

27<sup>th</sup> July 2023

Hon Peeni Henare  
Minister of Forestry  
New Zealand Government

By email:

**Response to Ministerial Inquiry into Land Use (MILU) Report Recommendations**

Tena Koe Minister Henare

We appreciated your time this morning and also the opportunity to meet with you in person next week during your visit to Gisborne.

Thank you for your time to receive and review the enclosed response from Eastland Wood Council - Te Kaunihera Pororakauo Te Tairāwhiti (EWC) in conjunction with member forestry companies.

**Acknowledgement**

The Eastland Wood Council (EWC) and its members welcomed the ministerial inquiry into past and current land-use practices and the impact of woody debris, including forestry slash and sediment, following the devastating cyclones.

We have appreciated the Government's commitment to work with all stakeholders in our community, including; iwi, mana whenua, land owners, Gisborne District Council and the forestry sector on this important inquiry.

Eastland Wood Council (EWC) welcomed the report 'Outrage to Optimism' released on the 12th May 2023.

EWC acknowledges the professional integrity demonstrated by the Inquiry Panel Members; Hon Hekia Parata (Chair), Matthew McCloy and Dave Brash and too their support staff for producing such an extensive report within the timeframe provided.

Our members have continued to consider the range of recommendations and this includes modelling to analyse the process, get a picture of the outcomes and help understand potential impacts and/or unintended consequences.

We remain committed to playing our part by leading improvements from within the forestry industry.

***The purpose of this report is to inform the Ministers office about the key actions being undertaken by our member forestry companies to reduce the risk of debris mobilisation to the extent they can.***

***We too have outlined what we consider to be the most significant changes that forestry companies and forestry managers are implementing to reduce the occurrence of the outcomes of Cyclone Gabrielle.***



Since the release of the MILU report 'Outrage to Optimism' we have appreciated the frequent contact (consultation) Eastland Wood Council (EWC) and sector leaders have had with advisors from Ministry for Primary Industries Te Uru Rākau - New Zealand Forest Service (MPI-TUR) and Ministry for the Environment - Manatū Mō Te Taiao (MfE).

Eastland Wood Council (EWC) and Gisborne District Council (GDC) recognised the need and the opportunity to work together by establishing and signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to improve collaboration and develop the relationship in a way that will enable both parties to meet their obligations and achieve their desired individual and joint outcomes.

The overarching goal is to ensure the region's catchment areas, infrastructure, waterways and beaches are not unduly impacted by forestry activities. NB: This MOU is 'separate' from GDC's role in relation to compliance and enforcement responsibilities. A copy of this MOU is attached.

### **Te Kawa a Tāne**

Te Kawa a Tāne has been initiated by WorkSafe as part of the Maruiti 2027 Strategy using an evidence basis to focus on this high-risk industry and location to deliver a regional collective approach to leading Hauora, Health and Safety improvements.

We consider it important to acknowledge Te Kawa a Tāne and the leadership of WorkSafe, including; iwi, forestry industry leaders, kaimahi, GDC and government agencies that together have built this kaupapa which has direct relativity to the MILU recommendations.

Iwi, Eastland Wood Council and WorkSafe have led a series of wānanga subsequent to the cyclone events; the first wānanga were held on 16 March and 13 April, to discuss an imminent coordinated approach to Kaimahi health and safety in the removal of wood debris, re-entry into forest worksites, windthrow clean-up, and working in contaminated and shifted terrain post Cyclone Gabrielle.

Collective leadership have agreed to the development of a Forestry Readiness and Emergency Plans for future significant events which provides a pathway to Civil Defence and Emergency Management, working alongside the Gisborne District Council.

***Improving the culture of safety and well-being is paramount for the future success of the forestry industry and improving environmental practice.***

### **The Landscape**

The issues we face today with regards to land use in our region, and how we deal with them to achieve industry and regional resilience and prosperity, are complex.

The forestry industry is an important part of the regional economy and the community. **EWC and its member forestry companies remain committed to regaining social license.**

EWC members have accepted the need for change and it has been encouraging to witness amongst the industry, the commitment to contribute to a better future for production forestry and our community.

The clean up work led by the forestry sector commenced immediately after cyclone Hale and following cyclone Gabrielle and continues today in consultation with the affected land owners, GDC and other key stakeholders.



The removal of wood debris, including forestry slash has extended to Gisborne beaches (Waikanae and Midway) and Tolaga Bay beaches (North and South) which have been cleaned a number of times.

EWC has provided regular updates about the sectors collective response to the impacts of the weather events and its commitment to community.

<https://eastlandwood.co.nz/news/>

Woody debris and forestry residues that mobilise during extreme events are a real concern for everyone in Tairāwhiti. We also acknowledge this material (biomass) is an underutilised resource that can help primary industry to decarbonise.

**EWC has kept the door open to collaborating on economically viable technology options for the region and we hope the government will support the establishment of wood processing suited to Te Tairāwhiti.**

<https://eastlandwood.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/22-06-23-EWC-Presentation-WPMA.pdf>

<https://eastlandwood.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/22-06-23-EWC-Presentation-Notes-WPMA.pdf>

EWC is working with GDC in conjunction with other land users on an equitable wood debris programme to guide future remedial work subsequent to weather events.

While the forest industry in isolation can implement a range of industry specific measures, a collaborative approach with; mana whenua, iwi, land users, local and central government, and community, will be required to implement sustainable long-term mitigation.

EWC's submission to MILU (Appendix 11) contained a number of measures (proposed solutions) which are currently being implemented, as well as a schedule (table) setting out the proposed solutions which are grouped in time bands, a number of which require support from local and central government to plan and implement.

<https://eastlandwood.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/06-04-23-EWC-Submission-to-MILU.pdf>

### **Industry Led Actions**

There is no silver bullet that will immediately solve the issue of slash and sediment in Tairāwhiti.

However, if we are to achieve a sustainable transition that supports land use that is resilient to the increasingly severe weather, as well as achieving good community and social outcomes, then these costs and losses incurred by landowners, being private, corporate and iwi, will need careful consideration and government intervention.

#### **A. Risk Assessment - Site Specific**

1.

EWC proposed in its submission that a fulsome review of land needs to be carried out as a matter of priority. This review also needs to incorporate the views of all land users, and should be based on scientific fact.

**Site Specific Risk Assessments are an absolute priority for high risk areas**, because this will identify and inform operations and which areas that need to be retired from plantation forestry land use and how this should be done in partnership with local and central government.

2.

While there are EWC members already operating under their own self-imposed catchment constraints model, EWC members do not support coupe and adjacency constraints recommended in the MILU report, because the unintended consequences would see tree stands remaining in the ground significantly longer and the likelihood forestry companies would have to reduce capacity (i.e. lay off some harvesting crews) in order to meet those constraints.

Trees remaining in the ground (for up to age 40 years or more) would grow bigger and heavier and this increases the risk of widescale slope failure on the highly erodible country.

To reduce the risk of slopes eroding at scale and for the forestry industry to remain viable, we recommend that catchment constraints are NOT prescriptive, but rather are informed by a 'site specific risk assessment' and detailed operational planning that reflects the unique characteristics of individual forestry blocks/estates.

***We owe it to the communities living down stream to remove tree stands from high risk areas as soon as possible.***

## **B. The Good Practise Guideline for Catchment Management**

The EWC Board has adopted The Good Practise Guideline for Catchment Management and members are employing these sound principles wherever possible as part of their operational planning which is cognisant of the unique characteristics of individual forestry blocks.

1. **Evaluating Slope Stability when Planning** - Harvest planning should consider aspect, slope gradient, slope length, stability, risk of landslides, potential amount of harvest residues, gradient of gullies and connectivity to water bodies.
  - a. Members are utilising a high degree of technology such as GIS, LiDAR and aerial photography to build a better understanding of the risk profile by catchment. Integrated mitigation strategies relevant to the risk profile is now entrenched in the harvest planning process.
  - b. Ultimately, where the risks of slope failure cannot be mitigated and/or the proposed Purple Zoning of land, it is of high importance to develop pathways of a fair and just transition, Public Works Act accquisition and/or adjustments to the ETS.
2. **Constructing Slash Traps** - A significant portion of the damage observed in Cyclone Hale and Gabrielle events within some forests involved standing trees sliding off slopes across a range of crop ages, up to mature stands.

The implementation of highly engineered debris catchers is seen as a key change that can be implemented where the terrain allows to reduce the risk of this material migrating off site, including slash that cannot be practically or safely removed from the harvesting slopes.

These traps would be site specific designed and strategically placed after undertaking analysis on potential loads from subcatchments. It is expected that these structures will be higher tech, signed off by certified engineers and more robust than the traditional railway iron type structures that we have seen in the past.

Members have engaged certified engineers to conduct site analysis and development of European Style engineered woody debris catchers for the highest risk sites. This is considered a key tool that can provide material protection but members cannot proceed without strong support from GDC. There needs to be compromises in the freshwater policy statement for the greater good. It is NOT a tool unaccompanied by any other mitigations.

*Forest terrain often does not allow effective implementation of slash catchers within forests and support from GDC to implement off-forest sites may be highly valuable to communities downstream.*

3. **Managing the extent of harvesting clearcuts** - Limiting clearcut size, and staging harvests in a larger catchment, to mitigate the risk of a larger storm event causing a significant impact.
  - a. Members have developed their own clearcut size rules and/or are guided by the Catchment Management Good Practice Guide. However, the inquiry recommendations and TRMP reviews has prompted an imminent review of the Good Practice Guide.
  - b. Members have rejected being incumbered with small coupe harvest constraints on high risk sites which will have unintended consequences of trees becoming too large for soils to support and too large to safely harvest.
4. **Managing harvest residues on landslide prone slopes** - It is important to focus on minimising the volume of large woody debris that creates the greatest hazard when mobilised, especially on areas with slope stability problems. A good harvest plan should ensure clear parameters to extract the sound windthrow and larger logs, plus ensure slash management requirements that cater for the additional non merchantable wood storage.
  - a. Members now have rigid and effective management plans of dealing with non-merchantable wood at the landing sites.
  - b. Members continue to survey and rehab any old legacy infrastructure that is deemed to be at risk.
  - c. Members are implementing intensive wood removal plans for high at-risk slopes, i.e. more than just removing merchantable volume.
  - d. Members are supporting contractor workforce with developing new ideas to reduce tree breakage and deal with harvest residues using specialised slash grapples and mulching type technologies.

Our industry has intentionally mechanised over the past decade to achieve safer tree felling and extraction operations. This has made the extraction of slash in some areas very difficult, so new developments must be balanced with safety and environmental objectives.

One of EWC's members is currently working with machine manufacturers and contractors to deliver slash grappling technology through the hauler. We expect to have this equipment to be operating with one of our members in the near future.

5. **Leaving mature trees to help trap slash** - In desirable locations, such as where there is a change of stream gradient at the base of the catchment, leaving large mature trees to act as a live slash-trap can be effective to mitigate migration of the larger harvest residues.

- a. Members are actively using Holds as a method of mitigating slash migration. This tool is integrated into the harvest plan risk assessment, risk mitigation and catchment constraint strategy.
6. **Planting new land and/or replant** - The long-term strategy to mitigate catchment risks of harvest residues and whole tree migration is through better risk assessment at the time of planting and replanting forests.

In areas of very high risk, identifying future non-production forest/retirement areas, planting live harvest residue traps in non-production species, the use of coppicing species, or increasing setbacks for areas of high landslide risk and instability may be required.

Important note: Regardless of the vegetation grown on these sites, the risk of future landslides on these sites in high intensity rainfall events is not expected to reduce significantly at least for the next few decades.

Members are committed to better risk assessment at the time of planting forests, but for existing forested areas where harvest is being prioritised to de-risk the site, it is of high importance to develop pathways of a fair and just transition, Public Works Act acquisition and/or adjustments to the ETS.

<https://eastlandwood.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/22-06-23-EWC-Good-Practise-Guideline-for-Catchment-Management-23-02.pdf>

*NB: This guidance document is being revised to include the learnings and improvements from Cyclones Hale and Gabrielle.*

### **C. High Level Debris Traps**

Members regularly install both living, in the form of trees, and engineered structures to serve as debris traps. Urgent support is needed for large scale engineered debris traps in strategic, life and infrastructure, risk locations where the terrain allows.

### **D. Burning forestry slash and wood debris**

Members consider and plan the burning piles of harvest waste, to mitigate the risk of mobilisation to watercourses and neighbouring landowners.

### **E. Bury forestry slash and wood debris**

Forestry Industry urgently needs approval to bury volumes of wood biomass in suitable locations at scale which cannot be removed or burnt.

### **Improved collaboration key to reducing impacts of future weather events**

Eastland Wood Council is committed to improving collaboration with Gisborne District Council with the focus on resolving the MILU recommendations and the TRMP review.

We acknowledge the importance of the key leaders from GDC and our industry (in conjunction with EWC) and the two Government appointed leaders working together with a collective focus on agreed outcomes is fundamental to achieving the paradigm shifts required to deliver the progress our region needs.

## Conclusion

The nature of the land in Tairāwhiti presents an inherent risk of failure that will persist regardless of land use practices. Our region is erosion-prone, because of a combination of geology, slope steepness in many areas, landscape responding to native forest removal 150 years ago, high tectonic uplift, and weather patterns.

This should be communicated and socialised with the aim of developing an integrated risk management strategy.

Acknowledgement of the inherent risk of the land, the value of tree cover and in turn, commercial forestry as mitigation of this risk will be required to achieve a coordinated strategy.

Mitigating these risks will require a coordinated effort together with; iwi, mana whenua, other landowners, Gisborne District Council, Trust Tairāwhiti, government agencies and stakeholders.

Ultimately, where the risks of slope failure cannot be mitigated, there may be cases for retirement of land from productive use and not building on high-risk flood plains and overland flow paths.

Developing land use and community-based response plans is critical. In addition, it will be important to develop pathways to viably achieve this through a fair and just transition and adjustments to the ETS.

The Eastland Wood Council and members of EWC are committed to collaborating with local and central government to help establish reasonable expectations for the future of production forestry in our region and transition of land use that is considered no longer suited to production forestry.

Naku noa na



Te Whanau o Ruataupare te hapu  
Te Aitanga-a-Hauiti te iwi  
Ngati Porou te iwi

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