Wilding Pine Network

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Submission from the Wilding Pine Network **10th August 2023**

on

A discussion document on proposals to redesign the permanent forest category in the New Zealand Emissions Trading Scheme (NZ ETS) MPI Discussion Paper No: 2023/07

Kia ora koutou,

Initial comments and notes

The Wilding Pine Network representing 26 community-based groups involved in the national Wilding Conifer Control Programme (Refer https://wildingpinenetwork.org.nz/) provides the following submission on the above discussion document.

We will confine our input in this submission to the issue of unwanted spread of exotic conifers as this relates to the proposed development and establishment of policy around permanent forests as part of ETS.

The unwanted spread of exotic conifers and the effects of fringe and distance spread (seed rain) is regarded as a serious national economic and environmental problem. The adverse impacts of this are documented in a cost benefit analysis commissioned by MPI in 2018. Refer weblink below:

https://www.wildingpines.nz/assets/Documents/MPI-Long-Term-Management-Wilding-Conifers-Cost-Benefit-Analysis.pdf

The redesign of the permanent forest category provides a critical opportunity to help avoid and mitigate the potential threats posed by future plantings of exotic forestry in vulnerable landscapes throughout New Zealand.

Under the present policy and regulatory settings permanent exotic forests planted for ETS purposes will tend to be established in areas where land is relatively cheap and available.

Land in this category is often found in areas of New Zealand under low intensity economic use, i.e., in the hill and high-country areas. Unfortunately, land adjacent to the planting sites can be vulnerable to wilding spread. This for example may be land under low intensity pastoral grazing or protected for conservation purposes. Intensive grazing has proven to be locally effective at controlling wilding conifers spread but this will only assist where stocking levels can be sustained at more than 1-2 stock units per hectare. This is not always feasible without intensive management and/or appropriate fencing.

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Responses to submission points and questions.

We will address the questions posed in the discussion document where wilding conifer risk is mentioned or should be considered.

Question 6: Do you think there is an opportunity to use permanent forests to stabilise erosion-prone land? Permanent forests could help address the risk of wilding pines?

In the hill and high country east of the main divide in the South Island we think it would be undesirable to use erosion control as a reason to justify the planting of permanent forests of high-risk species there.

It could be argued today that the impacts of wilding spread from these plantings significantly now outweigh any erosion control benefits.

Question 7: Do you think the Government should consider restricting the permanent forest category to exotic species with a low wilding risk?

Yes, the Wilding Pine Network would support the restriction of species to low or non-spreading species as one solution to the management of the spread of Wilding Conifers

In addition, the selection of exotic species for permanent forest must also consider that many exotic species have been selected for use in plantation forests and are designed to grow quickly and to be harvested for timber and require ongoing management.

The assessment of the likelihood of unwanted spread risk from the planting of production forests is currently assessed under the NES-PF using the Wilding Spread Risk Calculator. It should be noted that any tool designed to reduce the risk of unwanted spread must be able to deal with a range of highly complex site-specific variables of which species is only one.

Question 15: If Forest management requirements are implemented, do you think these should be prescriptive or outcomes focussed? Why/Why not?

We would favour a prescriptive regime rather than an outcome based one with respect to wilding risk.

Proactive and timely decisions are essential to respond to any event that may cause specific widespread seed dispersal or seed strike. If not, then the management costs for forest owner and/or neighbours may become unsustainable in a relatively short timeframe.

This was certainly the case with many historic plantings in the high country where spread risk went unrecognized for 20-30 years by which time the problem had become very well advanced. One way to implement forest management requirements could be via forest management plans.

While there may need to be some flexibility and discretion needed in forest management this cannot allow procrastination that allows problems to remain unrecognised until they have become very difficult and expensive to resolve.

Question 16: What are your views on forest management plans?

We support mandatory management plans with respect to managing wilding risks. One of the current challenges that needs to be addressed is the management of wilding problems is the difficulty because of property rights to clear them without agreement on third-party land.

Question 17: What should forest management plans include?

Forest management plans need to identify all the known and possible wilding risks that may arise from the planting of a permanent forest on neighbouring land which may be affected by externality impacts generated by the local fringe and distant spread (>1km and up to 25 km from source). These impacts could affect primary production, biodiversity, water yield, wildfire risk, social and cultural values, etc.

Question 18: Who do you think should be allowed to verify forest management plans?

This must be administered ideally by an independent third party preferably without any direct or indirect commercial links to the forestry industry. In the case of production forestry under the NES-PF Territorial and Regional government have some responsibilities for the oversight of forestry activities.

If they have the staff with the necessary local knowledge and technical expertise, then they are the logical agencies to have responsibility for verifying and otherwise administering forest management plans.

Question 19: How often do you think forest management plans should be audited or re-verified?

At least every 3 years because weather events are unpredictable and can generate wilding seed spread and propagation that can create significant problems. The same applies to managing wilding spread which can start often very rapidly and variably as soon as trees reach reproductive age, for some species this is within 5 years. Auditing and reverification processes at 3 yearly intervals would ensure that management plans remained fit for purpose and would ensure that the owners/managers of permanent forests were maintaining and implementing their plans in an effective manner.

Question 20: What do you think should happen if there are not enough people to verify forest management plans? Design choice 3c: What should the compliance (monitoring and enforcement) regime look like?

Local government agencies have the base capability and infrastructure to undertake a range of field-based monitoring and regulatory activities. There is no reason why given a suitable lead in time that these agencies could not develop the capacity to administer permanent forest management plans. Training by experienced people is essential as is the resourcing of this and the people that both developed and verify these plans so that supply can always meet demand within reasonable timeframes. An alternative could be the use of a similar standard being applied at present to afforestation notifications under the NES-PF, i.e., a minimum level of experience and expertise is required for those submitting &/or independently vetting the plans. This could be workable if there was a high level of transparency and consultation between all of the affected parties.

Question 21: Do you think the use of existing compliance tools are appropriate?

The WPN is of the opinion that regulatory tools for managing wilding conifer spread are inadequate. This has been investigated in a comprehensive report commissioned by the WPN in 2021. See https://wildingpinenetwork.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Wilding-Conifer-Management-in-NZ_Report-for-WPN_Final.pdf

It is our hope that legislation and regulation will be enacted in future that provides effective legal and regulatory tools to equitably manage externality impacts created by of planted conifers.

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Question 22: Do you think there should be new or expanded compliance tools for permanent forests? Which ones and why?

See Question 21 answer above.

Question 23: Are there other compliance options that you think we should consider?

See Question 21 answer above.

Question 24: For the compliance tools you think we should have, when do you think they should be used?

The redesign of the permanent forest category offers an opportunity to address the gaps and shortcomings in existing legislation and regulation in relation to unintended impacts of wilding spread of exotic conifers on adjacent land holders and communities of interest.

We suggest that one tool to address this issue is a statutory instrument of some sort that binds the owners of permanent forests to take reasonable responsibility for any externalities that may be imposed on neighbours and other affected stakeholders over time from the planting of a permanent forest. This could be used to provide a source of contingency recompense to enable effective and equitable remedies to be delivered in relation to any wilding related impacts on third parties over the life of the forest.

Nāku, nā

Jo Ritchie - Coordinator – Wilding Pine Network