
Joint statement on Indigenous Forest Policy

By John Falloon, Simon Upton and Denis Marshall, respectively the Ministers of Forestry, Environment and Conservation.

The Government is committed to maintaining and enhancing existing areas of indigenous forest in New Zealand.

Cabinet has approved the key principles of the Government's indigenous forest policy. It recognises the serious depletion of New Zealand's native forest heritage and the importance of remaining areas of forest as habitat for native plants and animals.

While remaining forest areas are of differing conservation value, there is a widespread feeling that New Zealand can lose no more of its indigenous forests. Any future production from indigenous forests must be on a sustainable basis. With this in mind, the Government has determined that tight operating prescriptions will apply in future. They are:

- * The rotation period within a sustained management plan must be 20 per cent greater than the age of the fully mature forest to ensure that some mature forest is always maintained for wildlife habitat.
- * In indigenous podocarp forest and virgin or substantially unmodified beech forest, harvesting can only be by single tree or small group harvesting with low impact techniques such as helicopter logging or use of chainsaw mills and wooden tramways.
- * In already significantly modified (for example, previously logged, mined or fire-damaged) beech forests, coupe (clearing) size shall be determined on a case-by-case basis taking account of ecological values.
- * The rate of extraction of species of indigenous trees shall be less than the net gross increment.

These tight operating conditions were designed to protect remaining forest areas by encouraging the indigenous timber industry to shift from existing high-volume, low-value forestry activity to a low-volume, high value emphasis.

The Government will also secure the preservation of high-value indigenous forests on private land through the Forest Heritage Fund and Nga Whenua Rahui. The contestable Forest Heritage

Fund provides \$6.75 million to save forest of high conservation value. Nga Whenua Rahui is a separate funding scheme for forest conservation on Maori-owned land. Nga Whenua Rahui funding of \$3.55 million per year was confirmed by Cabinet late in December.

Clear Principles

The need to define clear principles on which to base an indigenous forests policy has been made particularly urgent by the situation the Government has inherited.

We inherited from the previous Government an interim export ban that simply stopped the export of indigenous woodchips while felling on the ground. Jobs have been affected and there is substantial hardship and uncertainty in rural communities. Legislation was promised but never introduced. The Government was left with a huge adjustment assistance bill.

Uncertainty

The Government was determined to resolve the uncertainty faced by affected communities. It was equally determined to do so only after it had determined its overall policy on indigenous forests. Hence the need for a firm commitment to sustainable management and the spelling out of tight operating prescriptions.

We also recognise the need for a positive and practical transition period in some areas that have special characteristics and circumstances that need to be addressed. We have identified Southland as such an area. A special management strategy for Southland will be developed as a key element of the implementation plan.

Transitional Programme

A transitional programme will be put to the interested parties. It will involve cutting above sustainable level until 1995. As a short-term transitional measure only (six months), we will

permit settlement of an existing woodchip contract under tightly controlled conditions. The two shiploads due by July 1991 will be allowed.

However, in this short-term transitional phase, the total area of forest will not be diminished. For every hectare of forest cut from now until July 1991 under the Transitional Agreement, the Government will ensure that each hectare is either allowed to regenerate or is replaced. This short-term transitional arrangement will be closely monitored.

In the second phase of the transition, a careful management plan for Southland's forests will be negotiated to cover a phase-in period to 1995, when local exotics will come on stream. This programme will involve cutting at a rate higher than the national policy of sustainable management. These transitional arrangements will help communities survive in the meantime.

The Government recognises the co-operation and contribution of the Southland people over the last six months of uncertainty. We also recognise the strong commitment by these communities to their survival. We believe that the trade-off represented by the transition is a responsible way of sustaining them into the future.

The announcement of the Government's indigenous forest policy clearly signals an end to the pioneering attitude toward the clearfelling of New Zealand's native forests for conversion to pasture.

Clearfelling Days Over

The days of clearfelling are over. The Government is committed to protecting our remaining forests. It is also prepared to recognise the claims of employment and community viability where a long-term sustainable industry is in prospect. This is a very difficult and sensitive area of policy. We believe this announcement strikes an appropriate balance between securing a robust long-term policy and the need for some transitional arrangements.