

The time is right for New Zealand Wood

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In a world facing the very real consequences of global warming the impact of our consumption choices has never been so important.

Described as a 'miracle material'¹, wood is a wholly renewable raw material. It offsets harmful fossil fuel use, and the forests in which it is grown are massive net absorbers of CO₂. It's a natural building material with enormous potential for a range of different building environments.

None of this is new information, however, with the rapidly growing concern about greenhouse gases, climate change and control of harmful emissions wood, which we so much take for granted, has a new significance.

NZ Wood - a new brand for all New Zealand grown wood, is refocusing attention on wood. It is amplifying this significance by positioning wood as the building material of choice for New Zealanders.

NZ Wood is a promotional and development programme that aims to increase wood-use and raise awareness of the environmental credentials of forests and wood.

It is a multi-faceted programme that involves promotion and advertising, but also research, web site and information channels, a NZ Wood brand, design resources and training initiatives.

Conceived at a forestry and wood industry meeting in 2006, the NZ Wood programme received seed funding from industry, with a significant financial contribution from government. But the programme is driven by industry - bringing together the diverse forestry and wood industry on a common platform to pursue common goals like never before.

This decline in wood-use is occurring due to a number of factors - such as the lack of availability of timber building solutions, lack of information about the potential for wood, habit and experience - wood is just not being used to its potential in this sector. There is also greater penetration of competitive products.

Feedback on the programme has been extremely positive, with an unprecedented level of industry buy-in. About 800 people turned out to nationwide road-shows presenting the programme to the forestry and wood industry during August.

The programme is managed by a cross section of the forestry and wood industry, and includes representatives

from the New Zealand Forest Owners Association, the Douglas-fir Association, the Wood Processors Association of New Zealand, the Pine Manufacturer's Association, the New Zealand Farm Forestry Association and the Timber Design Society.

NZ Wood is co-funded by industry and government. Industry contributions make up 25% with the remaining 75% coming from government through the FIDA fund, administered by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

Opportunities for wood

The NZ Wood programme could not have been launched at a better time for increasing wood-use, and there are a number of reasons for this.

Firstly, research shows that there is an increasing demand on resources such as coal, oil and natural gas, but their continued use at current levels is unsustainable.

Renewable materials that are managed in a sustainable way for future use are increasingly becoming the first choice of consumers as they look for ways that they too can contribute to limiting the impact of global warming.

We have a great opportunity to educate New Zealanders on the renewable qualities of wood and encourage its consumption to stimulate replanting and more extensive planting of forests which absorb CO₂.

Furthermore, we know that wood building products have been shown in life cycle analysis research to have less global warming potential than comparative cement and steel building products - making wood an environmentally sound choice.

Secondly, the government is clearly backing wood and has recently announced strong sustainability policies. From September 2008 Government building projects up to four storeys high will require a wood design option.

In addition the government is also moving to have embodied energy and CO₂ emissions for new buildings included in the Building Code.

Thirdly, recent research commissioned by NZ Wood and conducted by BRANZ shows that wood has been losing some ground in the residential building market. This represents an opportunity for NZ Wood, particularly as UMR Research has identified that an overwhelming majority of New Zealanders want to use more wood and see wood as the building material of the future.

Unfortunately, wood loss of market share in the residential building market is not limited to framing but

¹ Hon Jim Anderton, Minister of Forestry, speaking at the NZ Wood launch at Parliament on 13 September 2007.

includes different building component markets such as flooring, framing and claddings.

We can't afford to be complacent. We need to secure wood's dominant position in the residential building market, but arguably the biggest opportunities for wood are in commercial buildings.

BRANZ research has identified that total timber volumes used in the non-residential sector can be increased by approximately 50,000 - 75,000 cubic metres, or nearly 20 - 30%, with the largest opportunities in farm buildings, retail and industrial (warehouses and factories) and education buildings.

We have a tradition of building our homes in wood, and this needs to be reinforced. Increasing wood's share in the non-residential market and strengthening its position in the residential market will be a focus for NZ Wood.

All this is good news for wood, and seizing these opportunities and creating positive outcomes are key components of the NZ Wood programme.

Perceptions towards forests and wood

In order to understand the information needs of specifiers and others when faced with a choice to specify or use timber, NZ Wood commissioned BRANZ and UMR Research to gauge perceptions towards forests and wood by both these groups.

Designing and building with wood

The research shows that specifiers are in general very positive towards wood. However, there are areas in which NZ Wood can provide tools and information to encourage wood to be specified more regularly.

Encouragingly, more than 75% of both architects and engineers believe there will be an increase in the use of engineered wood products and these groups are also most likely to perceive greater use of wood products in general - although there are those that believe there will be little change.

As a general observation, architects, designers and engineers tend to be more inclined towards the use of wood as a structural material (both by building type and component type) than builders and particularly, quantity surveyors.

While more than 75% of designers and architects are comfortable designing in wood, the corresponding figure for engineers is only 60%. As engineers can be called on to design larger and more complex structures, this suggests that they may need more tools and information to assist them.

Those building types in which there is substantial potential to increase wood-use are also the most popular amongst engineers and other specifiers when it comes to building in wood. They include schools, farm buildings, hotels/motels, and retail buildings.

The research is invaluable and shows that we need to make it easier. Developing building solutions and making information readily accessible is a high priority for the industry and NZ Wood, particularly given the significant opportunities to build in wood that are driven by consumer preference, government policies and which have been identified by the BRANZ research.

Support for forestry and wood

Forests and wood, now, more than ever, play an increasingly important environmental role. Forests have become part of our natural surroundings, and the vast majority of New Zealanders see plantation forests as being very much a part of the landscape.

With environmental consciousness at an all time high, specifiers, manufacturers and the general public have a strong sense of environmental responsibility, but at the same time believe that they could be doing more.

This places the NZ Wood programme in an excellent position to promote the benefits of planting trees and consuming wood. For example, 73% of both groups surveyed would buy more timber products if they were confident that the timber was from forests that are being managed in a sustainable way.

Support for forestry is most strongly seen in the perception that our forests are sustainable and fundamentally important to the New Zealand economy.

What does 'sustainable' mean to specifiers and the public? - it largely refers to production and economic outcomes, the support of the environment and the use of environmental management practices. Over 82% of specifiers, manufacturers and the general public believe that forestry is a sustainable industry.

NZ Wood will build upon these positive perceptions by promoting the ways that forests and wood positively contribute to the environment, the sustainable management practices used by the industry and how wood can be used effectively in different building scenarios.

Changing the outlook for the forestry and wood industry

Despite the positive news about forests and wood, people do not have great confidence about the growth for the forestry industry in the next 10 - 20 years. Amongst specifiers and manufacturers, 22% believe it likely that forestry is the most likely industry to shrink in size.

In comparison, over 70% of specifiers, manufacturers and members of the general public surveyed believe that tourism and construction are the industries most likely to grow over the next 10 - 20 years. The forestry industry and NZ Wood has a job to do to help change that picture.

To help drive an increased consumption of wood, information on the benefits of plantation forests and using wood will be provided to all parts of the industry and the public through the NZ Wood programme.

For example, construction respondents show the greatest interest in using environmentally certified wood products, but lack awareness about the products. Making this information readily available will lead to greater knowledge and awareness of the environmental credentials of wood as a building material.

All of this research will help NZ Wood to ensure it provides the information needed and valued by specifiers and others in making their building decisions.

Resources web site

The web is a key element of the NZ Wood programme. We know from research that specifiers are high users of the internet for building products information, and wood currently lacks a cohesive presence on the web. Information on wood, its potential uses and technical design information is currently spread over a number of different web sites.

NZ Wood's presence on the web needs to be strong, credible and easily accessible. It needs to be the primary site for wood and wood-use information and resources.

NZ Wood's web vision contains a number of information channels, and two of these are currently operating. There is a corporate site which profiles NZ Wood as an organisation. There is also a "promotion" site outlining the promotional programme, and detailing the environmental benefits of forestry and wood through the different stages in the wood story. Both these sites are available on nzwood.co.nz.

However, these sites will pale in comparison to the "resources" site that is currently under development. Due to be launched around August 2008, this site, also on nzwood.co.nz, will focus on wood-related resources for architects, engineers, designers, builders and others. It will contain technical and design information that is directly useable by design and building professionals.

The design component is a major part of the site, and the current Timber Design Society web site will play a large role in this - effectively forming the base. A whole raft of specification information is also envisaged.

In order to develop the site directly with end-users, NZ Wood has established an Advisory Working Party comprised of architects, engineers, and builders. The group

will guide the direction of the site, and will advise on the type of content that needs to be included to make the site a leading wood information and design resource.

It is intended that the resources web site will be a comprehensive source of a wide variety of wood information. It will contain information on Government and other regulations with applicability to industry. In particular, the implications of Government's sustainability policies and encouragement of wood solutions for government contracts will be covered.

Involving Industry

NZ Wood is committed to working closely with industry to achieve a significant and sustained increase in wood-use and educate New Zealanders on the value of forests and wood.

From the outset, NZ Wood convened a number of panel groups to advise on the direction, tenor and key activities under-taken by the programme. The panel groups include representatives from forestry organisations, specifier groups, and retailers and wood products manufacturers.

The panel groups meet regularly to discuss aspects of the programme, and the advice provided by these groups underpins the strategies of NZ Wood.

In addition, NZ Wood also has a number of well regarded scientific experts who act as a review for key claims made in the environmental area.

NZ Wood is not simply about promotion and advertising. Through research, development, tools, resources, education and training the programme will build an infrastructure within the forestry and wood industry to ensure that wood resumes its rightful place as the leading building material of choice.