

NZ Dryland Forests Initiative: Media Release

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NZ Dryland Forests Initiative proposes a plan to plant

100,000 hectares of durable eucalypt trees

The NZ Dryland Forests Initiative (NZDFI) has just released a Consultation Paper as a first step towards developing a regionally based strategic plan for government and private sector collaboration to plant 100,000 hectares of durable eucalypt trees in NZ's east coast regions as a part of the Government's One Billion Trees programme.

The consultation paper: ***"Durable eucalypt forests: a multi-regional opportunity for investment in NZ drylands"*** outlines the case for durable eucalypts in east coast regions. The trees are considered an exciting alternative to traditional agriculture and radiata pine forestry.

NZDFI proposes these eucalypt forests and woodlots will be established in New Zealand's east coast regions by 2030. These could generate an estimated \$2 billion in annual sales of naturally durable timber products by 2050. Regional development and employment could be generated through local processing to produce high value export products that are a sustainable alternative to unsustainably logged tropical hardwoods.

Shaf van Ballekom is chairman of the NZDFI as well as CEO of Proseed Ltd, Austrasia's largest producer of tree seed.

"Since 2008, over \$3 million has been invested into the NZDFI's tree breeding and research to develop the foundation of our vision for NZ's east coast regions to have 100,000 hectares of durable eucalypt forests. The time is right to go out to the regions and to consult with people", says Shaf. "We want to hear from those in central and regional government who are involved in land management and regional economic development, as well as those in the forestry and agriculture industries who might want to take up this opportunity. We want to work with them to develop a plan to get durable eucalypts planted, commencing in 2020 – just two planting seasons away."

Initial substantial markets for the durable timber produced by these trees could include engineered wood products such as laminated veneer lumber (LVL), and as posts for vineyards, agriculture and horticulture. CCA-treated radiata pine posts are coming increasingly less acceptable in sustainable

wine and food growing systems, because of problems with their disposal (the vineyard industry currently breaks an estimated one million CCA-treated posts per year) and potential ground contamination. Other potential markets for the very strong, durable timber include electricity cross-arms, railway sleepers, and structures such as bridges and marine wharves.

Marlborough Research Centre **Chief Executive Gerald Hope**, says

“In terms of their contribution to supporting sustainable grape-growing in Marlborough, durable locally grown timbers offer us a huge benefit. Marlborough is confronted with the problem of how to dispose of many hundreds of thousands of broken CCA-treated posts. We also have large areas of east coast hill country with relatively low rainfall where we see huge potential for farmers to diversify into growing selected dryland species.”

A key focus of NZDFI’s research and development to date has been to establish an extensive regional breeding trial network, and the development of novel techniques for rapid selection and propagation of high-performing genetic material. This will lead to the production of improved planting stock, with the first elite seedlings due for release in 2020. This work is being done by the NZDFI science team, including a large group of academics and researchers from University of Canterbury’s NZ School of Forestry (UC).

Professor Bruce Manley, who leads the research team at UC, says:

“The team here is now recognised internationally as leading the way in a whole raft of research associated with breeding, growing, and processing durable eucalypts. The DFI research project includes seven of our academic staff as well as eight PhD students. It is exciting to be involved with such a collaborative and innovative project.”

Feedback on the consultation paper is sought from all interested parties. The outcomes of the consultation will include establishing a working group which will become active in developing and then implementing the regional plan. Consultees include central and regional government, representatives of the forest growing and timber processing industries, and landowners and their representatives. Anyone else who is interested and keen to become involved with the next phase of the NZDFI’s exciting, visionary project is encouraged to complete a questionnaire, either on-line or via an interview with NZDFI Programme Manager, Paul Millen.

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More details:

The full consultation paper: ***Durable eucalypt forests: a multi-regional opportunity for investment in NZ drylands*** is available at on the [NZDFI website](#) .

The questionnaire is available [here](#) .

www.nzdfi.org.nz