

National Newsletter April 2026

Sent: Apr 16, 2026, 8:13 PM

From the President

This is the last opportunity for me to contribute to the Association through my role as President. I will be standing down at the AGM in a couple of weeks. To offer a reason, I quote from our fairly recent President, Neil Cullen.

"This is my second term in the role and already I can see that the demands and expectations have grown markedly since 2019."

The Minister of Forestry recently stated that for nearly 30 years New Zealand has been governed without a coherent economic development policy, and now the country is paying the price. Taiwan was an example he used. In 1969 Taiwan and New Zealand each had a GDP of about 1 billion dollars. Over thirty years later the figures for Taiwan were 120 billion and for New Zealand 30 billion.

Taiwan had a strategic plan and New Zealand did not.

Other useful points he stated were-

- There is a need to focus on wood value rather than wood weight. There is a need to upskill and process more logs into goods that are high value and less price sensitive.
- There is a need to encourage a design- led approach to replace other construction material with wood.
- Two years ago the Wood Processing Strategy working group called for Industry and Councils to agree to a code of practice for making and assessing wood processing consent applications. Local Government New Zealand and the Ministry of Environment poured cold water on the proposal.
- When we see logs on the wharf, we need to ask whether it is a reflection of economic success or economic failure.
- The industry has to change its image. Most forestry is high tech, but this is not the image portrayed. It has to learn to treat communities and people with care and respect.

If any of the above sounds slightly familiar, it is because it was written by another President of NZFFA , Nick Seymour, in the Tree Grower of May 2005, 21 years ago. The Minister who Nick referred to, was the late Honourable Jim Anderton. Jim attended our 2005 Conference. This was a time when Ministers didn't mind mixing with the Great Unwashed.

In his address to us Jim said.

"Before I was Minister of Forestry, I was Minister of Economic Development. One of the first things I did in that role was to ask officials for an assessment of the industries with the highest potential for growth in New Zealand. The answer came back very quickly, Forestry and Wood Processing.

They said the potential scale of this industry is unique. The industry is a competitive strength for New Zealand. We have enormous potential to increase the scale of the industry and the returns that can be achieved.

But what the industry needed above all was pro-active attention from the Government. It needed a partnership approach to solving the problems in which we all have a stake. So I brought together an industry taskforce and sat down to look at what we could achieve.

Value Chain Crucial

There is no question that the wood industry, through all the stages of the value chain is crucial to New Zealand. At around \$5 billion per year, it is worth around 4% of our GDP. It ranks with Tourism and Dairy in our top three export earners. That first report I received about the industry told me we could at least double the export earnings from Forestry and Wood Processing. The Wood Processing Taskforce came up with an even more ambitious goal. We can realistically hope to increase earnings to \$20 billion a year over the next 20 years."

SO WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED? Twenty years on the industry is still only worth \$6 billion, so in real terms it has gone backwards by about 50%. This is an absolute disgrace. Forestry has been overtaken by the red meat sector and is likely to slip behind Horticulture, if it hasn't already. Perhaps before long we will sit behind the wine industry?

This is a shocking disappointment. In a country that lends itself to tree growing more than most other countries in the world, we have managed to stuff it up. The blame can be laid squarely at the feet of leadership.

Leadership at Central Government level has been gutless since Jim left us. Leadership at industry level has been, and is, suffering from tunnel vision and myopia.

The risks of building an industry on the one trick pony that is Radiata pine are immense. Now that it has finally dawned on industry leaders that something could go badly wrong with a forest monoculture, there is a rush to build the "Forest Shield".

The sad reality is, that as a heavily reliant trading nation, we are unable to keep pathogens such as varroa mites and yellow legged hornets from our country, so what hope can realistically be expected of keeping lethal fungi from crossing our shores?

I could wax lyrical about the versatility of Radiata pine. With the hundreds of millions of research dollars spent on it, it is now an incredibly useful species. But Mahogany and Teak, it is not.

And just when you thought it couldn't get any worse for the forest industry we now are faced with energy costs causing 80% of the value of small forests being absorbed by the harvesting and transport portions of log sales. Who wants to invest in growing anything where the thirty or so years of risk only amounts to 20% of value once it leaves your farm gate? We need to get more logs off trucks and onto trains at the earliest opportunity. Building more electric rail is twenty years overdue.

The only redeeming feature is, that it probably looks worse for agriculture. As much as I like a good steak, I don't want to see half of the cost of producing it going on imported chemical fertilisers. Thankfully, trees can grow well without them.

So I will finish my cheerful discourse by reminding you all that it could all be a lot worse if we were starting from scratch. Luckily we have an existing industry on which to build. But it's time for bold leadership from both Government and Industry to turn this sluggish ship around.

To those of you coming to the Annual Conference being held Cambridge and ably hosted by the Waikato Branch, I look forward to meeting up with you all. Let's face it, the best thing about our Association are the people that we meet within it. I have learned so much from so many of you over the years.

To those that won't be coming, all the very best to you for the future.

Vaughan Kearns

FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE: **Election 2026: What forest growers need from the next New Zealand government**

As New Zealand moves toward the 2026 General Election, the New Zealand Forest Owners Association has consolidated a clear set of priorities it believes any incoming government should consider supporting the stability and productivity of forest growers.

As an industry body advocating on behalf of its members – commercial forest owners – our role is not to endorse political parties but to ensure that whoever forms the next Government understands the long-term policy settings required for investment certainty, regional employment and environmental performance.

Our 2026 Policy Priorities span three focus areas – people, environment and trade – shaped by member feedback and the current pressures and opportunities facing the sector.

People: Workforce development, safety and training

There are approximately 40,000 people working across the forestry supply chain, at least 8000 of those in forestry. New Zealand's professional foresters and the workers that support them are a top priority for the forest industry.

With the future of forestry relying heavily on a skilled and safe workforce, NZFOA's 2026 Policy Priorities include:

- A public-private partnership for vocational education, ensuring sustainable funding for training and strengthening pathways into forestry careers, as led by the joint Forest Industry Contractors Association (FICA) and NZFOA Forestry Training committee.
- Supporting the actions called for by the Food and Fibre Capability Strategy, including better support for the establishment of pathways for regional provision of workplace-based learning for forestry in particular.



- Continued investment in the Forest Industry Safety Council (FISC) and support for specialised training programmes such as registered fellers, which enhance capability in high-risk roles.

These measures aim to improve workforce resilience, attract new talent, and keep people safe in one of New Zealand's most important primary industries.



NZFOA chief executive, Dr Elizabeth H

Environment: A strategic approach to forest and landscape health

Policy signals across the political spectrum in the last three years have created uncertainty about forestry's long-term role as a primary producer, climate mitigator and land user. NZFOA will be seeking clarity on how the new government defines forestry's role and contributions to our country.

Land use and the Emissions Trading Scheme

The NZFOA's policy priorities caution against further blanket restrictions on afforestation and farm-to-forest conversions, noting that additional constraints could impede forest expansion where it is environmentally and commercially suitable. Maintaining flexible land-use pathways supports forest productivity and helps stabilise erosion-prone land.

A stable and forward-looking approach to the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) is critical for forest owners' long-term investment certainty. We call for government and industry to co-develop a long-term plan for forestry in the ETS, ensuring that forestry-generated units continue to support hard-to-abate sectors and that policy settings remain predictable for investors.

High-quality national mapping

NZFOA seeks a significantly improved national mapping system that is consistent, high-resolution and fit for modern decision-making. Enhanced mapping enables better risk management, operational planning and monitoring of forest health across landscapes. We support the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment's (PCE) call for a replacement for the Land Use Capability mapping system as part of upgrading our statistics and data.



Native forest establishment

Many within the sector support targeted public investment in native forest planting incentives, recognising the long-term ecological value of native species, including their contributions to soil stability, biodiversity, and climate resilience. With the need to convert areas of production forest to natives, we are committed as a sector to bringing down the costs of native planting in partnership with the government. We also support Federated Farmer's call for additional funding for QEII National Trust to support the establishment and maintenance of biodiversity protected areas on private land.

Biosecurity and a national wildlife management partnership

Forest owners see biosecurity and good pest, predator and game control as some of the most critical tools protecting against declines in forest health, which is increasingly at risk as climate patterns shift.

NZFOA seeks a coordinated, public-private initiative to manage wildlife species such as deer, which are known to damage both native and exotic forests. Better wildlife management is seen as essential to ensuring productive, healthy forests for generations to come.

The NZFOA also seeks increased support for forest biosecurity through the reforms to the science system, including surveillance and diagnostic capability. We cannot focus on innovation as a sector if we are worried about our defences. Our long standing and proactive partnership with government on biosecurity only works if we have the domestic science capability and capacity to support it.

Fire control support

One of forestry's strengths is its substantial contributions to New Zealand's rural fire capability, providing forestry crews for fire control, machinery and aviation expertise. NZFOA seeks greater collaboration with Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ) to explore improvements to New Zealand's firefighting systems.



Key focus areas include a joint FENZ–forestry training reset, clarifying the use of forestry capability in initial attack in wildfire response, an independent review of aerial firefighting effectiveness – including its effectiveness relative to costs. We also advocate for strengthening rural fire performance measures and improved capture and reporting of rural fire data such as area burned by land use, forest type affected and fire origins. Greater transparency and evidence of rural fire cost baselines ahead of levy changes will support informed decision-making.

Ultimately, we want government to reinforce forestry as a core national wildfire partner.

Bioeconomy and trade: Transforming wood resources into high-value products

Forestry holds a critical role in accelerating New Zealand’s transition towards a renewable, circular bioeconomy.

NZFOA seeks initiatives enabling forestry’s role in the bioeconomy’s evolution, including:

- Government procurement policies favouring New Zealand–grown wood in construction, stimulating demand for domestic processing.
- Measures to reduce energy costs and support woody biomass co-generation in wood-processing plants. These steps aim to lift competitiveness and reduce emissions.
- The establishment of a national bioeconomy strategy, modelled on international examples such as Japan, to coordinate research, innovation, and investment across forestry and related sectors.

The overarching vision is to shift New Zealand from exporting raw logs toward producing higher-value products and bio-based materials.

To grow exports and diversify markets, we call for increased government support for:

- Forest research and development, market research and biofactory investment - helping companies innovate and commercialise new products.
- Progress on a Free Trade Agreement with India and broader tariff reductions with other key partners, improving competitiveness for New Zealand wood products.

With global wood markets becoming more competitive, we see trade policy as essential for safeguarding and expanding market access.

Forestry and wood processing have a growing role in the New Zealand economy

NZFOA's 2026 Policy Priorities set out a forward-looking vision for commercial forest growing in New Zealand contingent on policy settings that support the sector's long-term growth.

By advocating for climate resilience, enhanced forest health and productivity, growing the bioeconomy, expanded trade and investment in people, the sector is charting a course for long-term growth and environmental stewardship.

This policy roadmap reflects a sector that sees itself not just as an economic engine but as a key contributor to climate action and regional development. The next government - whatever its composition - will play a critical role in shaping how these ambitions are realised.

- Dr Elizabeth Heeg
NZFOA chief executive



Dr Elizabeth Heeg's directive to Political parties for the 2026 General Election.

NZFFA President's response.

Every General Election, the NZFFA ask all the Forestry spokespersons from the various political parties to give a clear policy direction on their future intentions if they are in power.

For the last two elections the major parties have been mute in this area.

So it was extremely timely for Dr Elisabeth Heeg to front foot this silence, by stating a clear case for what the Forest Industry requires.

As President, and representing the opinions of the current Executive, I am fully in favour of what Dr Heeg has requested. As her directive was produced in February before the current fuel shock was upon us, there is now room for government assistance for our industry, over and above what was requested in the first instance.

Unfortunately after decades of ambivalence regarding our industry and its aspirations, I genuinely fear that nothing will come from whoever is in power after November, in regards to offering the support that our industry requires to reach even a modicum of economic improvement. Much of what is requested is a level playing field and a stop to interference from biased local body politicians.

Regardless of previous political inaction, that doesn't mean that Dr Heeg's ideas should not be fully discussed and fine tuned with useful debate among our members at the coming Conference, and beyond.

Vaughan Kearns

NZFFA President

Civic Award for NZFFA Patron Eric Appleton

16th February 2026

It was a nice privilege to be among NZFFA members from Nelson & Marlborough to see Eric caught off guard by this

surprise presentation.

Photo and text from Hon Nick Smith's Facebook article.



This evening, we honoured local legend Eric Appleton for his 70-year contribution with his nursery in Wakefield propagating over 200 million trees all over NZ for forestry and amenity.

Tasman Mayor Tim King presented the TDC award at the Wakefield Community Council-organised event alongside West Coast/Tasman MP Maureen Pugh. I was delighted to be invited, both as Nelson's Mayor and a former Conservation Minister, to help acknowledge Eric's contribution.

Eric migrated to NZ from England in 1956 after training in forestry in the UK and Germany, worked at Baigent's Tree Nursery and then in 1968 established Appleton's Tree Nursery south of Wakefield that continues to this day as a family business.

The iconic business has provided permanent jobs for more than 20 locals and a further 40 seasonal jobs over the winter as well as its critical role in the regions \$200 million a year forest sector. Eric has shared his knowledge, experience and love of trees to gardeners, landscapers, foresters and Councils all over NZ and internationally. Eric and the Appleton family are also great community contributors.

Eric's contribution nationally and internationally has been recognised by the International Plant Propagators, NZ Landscape Architects, NZ Farm Forestry Assn. and NZ Crop Association, but it is timely that we locally saluted his contribution. Congrats Eric on behalf of Nelson City!

New NZFFA executive from April 2026

Nominations were called for vacancies that had opened on the NZFFA Executive. It turns out that nominations matched the vacancies. This means there will be no need for an election at the April AGM. The new Executive will be:

Member and status.		When elected	When term finishes
Dougal Morrison	President	Apr-26	Apr-28
Tim Forde	North Island	Apr-24	Apr-27
Graham West	North Island	Apr-26	Apr-29
Gary Fleming	South Island	Apr-24	Apr-27
George Shallcrass	South Island	Apr-26	Apr-29
Vaughan Kearns	At large	Apr-26	Apr-29
Kees Weytmans	At Large	Apr-25	Apr-28
Dave Forsyth	At Large	Apr-26	Apr-29
Phil Alloway	At large	Apr-26	Apr-29

The biographies of the new faces on the Executive, plus other members who were co-opted in the past for their skills but are now full Exec members are appended.

Hamish Levack [NZFFA National secretary]

Mini biographies.

Philip Alloway

Currently Branch chair and treasurer for Nelson and treasurer for Marlborough.

Owned plantation forestry together with my wife Carol for 33 years largely hands off, both working feverishly overseas to fund it.

On returning to NZ in 2008, owned and operated a nationwide industrial scale service business with my younger brother for 13 yrs.

Currently developing a small amenity tree block in Linkwater.

Keen to assist NZFFA in the executive and further national image and management for the benefit of our members.

Dave Forsythe

I've been a member of the farm Forestry Association for the last 30 years. I was a co-opted member of the executive from April 2023 to April 2025. I'm the current President of the Waikato branch. I was co-opted back onto the executive at the end of last year and have now assumed the role of Treasurer.

My background is owning and operating a high input dairy farm milking up to 1100 dairy cows. That operation was sold about 5 years ago.

George Shallcrass

George left school and did an apprenticeship as a fitter & Turner, then went commercial fishing and gained his Coastal Masters ticket. He has been self-employed since the early 1990's. He started playing with trees back in the 90's doing jobs that were too big for an arborist and too small for logging contractors. He has had a few employees when required, but now just engages contractors as needed.

George has been a member of NZFFA through family connection since the 90's. In the 2000's he joined the Marlborough Forest Industry Association and ended up on the Executive and was elected Chairman of MFIA in 2021. The Association changed to Top of The South Wood Council in 2022 and he continued as chairman until 2024. He remains on the executive of TOTSWC. George is currently chair of the Marlborough branch of NZFFA. He received the Joll Hosking award for "Distinguished Service" to NZFFA in 2025.

Dougal Morrison

Dougal Morrison is a dedicated advocate for forestry and land management. He has been a member of the NZFFA for over 40 years and is an active participant in both the Wellington and Wairarapa branches. He has also served on the NZFFA National Executive for nearly three years and was elected as National Vice President in December 2025. He has been a member of the Wellington Branch Executive for over 10 years and convened the National Conference in 2021. In his younger days he was National Vice President of NZ Young Farmers. He has also been a Trustee of the Product Stewardship Foundation a member of the Motor Trade Association Environment Committee and a graduate of the Kellog Rural Leadership Programme.

Dougal is standing for the position of President of NZFFA, with a vision to strengthen partnerships across the sector. His goal is to build strong relationships with key organisations such as NZ Federated Farmers, Beef+Lamb NZ, Rural Women NZ, the NZ Forest Owners' Association, Ngā Pou a Tāne, NZ Young Farmers and Regional Councils to drive membership growth and get a wider reach to younger people. Growing membership will enhance the Association's sustainability.

Dougal has a wide range of government, industry and political contacts. As an experienced professional in land and forestry management, he also has a diverse background in agriculture, forestry, and environmental sustainability. In the past he has represented New Zealand in negotiating international forestry agreements.

Dougal has a Bachelor of Agricultural Commerce from Lincoln University and post-graduate qualifications in forestry. He is a recognised Certified Practising Resource Manager (Leading Professional) with the NZ Association of Resource Management, is a member of the NZ Institute of Forestry and a retired farmer. Dougal currently manages the Riparian planting programme for Porirua City Council.

WPMA Election Manifesto 2026

Wood Processors and Manufacturers Association of NZ 2026 General Election Manifesto

Who we are

The Wood Processors and Manufacturers Association of NZ (WPMA) is a national, voluntary industry body representing companies that convert harvested logs into finished wood products such as sawn timber, pulp, panels, laminated products, mouldings, engineered wood, and emerging bio-forest product solutions. WPMA supports a sector employing more than 38,000 direct staff, mostly in the regions. Our members export over \$3.2 billion in value added wood products and generate around \$2 billion in domestic wood sales each year.

[Read more](#)

Nominations Open: Growing Native Forests Champions Awards

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Growing Native Forests Champions



Do you know someone making an outstanding contribution to the growth and regeneration of New Zealand's native forests? Or is your organisation or community group involved in a project worthy of national recognition?

Te Uru Rākau – New Zealand Forest Service (MPI) is now accepting nominations for the **2026 Growing Native Forests Champions Awards**. These awards celebrate the remarkable achievements of individuals, mana whenua, organisations, and communities who are planting and regenerating native forests across the motu.

Who can apply:

- Farmers, lifestyle block owners and large restoration block owners who have established native forests on their land
- Forestry companies
- Mana whenua (individuals, whānau, hapū, iwi, and groups)
- Catchment and community groups

Why apply:

- Showcase your contribution to establishing new native forests
- Help highlight the environmental and cultural benefits of native afforestation
- Inspire others to support and expand native forest regeneration efforts

Applications opened on **9 March** and close on **17 April 2026**. Winners will be announced at a special ceremony at **Fieldays in June**.

For full details and to submit a nomination, please visit:

[Growing Native Forests Champions | NZ Government](#)

We encourage you to nominate someone - or apply yourself - and join us in celebrating the people helping our native forests thrive.

Watch: [Bringing back the forest for the next generation](#)

Ngā mihi,

Jarrold Wilkinson-Smith | He Poutohutohu Tuakana Tuhono Ahumahi- Senior Adviser Sector Engagement

Forestry Engagement and Advice | Te Uru Rākau — New Zealand Forest Service
Manatū Ahu Matua - Ministry for Primary Industries

21 Domett Street, Ahuriri, Napier 4110 | PO Box 12-034, Napier 4144 | New Zealand
Waea Pūkoro (M): 027 874 0008 | **Pae ipurangi (W):** www.mpi.govt.nz

Harvesting Operations Handbook

Te Uru Rākau – New Zealand Forest Service has released a new best practice guide for managing slash on steep hill country. You might like to download it as a PDF file from this link:

<https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/71233-Managing-slash-on-steep-hill-country-harvesting-operations-handbook>

At 40 pages and 8 Mb it should be self explanatory but if in doubt contact Dr Susan Secker, Manager, Forestry Operational Policy, Forestry System Directorate on Susan.Secker@mpi.govt.nz



Managing slash on steep hill country
Harvesting operations handbook



Members views

Farm Forestry Discussion Group on Facebook

It puzzles me I've never seen promotion, support or even commentary on the excellent NZFFA-sponsored 'NZ Farm Forestry Discussion Group' Facebook page created in 2019. On it, members pose operational questions on any aspect of farm forestry from site and species selection to selling logs, to draw responses from others. It's a member-to-member thing, with no agency intervening, other than a silent moderator to keep things honest and respectable. I've used it several times, always drawing a handful of useful responses. (As for all Facebook things, its immediate, turnaround time for responses is measured in hours, days, rarely weeks.) I'd rate this nationally accessible service as having the potential to match the *Tree Grower* and Conference for actual and useful information sharing across membership at large.

But despite 2000 registered users, I suspect its actual user base is wafer thin. It could be revved up with little effort. Facebook Discussion Groups such as this seem ideal for handling the professional-willing-to-share-on-the-side/experienced practitioners likewise/enquiring newcomer mix that typifies the make-up and functionality of the NZFFA. And with the users doing all the populating work, it must be low-maintenance to keep things going. Take a look at this gem, if you haven't: www.facebook.com/groups/1393921050756726

Grant Hunter
North Canterbury Branch

Living fence article

Hi Raewyn,

Thank you for sending Annette Litherland's article. Annette has been co-ordinating the Motueka Catchment Collective and I have been a part of that group. Just a small correction, I have been observing Populus tremula plantings done when Golden Downs was part of the NZ Forest Service. The UK Forestry Commission selected straight clones of Populus tremula (European aspen) and sent them to the NZ Forest Service with a view to starting a match industry, The clones were planted in Golden Downs Forest and have created circles of very straight poles around each original tree. They are especially noticeable in autumn for their autumn colours.

Unlike most other poplar species aspens will not grow from aerial shoots, only from root cuttings and these must be dug from the tough root mass within the groups. Root cuttings planted in the nursery will produce a rooted plant 0.5 to 1.5m tall in the first year and are suitable planting stock. Some firm roots from the nursery stock can be grown for the next season.

My suggestions is that aspens could be planted in steep gullies where they are about to emerge onto flat pastureland, planted at 10m apart alternating up the side of the

gully. In a few years there would be a dense root mass to retain silt, prevent scouring, and the poles would hold back woody debris, but allow the flood water to pass through. If a massive flood was to smash the poles the root mass would resprout new rods and be a permanent feature.

The former Catchment Boards discounted using aspen because they would not root from poles or rods.

There is an American aspen *Populus tremuloides* which I have plants in the nursery, it appears to produce less suckers and is rare in NZ with few examples to study.





Populus tremula and living fences. This group sat in shallow water all winter 2004. There have been a period of grazing which controlled sucker growth for some time, when stock was removed a new ring of suckers grew.

A group of P. tremula have been planted on the dry Wither Hills on the southern boundary of Blenheim and in a very low rainfall are growing and suckering, though less densely than in the photos, so they are versatile.

Regards

Eric Appleton