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# East Coast, New Zealand: the challenge of sustainable land use management

By MICHAEL SMITH

MICHAEL Campbell, the advisor for the Ministerial Inquiry into Land Use (MILU) in Tairāwhiti (East Coast), New Zealand, noted in a progress report that the region's topography "is one of extremes ... which restricts economically viable land use options. The approach ... has been driven by historical incentives to clear the land for farming and then plant the land in pine trees to stop erosion, specifically in response to Cyclone Bola [1988]."

Having experienced 16 extreme weather events since 2017, including last year's cyclones, the communities in Tairāwhiti have clear expectations of the forestry



The clean-up on the East Coast (and in Hawkes Bay) is extensive and ongoing

sector and Gisborne District Council (GDC) when it comes

to the challenge of sustainable land use management.

Timber & Forestry eNews invited Philip Hope, chief executive of the Eastland Wood Council (EWC), to provide an update on the clean up of slash and comment on the forest industry's future prospects in Tairāwhiti.

In relation to the Ministerial Inquiry, Mr Hope says a fulsome review of land use needs to be carried out as a matter of priority.

"It needs to incorporate the views of all land users and should be based on science. Site-specific risk assessments are crucial for high-risk areas to identify and inform operations – and how we can do so in partnership with local and central government, iwi and mana whenua.

"While there are EWC members already operating under their own self-imposed catchment constraints model, 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 growing bigger and heavier. This would increase the risk of wide-scale slope failure on the already highly erodible ground. It also presents the possibility of reducing staff numbers to meet

constraints.

"To mitigate both factors, we recommend that catchment constraints are not prescriptive, but rather are informed by detailed operational planning that reflects the unique characteristics of individual forestry blocks or estates."

Uncertainty also remains regarding moves to limit the size of the clear-cut areas within catchments – possibly resulting in a lengthy and staggered approach to harvesting. "The industry is keen to have clarity about what is required and believes this needs to be informed by science and best practice to ensure meaningful outcomes. Any regulation or management changes will inevitably impact the industry."

The clean-up of slash is currently funded through the GDC, but the MILU report's recommendation to establish a Woody Debris Taskforce is yet

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From P 10

to see the light of day. Mr Hope says, despite this, forestry companies are continuing to de-risk catchments within their estates, and to varying degrees on neighbouring lands.

“Debris removal and clean-up has been self-funded, with central government funding being channelled by Gisborne District Council to third parties contracted to undertake debris removal. As a result, EWC cannot comment on matters relating to the funding of a taskforce.

“The EWC continues to endorse the establishment of the taskforce. A priority for us in working together is acknowledging the near and present risk of future debris flows. We know there are still large areas of destabilised and at-risk land where trees are present.

“We continue to raise this with our partners and are keen

to see a regional mitigation plan developed.”

Mr Campbell added in his progress report that “dialogue between GDC and the forestry sector has been limited with little interaction over several years, mostly undertaken in the regulatory setting of resource consent applications. Forestry managers expressed frustration at their inability to get GDC officers to engage with them in proactive problem solving in an industry/council forum or field trips on site.”

Mr Hope says that, in the past 12 months, the two organisations have taken several steps to strengthen their relationship. “They include



**Philip Hope, chief executive of the Eastland Wood council endorses the establishment of the Woody Debris Taskforce.**

signing a Memorandum of Understanding in July 2023 to formalise our commitment to serving our community together.

“Regular meetings and working groups have also been held – to build on the way we are collaborating across the region. One way we are doing this is through jointly

hosted technical meetings with stakeholders, and each other, to review draft forestry consents and update these in ways that make sense to us both.

“We have also recommenced a forestry sector roading forum with GDC and met earlier this month, with meetings scheduled quarterly.”

Mr Hope adds that utilisation of harvest residues would be welcomed by the forest industry. He acknowledges that residues could be repurposed to support decarbonisation of industries, but notes that some hurdles need to be overcome.

“Work is required on logistical supply chains and infrastructure to improve the feasibility and cost, but we remain keen to see these conversations progress further into action and stand ready to be involved.”


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