



Greens urge government to promise forest industry benefits

Wellington, March 12

The Greens have come out in support of the forestry industry which is at loggerheads with the Government over carbon credits.

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.

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.

Green Party climate change spokeswoman Jeanette Fitzsimons said the Government should act quickly to assure the sector it would benefit financially.

"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 said.

"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." Ms Fitzsimons said the situation was urgent as trees were being felled now.

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

The same week the National Party said it would return an as yet unspecified level of carbon credits to the affected forest owners.

The Greens believed there were "equitable ways of treating the forest industry as a whole" and would have detailed policy prepared within two months.

"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 co-operate with the Government's policy-making," Ms Fitzsimons said.

Today 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," he said.

Groups and individuals have until the end of March 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 tradeable "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 tax payers.

"To claim forest owners have a right to credits from trees that were planted before carbon credits were even invented is to suggest farmers, motorists and the rest of New Zealand should pay for their emissions dating back to 1990." NZPA