

Huge era of opportunities for foresters about to begin - Fitzsimons

Green Party Co-Leader Jeanette Fitzsimons said New Zealand is entering into an era of huge opportunities for foresters in spite of the doldrums the industry is in.

Opening the New Zealand Institute of Forestry Conference at Te Papa in Wellington today, she said that although log prices were currently low, forestry had an opportunity to gain a better position in future in terms of carbon storage payments, climate change mitigation and biofuels.

"I opened the Biofuels Conference, also being held in Wellington today, and it sees forests as the new energy source with work on collecting forest arisings, coppicing hardwoods for ethanol and using wood chips for producer gas in industrial work and transport."

Some companies are already moving towards harnessing the energy of wood by converting more costly gas fired equipment with less-expensive wood-burning options. There was also the opportunity to grow diverse forests with higher landscape and biodiversity values while still getting a good return. However, there was a need to come to grips with the current climate change policy vacuum.

"The decision-makers need to place a price on carbon in some way. They've abandoned the carbon charge and full emissions trading can't happen in time for the 2012 deadline set internationally. Our policy "Turn down the Heat" looks at what Government can do now. It's pragmatic and proposes



Jeanette Fitzsimons

offsets for emissions which can't easily be reduced ie methane and air travel. Approved offset projects (not just forests) hold a permanent obligation to maintain storage and this is the direction we need to be heading."

She opened her speech by commenting on her recent visit to Maungatautari, a volcanic mass in Waikato which has 3000 hectares of original tawa forest.

"It was perhaps never valued highly enough to log or it was considered too steep to do so. Either way the forest was high quality with little bird life. The community now values it so highly as a potential habitat that they've fenced it.

"Sadly the view from the top is one of haze and smoke from burning forests for dairy conversions. While the log value may be down and dairy values up we need to ask – is this good economics?"

Ms Fitzsimons said there were significant environmental consequences from dairy conversions. There's nitrogen and coliforms to

the waters, especially in Taupo, which have no price to the farmer, but the clean-up costs for Lake Taupo are already established at \$80m to the community.

"Then there's the loss of carbon storage which has no value to the forester but will cost the taxpayer in 2012. There's the increase in methane emissions with no cost to the farmer but again a cost to the taxpayer in 2012. Can we really say this is an economic decision to convert forests for dairying?"

Education news

New staff at School of Forestry, University of Canterbury

This year we have two new staff who have joined the School of Forestry at Canterbury. Dr Luis Apiolaza has been appointed to a position in Tree Breeding and Genetics and comes to us from Tasmania. Luis is originally from Chile. Kurt Niquidet joins us from Canada. Kurt has been appointed to a position in economics. Both positions have been supported by industry.

Richard Woollons has retired, but has been appointed Adjunct Associate Professor and so will continue to influence the biometry offerings. Ron O'Reilly is moving to halftime from mid-2006, to better pursue interests in golf and fishing.

On the student front we have had reasonable enrolments at first-year level, have a very large class at second year, and two smaller classes in third and fourth year. As always the challenge remains enthusing young people about forestry as a career and we certainly appreciate the wider effort from industry that goes into this. Our students have been very successful with two students

from the School of Forestry winning 1st and 2nd place in the poster competition at the recent NZIF conference. Jeremy Mansell has been awarded the NZIF postgraduate award and Daniel McCallum has been awarded the NZIF undergraduate award.

Hamish Cochrane
Chair, Forestry Board of Studies