

Northland Totara Working Group

February 2007

The Northland Totara Working Group was formally established in September 2006 to support and promote research and technology transfer in the productive management of totara from both naturally regenerating stands and plantations.

The group is coordinated by NZ Landcare Trust. Current members include landowners, Farm Forestry, Far North District Council, Northland Regional Council, wood millers and processors, Tane's Tree Trust, NZ Forest Owners Association, and Ensis (ex Forest Research Institute).

The Working Group meets on a regular basis to discuss progress and provide direction and input into the initiatives underway. New members are welcome to come along to these meetings.



Background

Totara regenerates naturally on farmland in many regions throughout New Zealand – particularly Northland. Its ability to establish in a paddock, and its compatibility with livestock farming, means it has truly unique potential for widespread integration into our production landscapes.

Naturally regenerating totara stands potentially represent a significant existing and developing resource. Typically, totara is regenerating naturally on the less productive slopes in hill country, as well as riparian areas, where they often fill a soil conservation role and supply shading crucial to water quality enhancement. Regenerating totara is so widespread in Northland that many landowners consider it a weed.

The working group aims to change that regrowth into an asset for landowners and the country. There is increasing interest in actively managing these stands for sustainable timber production. However very little work has been carried out on what management is required to maximise the production from these stands. Demonstration areas are needed where various thinning, pruning and other silvicultural options can be tested to boost growth rates, improve tree form, and produce timber of high value for specialty uses.

There are also some planted totara stands that require monitoring to assess growth rates and timber quality of these stands versus naturally regenerating totara.

The Northland Totara Working Group has five broad objectives:

- To quantify the resource of naturally regenerating totara
- To establish demonstration trials, evaluating a range of thinning and pruning options
- To determine wood qualities and uses of farm grown trees
- To investigate the feasibility of developing a supply chain
- To identify and overcome hindrances to sustainable management of naturally regenerating totara.



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Funded projects

The Northland Totara Working group has successfully applied to the Sustainable Farming Fund for funding. With cash contributions from SFF, Foundation of Research Science and Technology, Tane's Tree Trust, Far North District Council and Northland Regional Council for the next three years, the group will oversee a project with three objectives:

- To establish sites around Northland for demonstration trials evaluating a range of thinning and pruning options.
- To evaluate the wood quality of thinnings from selected stands, using both laboratory testing procedures and local processors and end-users.
- To compare growth rates, stand productivity and wood quality of extracted thinnings of naturally regenerating stands with plantation totara.

Permanent sample plots will be established for trial work on sites in three 'clusters' around Northland – Glenbervie/Whangarei, Kaeo and Herekino/Broadwood.



There will also be a number of field days and workshops associated with this project, including seminars with a general focus on totara management, a workshop looking at management techniques, and a workshop looking at legal issues under the RMA and Forest Amendment Act.

Thanks to support and funding from Far North District Council, the first of these is planned for **19 March in Kaikohe, 20 March in Kaeo, 21 March in Kaitiāia and 22 March in Whangarei.**

An application was also successfully submitted to **ASB Community Trust** under the umbrella of Tane's Tree Trust.



This will fund the development of a practical method for assessing the current resource of naturally regenerating totara in Northland using aerial mapping/photography and GIS technology.

Another focus

The milling of naturally regenerating native trees is governed and controlled by the Forests Amendment Act 1993 (administered by MAF). This requires harvesting to be done on a sustainable basis under either Permit or Plan provisions. It is important that Council District Plans give effect to both Acts in a well-meshed and compatible way that avoids unnecessary duplication or inefficiencies.

Any rules within the District Plan, especially concerning indigenous vegetation, should not preclude, discourage or increase the expense of harvesting under a MAF approved Permit or Plan. Fear of legal difficulties and complicated consent processes has been identified by Tane's Tree Trust as a major disincentive to rural land owners thinking about planting or managing native trees.

The Northland Totara Working Group will continue to seek involvement in appropriate planning processes to minimise this. A submission has been made to the Whangarei District Council Landscape Review process regarding this, and input will be made into the review of the Regional Policy Statement and other processes in the future.



Keen to learn more?

- Come along to the N-Beg tent at the Northland Agricultural **Field Days in Dargaville (1-3 March 2007)** for more information on the Northland Totara Working Group.
- Get hold of the **Totara Bulletin** – "Totara - Establishment, Growth and Management", the first in the New Zealand Indigenous Tree Bulletin series. It can be sourced from the Scion Research website <http://www.scionresearch.com/other+publications.aspx> or by emailing publications@scionresearch.com.
- Contact Helen Moodie to be added to the database and receive regular updates on the project.



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