is not true now.

"On average Timberlands will harvest, by helicopter, just one tree per hectare per year. The forest will be closely monitored and management adjusted over time to ensure negligible impacts on native fauna and flora.

"Importantly, sustainable beech forestry will, over time, reduce our dependence on clearfelled tropical forests currently being mowed down in countries like Brazil and Indonesia and imported to New Zealand to replace diminishing supplies of rimu. And, despite being self-sufficient in plantation timber for many years New Zealanders have continued to import tropical timber from clearfelled rainforest."

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