



Forest industry at loggerheads with the Government over carbon credits

Some sense from the Green Party. It has come out in support of the forestry industry which is at loggerheads with the Government over carbon credits.

I know the Government has yet to decide if it will grant carbon credits to the owners of forests planted after 1990, but has said it does not favour such a move.

How wrong can it be! Its failure to offer carbon credits and a proposal to penalise deforestation has created a clamour in the industry, with many members saying the Government's position is contributing to a record number of trees being chopped down. And who could blame forest owners for acting in this way?

Green Party climate change spokeswoman Jeanette Fitzsimons was bang on target when saying the Government should act quickly to assure the sector it would benefit financially.

No wonder our forest owners are in an uproar, primarily because government policies are not requiring the transport or farming sectors to take any responsibility for their emissions, but instead appear to be using forest credits to shield those parts of the economy.

Ms Fitzsimons is right when she says that whether the final decision is a carbon charge, an emissions trading scheme, or an alternative approach to putting a price on carbon, the Government must commit to using the forestry credits for the long-term benefit of the forestry industry.

If, as she claims, trees are being felled now, it is a tremendous waste.

Last Thursday ACT leader Rodney Hide used his state of the nation speech to highlight the issue and said the industry needed incentives. That made sense to me.

The same week the National Party said it would return an as yet unspecified level of carbon credits to the affected forest owners. And that's fair enough, too.

The Greens believed there were "equitable ways of treating the forest industry as

a whole" and would have detailed policy prepared within two months.

Good on them!

Surely what matters most at this stage is for Government to tell the forest industry immediately that they will not be expected to subsidise farmers and those who burn fossil fuel. Then foresters will start to cooperate with the Government's policy-making.

This week the New Zealand Timber Industry Federation (NZTIF) added its support to the Kyoto Forestry Association which has criticised the Government over the issue.

NZTIF president Howard Tonge said a proposal to levy those who convert forests into farms "sent shudders" through the entire forest industry and any potential new investors.

These proposed taxes cut right across the fundamental rights of property owners in this country which unfortunately the current Government seems to be doing more and more regularly. Here in the Gisborne-East Coast I would remind those concerned with this issue that groups and individuals have until the end of this month to make submissions on discussion papers.

Options included a flat charge on changing the use of forestry land, passing laws to enforce a national cap on how much non-Kyoto forest can be cut down, and using the Resource Management Act to control deforestation. Forestry Minister Jim Anderton has said he favours allocating tradable "deforestation permits" to foresters, which could be cashed in when they cut down trees.

Last week he said the value of carbon credits from forest plantings since 1990 was \$1.24 billion. He said paying foresters would be at the expense of taxpayers.

But I still think a lot of work needs to be done on this issue.

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