

Ensuring everyone in forestry plays their part in creating ‘better work’

Fiona Ewing

Abstract

This paper summarises the key highlights in 2021 for the Forest Industry Safety Council (FISC), a not-for-profit organisation, and outlines how it intends to expand its focus in 2022 and onwards. As the forestry industry changes and matures, FISC needs to adapt its work to ensure it is delivering initiatives that make a difference to the wellbeing and safety of people working in the forest industry. FISC encourages forestry businesses to get in touch if they want to support its work, share their experiences or discuss the challenges facing the industry.

About FISC

FISC works with its partners across the sector to lead a significant improvement in the wellbeing and safety of everyone working in forestry. Its creation was a recommendation of the 2014 Independent Forestry Safety Review. FISC runs a range of safety and wellbeing initiatives and operates the safetree.nz website.

Its workplan is guided by Council members and its programmes and resources are developed together with people working across the forest industry. This is to ensure they are practical and meet the needs of the New Zealand industry.

The Council includes representatives of the NZ Forest Owners Association, the Forest Industry Contractors Association and the NZ Farm Forestry Association, along with WorkSafe and ACC. It also has people representing Māori and workers, including from First Union (for the NZ Council of Trade Unions). FISC is funded by the Forest Growers Levy Trust, ACC and WorkSafe.

Review of FISC strategy

With the goal of reducing deaths and serious injuries in mind, FISC has reviewed its strategy and as a result in future you will see us focusing on three key areas:

Promoting a better understanding of risk

Traditionally in forestry ‘risk management’ has meant having set rules and processes for people

Our Strategy on a page

What we want for Forestry in New Zealand

A safe, sustainable, and professional forestry sector, achieved in partnership with workers, growers, forestry businesses and government.

Why we are here

To work with our partners and lead a significant change to improve the wellbeing and safety of everyone working in forestry so our people will thrive.

What we want to see improve

- ✓ Capability and capacity
- ✓ Stakeholder perceptions and support
- ✓ Worker voice being heard and valued
- ✓ Retention and attraction of people
- ✓ Health
- ✓ Culture
- ✓ Thriving people
- ✓ Information sharing with and from the sector

How we'll measure our contribution

Uptake

Increase the number of people/companies using Safetree programmes and the resources. The Safetree website is a portal for health, wellbeing and safety tools for the industry managed and maintained by FISC.

Impact

As a result of interacting with us, people/companies improve their capabilities, particularly around leadership, worker engagement and participation and risk management.

What will we do?

► Leadership

Embed sector leadership by establishing good work design principles for the sector. Focusing on the whole supply chain and how they can contribute to good work design and ultimately successful work. This will be supported by a fundamental review and refresh of the FISC safety charter and further development of industry certification.

► Engagement

Promote and support better engagement and participation across all segments of the sector. An equally strong focus on worker engagement and participation supported by the Toroawhi.

► Risk

Deliver activities to support a better understanding of risk, and its management, across the supply chain.

► Capability

Build capability through certification, leadership development and other workshops. Support good practice and share industry stories through Safetree.

► Performance

Support the industry to better understand the key elements required for successful work and how this leads to improved performance.



Figure 1: FISC's strategy – summarised on a page

to follow. However, this approach ignores the fact that in forestry people work in constantly changing environments where things do not always follow the plan, and where unintended human errors can have very serious consequences.

So, our work will focus on supporting the workforce across the sector to become more highly skilled at understanding risk, particularly in relation to the critical risks that cause fatalities in the sector. We also look at how other areas of a person's life are impacted by risk factors outside of work, which will include running our *Understanding Risk* workshops and the Safetree certification programme.

Promoting effective worker engagement

Experience shows us that the safest workplaces are the ones where workers are actively involved in decisions about how work gets done. That is why the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 requires businesses to engage with workers and ensure they participate in how it is done. This is particularly important because the dynamic nature of forestry work means that sometimes the 'rules' can be hard to follow, and workers need to be able to talk about the best ways to deal with a situation.

They also need to work in environments that support them to speak up when things aren't going well or according to the plan. So, we will continue to promote effective worker engagement and participation through our Toroawhi/Worker Engagement Champions initiative.

Promoting 'better work'

The term 'better work' sums up three important ways that forest managers and owners can positively influence health and safety:

- Higher order controls – the expectation that businesses will adopt the most effective ways to protect workers – not just the easiest or cheapest. Mechanisation is an example of a higher order control
- Safety in design – the idea that work should be designed to be safe, rather than safety being a 'clip-on' added later. A good example is not planting trees on slopes that are too steep or difficult to harvest mechanically
- Upstream duties – the responsibilities of forest owners and managers to ensure contractors can, and are, working safely. This can include adopting a safety in design approach, and supporting and enabling contractors to use higher order controls.

We will step up our activities to encourage and support forest managers and owners to create 'better work', which will include sharing stories of how they are already going about this. These three areas of work are all interconnected, so by tackling all of them we can have a bigger impact on wellbeing and safety in forestry. See the FISC Strategy (Figure 1).

2021 milestones

In the area of leadership, FISC continued to lead the development of forestry's COVID-19 working protocols and worked with WorkSafe, the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) and others to produce and share resources about the pandemic. *Frontline Leadership and Team Up* workshops were further developed and have been delivered to 617 participants since 2019. Safetree's leadership courses were a finalist in the 2021 New Zealand Workplace Health and Safety Awards.

We also updated FISC's strategy to include a focus on supporting forest managers and owners to create 'better work' that supports wellbeing and safety. We continue to provide a strong voice for the industry in engagements with government ministers, officials and agencies, including WorkSafe and MPI.

Because of its focus on risk, FISC delivered four workshops on *Understanding Risk* and produced a draft *Steep Slope Harvesting* Guide for industry feedback. We also created and distributed videos, and shared industry alerts and stories of good practices. We delivered 166 packs of Tailgate Meeting Cards and 560 packs of Tailgate Health Cards.

Our flagship engagement initiative, Toroawhi/Worker Engagement Champions, continued to work with contractors, managers and workers. Our Safetree website and Facebook pages also continued to act as a connector to forest workers and the industry, but the Safetree Conference was postponed to June 2022 due to COVID-19.

We have had a continuing focus on certification and during 2021 completed a significant industry-led review of this area. We were pleased to see that Safetree Contractor certification increased to 285 companies by the end of 2021 and that Safetree Professional Forest Workers certification rose to 419.



Figure 2: Staff at Pan Pac Forest Products Napier on the Safetree leadership course now being offered to other primary industries

However, there were still sobering statistics in the performance area, with 129 workers suffering injuries serious enough to require at least a week off work. Three fatalities were reported by WorkSafe.

2021 highlights

2021 was a real rollercoaster of a year. We had COVID-19, major weather events, another downturn in log prices and, unfortunately, another three forestry fatalities. Throughout the year FISC worked with stakeholders across the forestry sector to try to improve worker wellbeing and safety. Highlights of this work included the following:

Supporting the industry during COVID-19

Throughout the year we continued to provide and share guidance on working safely during the pandemic. This included publishing updated protocols for working at different COVID Alert Levels and new guidance for working under the COVID-19 Protection Framework (Traffic Light System). We ran two vaccination webinars and used highlights from these to create information videos. We also sponsored two \$100 prizes for crew and crew whānau at a vaccination event run by NZFM, Pihanga Heath and Tūwharetoa Health. Safetree's COVID-19 information is available at: safetree.nz/resources/covid-19

Leadership workshops

As noted, our leadership training was nominated as a finalist at the 2021 New Zealand Workplace Health and Safety Awards. This training is specifically designed for forestry and it supports the development of forestry professionals and helps businesses improve team performance. The training is also being made available to other primary industry businesses thanks to support from MPI. Since last May, 95 people have completed the training, 24 of them from forestry and wood processing (see Figure 2). To find out about running workshops email: info@safetree.nz



Figure 3: Gavin and Chrystal Edmonds of Stirling Logging who feature in one of Safetree's industry story videos

A strong voice for forestry

FISC regularly engages with the Workplace Relations and Safety and Forestry ministers, and officials from WorkSafe, the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE), MPI and ACC. This included providing input into MBIE's Plant, Structures and Working at Heights Health and Safety Regulatory Review. As FISC's National Safety Director, I am also Deputy Chair of the Forestry and Wood Processing Workforce Council, which is undertaking several initiatives to boost workforce capacity and capability.

'Understanding Risk' workshops

Safetree developed these workshops to help businesses better understand risk and ran four of them in regional areas in 2021. The workshops were run with people from across the contracting chain, meaning attendees could talk about the risks they could control and identify controls that they needed others in the contracting chain to put in place.



Figure 4: The team behind Safetree's Toroawhi initiative, which won at the New Zealand Workplace Health and Safety Awards in 2021

Draft steep slope harvesting guide

At the industry's request, FISC has been working with a broad group of experts and industry people to create a *New Zealand Winch-Assisted Harvesting Good Practice Guide*, which will set a benchmark for winch-assisted harvesting on steep slopes. The draft was circulated for final industry feedback in December and is due to be published in 2022.

Resources, alerts and industry stories

We continue to create and share resources to support risk management. These included producing a *Daily Debrief Resource* and *Tree Fallers Logbook*. Our alerts are available at safetree.nz/safety-alerts. Our industry stories included a Safe-Start 2022 resource on the Benefits of Improving Worker Engagement and a video on how Gisborne-based Stirling Logging is rehabilitating workers and getting them back to work in the forest (see Figure 3).

Toroawhi win at awards

Our Toroawhi/Worker Engagement Champions initiative was recognised at the New Zealand Workplace Health and Safety Awards in May 2021, winning a Judges' Commendation Award (see Figure 4). During the year, our two Toroawhi (Richard Stringfellow and Wade Brunt) visited crews, contractors, forest managers and others. They acted as coaches and mentors to help people deal with health, safety and wellbeing issues (or find professional help for this). They also supported contractors working to achieve Safetree Contractor certification and helped crew members and foremen/owners who had attended FISC's workshops and training to embed what they had learnt.

Safetree

The Safetree website, newsletter and Facebook page (3,003 followers) continue to provide information to the industry. The most successful Facebook post was our industry story on Stirling Logging helping workers rehabilitate, which had 21,500 views. During the year, 20 newsletters were sent to about 3,410 recipients. The website had about 20,000 unique users during the year, up 25% on the previous year.

Certification review

A review of certification was completed during 2021 and we began implementing the recommendations to make the scheme more robust and responsive to industry needs (see Figure 5). These changes included moving to a new online system for registering information, which is being run by EcoPortal. We are also developing the framework for a tiered certification scheme to provide 'stretch' goals for businesses with more mature practices.

To ensure a more robust and streamlined model, FISC has taken over governance of the certification scheme. It has also taken over administration of the scheme and has appointed a Certification Manager. These changes will support the scheme to grow and develop. They will also ensure better consistency around the application of audits and will deliver economies of scale through more



Figure 5: Toroawhi Richard Stringfellow visits Mahi Rākau, Wahine Crew, Kaingaroa Forest

efficient planning of audits. We are grateful to everyone in the Safetree Certification Review Technical Action Group who helped come up with these recommendations.

2022 further work

As well as the work outlined above, FISC has several other projects in the pipeline for 2022. We plan to:

- Launch the new Forestry Safety Charter
- Develop a project to understand how we can measure key aspects of 'better work'
- Review forestry's drugs and alcohol policy
- Work more closely with Wood Councils to expand our reach
- Run regional workshops, where it is safe to do so
- Improve engagement with iwi trusts that have significant forestry holdings
- Continue to monitor and communicate industry performance through our quarterly dashboard and the IRIS system
- Work with WorkSafe to see how more information from completed incident investigations could be shared with the industry.

FISC's motto comes from the translation of the word Toroawhi, which is *Together We Create Change*. All of the work we have done to date has been carried out with considerable input and support from the industry. None of the things we've achieved would have been possible without that support.

For FISC to continue to make progress we need that support to continue and to become even stronger. We need the industry to continue to support certification and our Toroawhi and to get behind our drive to create better work.

There's a lot of good practice already going on out there, and we'd love to hear your stories so we can share them with others in the industry. So please get in touch with us. Conversely, please contact us if there are emerging or entrenched challenges you think we need to address on behalf of the industry.

Fiona Ewing is National Safety Director of the Forest Industry Safety Council. Email: fiona.ewing@fisc.org.nz