

27 November 2023

Tēnā koe,

Outrage to Optimism - How will we respond?

Letter of Intent - Catchment Forestry Plans

For many decades, plantation forestry has been one of the cornerstone industries in Tairāwhiti - our region has developed in parallel with the forestry sector.

There are challenges, which have been highlighted by major storm events in recent times. Not all land currently planted in *Pinus radiata* is suitable for plantation forest. Many of the decisions to create extensive plantation forests in Tairāwhiti were made decades ago as a reaction to the effects of historic land clearance.

In hindsight, these decisions have not always been in the best interests of the whenua or our communities, and in many cases, they have had unintended consequences for Tairāwhiti and its people.

We do not yet have the right trees in the right places, and the whenua and our communities have been damaged as a result.

But we are where we are - we must find a way to build our future whilst repairing the mistakes of the past. And we recognise we must do this together.

This Letter of Intent signifies a new direction for Council and the forestry sector in Tairāwhiti. It marks a break with the past, and an intention to work collaboratively to build the wellbeing of whenua and whānau while exploring sustainable economic opportunities.

I acknowledge that we have jointly developed an MOU between Council and the EWC and this is still critical to our working relationship. However, what I have heard from the sector is the need for additional and focussed collaboration that looks at broader land use solutions - which is what this Letter of Intent relates to.

The relationships

Relationships will be more important than ever as we learn from recent events and design the settings for a sustainable future. Council is committed to collaborating with its partners and key stakeholders in the development of any new policy direction. Council acknowledges its Treaty commitments to tangata whenua, inclusive of marae, hapū, iwi entities and Māori landowners. We also recognise the position of key stakeholder and land user relationships that support the region's economy in the forward discussion.

The success of any transition will require us all working together to shape that approach. For this reason, Council is motivated to ensure the right conversations occur in the right places with the right people.



Our intentions

The purpose of reaching out to these relationships is to understand how you would like to work together on this process. There will be many ways to facilitate our respective contributions to this process. How we approach that needs to be understood.

We propose to work together on two key areas: land classification and catchment forestry plans:

Land classification

1. We will work together to complete the mapping and understanding of the land types in Tairāwhiti, so we can retire vulnerable land from plantation forestry. We will begin the process of having the right tree in the right place by identifying where *pinus radiata* and related species are not appropriate, and classifying the land accordingly. And we jointly agree this land will transition from commercial plantation forestry into other uses.
2. We will work together to understand how this vulnerable land might be restored and managed in order to heal the whenua and the waterways, once the land is no longer used for plantation forestry. We will aspire to creating a space for a mātauranga perspective alongside the latest science and the insights of communities to develop the right approaches to transition, restoration and land use.
3. We will collaborate with and the farming sector to explore how the changes in land classification will also affect whānau, communities and farms, so the full impacts can be understood and the right plans put in place, in the spirit of a just and equitable transition.
4. In order to inform this korero, we will work together to understand the economic, social, environmental and cultural costs and benefits of our current ways of working, and how the changes to land use and forestry management will alter these, both for the forestry sector and the communities of Te Tairāwhiti.
5. Given the national importance of the forestry sector, we will explore with central government the implications of the changes to land classification and how the whenua is used, particularly in relation to the Emissions Trading Scheme.

Catchment Forestry Plans

6. We will collaboratively develop a Catchment Forestry Plan for each of the catchments of Tairāwhiti, commencing with Ūawa. The Forestry Plans will describe how plantation forest land will be prepared for planting, where it is planted, and how it will be managed and harvested for multiple rotations, covering the full lifecycle of the trees.
7. The Forestry Plans will be developed between Council, tangata whenua and Eastland Wood Council before consultation with wider community. This process will consider the National Environmental Standards for Commercial Forestry and the Eastland Wood Council's Best Practice Guidelines. The Forestry Plans will be given full authority through a Plan Change to the Tairāwhiti Resource Management Plan, in accordance with the relevant legislation.
8. The Forestry Plans will cover the full forest lifecycle, from land preparation and establishment through to harvest, post-harvest activities and restocking.
9. In order to inform the Forestry Plans, we will work together to understand the impacts of land use and forestry management, covering important matters such as high risk riparian land, the management of historic slash, and biodiversity improvement. We will incorporate mātauranga Māori alongside the latest science and the insights of communities to inform these hui.

Next steps

We are jointly committed to taking action and wish to move forward together. As a starting point, we propose a preliminary meeting with tangata whenua and Eastland Wood Council to confirm scope for the two areas of work outlined above.

Once scope is confirmed, we suggest the formation of a joint Working Group composed of Council, tangata whenua, the Eastland Wood Council and key community representatives. The Working Group will focus on changes in land classification (Land Overlay 3B) and the Ūawa Catchment Forestry Plan in a series of collaborative working sessions.

Development of the Ūawa Catchment Forestry Plan will commence in early 2024. Several workshops with partners and stakeholders will be required, starting with the understanding and assessment of the current state of the catchment, and progressing to an agreed future state for forestry in Ūawa. We will explore the full range of options for how these outcomes might be achieved. We commit to working collaboratively in the workshops to achieve our shared goals.

The National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 and Te Mana o te Wai will be relevant for the development of the Ūawa Catchment Forestry Plan. Where necessary, we will invite mātauranga and technical experts to provide advice to the Working Group on the constraints and possibilities inherent in these regulatory matters.

On completion, the proposed Plan Change that will give effect to the Ūawa Catchment Forestry Plan will be tabled at Council. Following community consultation, it will follow the statutory processes to be given effect.

Our commitment


We recognise that the issues that have been developing for decades in the plantation forests of Tairāwhiti cannot be solved overnight. There are trees that will continue to grow on unsuitable land; there is slash from historic logging scattered on steep slopes; there is unstable topsoil that is not adequately protected from future weather events.

We also recognise that the vast majority of the issues were not created by the people who will make up the Working Group, but that responsibility has fallen to us to address the problems that have been many decades in the making. We are committed to working differently and working better, to addressing the challenges and opportunities of plantation forestry in Te Tairāwhiti, and to giving effect to these intentions.

I look forward to hearing from you on confirming a date for our next hui.

Noho ora mai

na



Nedine Thatcher-Swann

Chief Executive