

## FISC update

Fiona Ewing



Ellis Silviculture Contracting crew in their 'office' at Atawa, Stratford, with Mt Taranaki in the background. Photo courtesy of Richard Stringfellow, Safetree Toroawhi

### An extraordinary year

2020 was an extraordinary year. Many people might be happy to forget about it. But for forestry there were lessons learnt in 2020 that should be remembered and incorporated into how we work in 2021 and beyond.

Last year showed us that the risks to forestry posed by COVID-19 were not limited to the risk of people getting sick from the virus. The lockdowns and various COVID-19 alert levels had an economic impact that affected forestry companies, contractors, the industry's extended supply chain, and workers and their families.

One positive note during that period was the extraordinary way the sector got behind efforts by FISC to create all-of-industry guidance for working at various COVID-19 alert levels. That guidance was endorsed by WorkSafe and supported the industry to get back on its feet as quickly as possible when the alert levels began to drop, and in a way that helped protect business and people.

It was a great example of how health and safety can provide 'neutral ground' where people working in a highly competitive industry can work together on issues that affect the wellbeing of people, and ultimately of businesses.

While the market for New Zealand logs has recovered to pre-COVID levels, FISC is determined to remember and to draw on lessons learnt during COVID-19 for how we can support the industry in 2021 (and beyond).

In particular, FISC will be focusing on three areas that we believe can help forestry build safer, more resilient and profitable businesses. These areas are building capability (certification), strengthening engagement (our Toroawhi pilot), and developing leadership (the Forestry Charter and frontline leadership courses).

### Building capability – contractor and worker certification

Our Contractor Certification programme is now almost three years old. So, we are reviewing it in 2021 to look at how we can improve it. The review will particularly focus on costs, improving the software that supports the programme, and the quality of customer service. It will also look at how we can add a 'stretch' element to certification for contractors who want to continuously improve their performance.

By the end of 2020, 250 contractors had become Safetree Certified, including 35 silviculture businesses. An additional 173 contractors are in the process of becoming certified.



Crew members attending a Safetree Leadership Course

The aim of the certification scheme is to promote ownership and leadership of health and safety in contracting businesses and to recognise the professionalism of these businesses:

- For contractors, certification demonstrates their professionalism to clients. It provides a benchmark that their health and safety systems can be assessed against and means everyone is held to the same standards
- For forest owners and managers, using certified contractors provides an assurance that the companies they have hired are competent to do the job
- For workers, the scheme will lead to improved health and safety and employment conditions.

The scheme was designed in consultation with the regulator, WorkSafe, and with extensive input from the industry. Certified contractors are added to a searchable register on the Safetree website.

During 2020 new certification modules were developed in response to feedback from contractors and FICA. An environmental module is now available to those being recertified. There are also health and business capability modules that will be developed further (along with any other suggestions) following a workshop we are holding in 2021 as part of the review of certification.

The health module recognises the legal requirement to protect both the health and safety of workers, and that healthy workers are less likely to be involved in incidents. This module is strongly linked to another FISC

project, where we are working with Dr Tom Mulholland and his health and wellbeing KYND app. This project includes easy-to-understand health tailgate cards, which can be downloaded from the Safetree website.

The environment and business capability modules, while not strictly about health and safety, recognise that good business performance supports good health and safety.

Following requests from management companies, we also began testing a way for forest management companies to become certified. The first companies to go through this process were the Forest Management Group, for its three independent companies Forest Management (FML), Tasman Forest Management (TFM) and Forest Management North Island (FMNI), along with Logic Forest Solutions Ltd. NZ Forestry Ltd are close to completing the process.

By the end of 2020, 379 workers had become Safetree Certified: 316 tree fallers and 63 breaker outs. During the year we did a benchmarking exercise to look at improving the consistency of the application of the Safetree worker certification methodology across the industry, and developed electronic data collection.

This was further explored at a Certification Workshop in early 2021, with the goal to ensure we have a single, universally applied approach to certification used across the industry.

## Strengthening engagement – Toroawhi pilot

WorkSafe has agreed to extend the pilot of Safetree's Toroawhi/worker engagement champions initiative for a further six months, to the end of June 2021. This extension was a welcome endorsement of the work our Toroawhi have done since they were appointed at the start of 2020, despite the challenges presented by COVID-19.

We know from experience that workplaces are safer, healthier and more productive when workers are involved in health and safety decisions. Our Toroawhi – Richard Stringfellow and Wade Brunt – were brought on board to support improved engagement. They are working with crews, forestry companies, communities and iwi. Richard is based in Taupo and covers the Central North Island, while Wade is based in Gisborne covering the Gisborne/Tairāwhiti region.

An independent assessment of their work in the first half of the year showed that despite the COVID-19 lockdown, Richard and Wade have managed to engage with a diverse group of stakeholders. Feedback is



250 – certification hit a new milestone at the end of 2020 when Inta-Wood Forestry Ltd became the 250th Safetree Certified Contractor and the 35th silviculture contractor to become certified



More crew members attending a Safetree Leadership Course

that these stakeholders appreciate the Toroawhi's independence, extensive industry knowledge, and ability to work with people at all levels, including new and young workers, and Māori. They enable a safe environment for people to open up and discuss sensitive issues.

The assessment suggested focus areas for the second part of the pilot, including more work with silviculture crews, more sharing of insights, and more engagement with iwi. These findings are encouraging and helpful, and we are looking forward to seeing what else our Toroawhi can achieve over the coming months of this pilot.

## Developing leadership – leadership courses and safety charter

FISC has been working to develop frontline leadership through our Frontline Leadership and Team Up training.

Twelve of these frontline leadership courses, originally developed by The Learning Wave, have been run since July 2020 involving more than 120 workers. This brings the total number of workers who have been through this training to more than 500.

Course dates are being set for 2021 and details are available on the Safetree website. Locations will be confirmed based on expressions of interest.

These courses encourage people to look at health and safety differently – not as a 'tick box' exercise but as a way to develop leadership capability. They were created specifically for the forestry industry. The courses are very hands-on and help attendees learn how to:

- Lead a high-performance team focused on key results, including safety

- Effectively communicate with people who are different from themselves
- Get workers involved in solving problems and making good safety decisions
- Hold people to account without bullying
- Focus their teams on learning from things going right – not just waiting for things to go wrong.

During 2021, the existing FISC safety charter will also be reviewed.

The revised charter will seek a commitment from the industry to extend support for existing FISC work. There will also be a focus across the supply chain looking at contracts, employment standards and safety-in-design aspects. We would welcome any expressions of interest to be involved in this work.

## Get in touch

FISC's success depends on the support of the industry and uptake by the industry of our initiatives. We appreciate the strong support the industry has shown to date and look forward to that continuing in 2021.

If you would like to get involved in our activities please get in touch:

- About the review of contractor certification, safety charter, or for more information on the leadership courses: [info@safetree.nz](mailto:info@safetree.nz)
- With our Toroawhi: [richard@safetree.nz](mailto:richard@safetree.nz) (Central North Island region); [wade@safetree.nz](mailto:wade@safetree.nz) (Gisborne/Tairāwhiti region)

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