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Raising the bar in forestry

The new National Environmental Standards for Plantation Forestry (NES-PF) has got many in the industry buzzing about what the changes might mean for them.

Representatives from the forestry industry, from large export companies to harvesters and farm foresters, have been working with the Ministry for Primary Industries over the last few years to come up with a practical and consistent approach.

The new regulations, which came into force in May, aim to raise the bar when it comes to forestry activities and the environment. The standards include risk assessment tools to manage the environmental impacts from forestry, covering the issues of erosion, wilding conifers and fish spawnings. They will also give consistency and certainty for plantation foresters across New Zealand

while giving them the flexibility to be responsive to local conditions.

Forestry is New Zealand's third largest primary industry and up until now, many in the industry would argue that its efficiency has been hampered by the confusing mix of planning rules across New Zealand's 86 councils.

Tim Garlick and Hamish Anderson from IFS Growth Ltd and its harvesting brand, One Forest, both agree the NES-PF will lift standards. "As a company working across the country, the NES will enable us to set consistent standards and make compliance easier to monitor," Hamish says.

"It will be good to be able to work more closely with the different councils," he says.

IFS Growth was established in Southland nearly 40 years ago, and Hamish has overseen its southern harvesting operations for six years. In that time he has seen the company grow from a small Winton-based operation with five staff, to a nationwide company employing 30. One Forest is the harvesting arm of the company.

"This will be a big change for some. It will stop some of the on-the-day requests from some to 'just pop into my block on your way down the road'."

TIM GARLICK

Tim has recently joined IFS Growth working within the One Forest brand and has 35 years' experience in the industry. He's seen many changes and thinks this latest change is a positive one. "I see it as an important step in raising the environmental awareness throughout the forestry industry," he says.

"It's definitely a good thing. There's a lot of awareness around now, whether it be forestry or anything where there's going to be movement of land. Improving environmental outcomes is important for the industry with the public rightfully demanding higher standards from all land users.

"It's only going to have benefits in the future – we just have to get our heads around it really, and strive to keep those standards up."

One Forest was established as part of IFS Growth to get small forest block owners together to give them better scale when competing with the bigger companies in the market. Tim says around 80% of their clients are farmers, who together produce about 40% of the wood One Forest harvests within the region.

Small forest owners are an important part of the sector. It's where the largest growth is expected to come in the next 10 years, but at the same time they will also need to follow the new regulations. The NES-PF applies to any forest at least one hectare in size that has been planted specifically for commercial purposes and will be harvested.

Hamish and Tim agree that this will put pressure on forward planning, particularly for farm forestry, as a harvest plan will need to be in place six months prior to cutting any trees, and there are other strict timelines within the NES-PF for future works.

"This will be a big change for some. It will stop some of the on-the-day requests from some to 'just pop into my block on your way down the road'," Tim says.

"Traditionally what would happen is farmers will wait till after lambing and then ring up and say 'I want to fell some trees at Christmas time', but it's going to need a bit more thought, and more on-the-ground planning to make sure the operations are suited to the terrain or the right conditions."

Need more info?

With the introduction of the National Environmental Standards for Plantation Forestry, there is now a matrix of rules that apply to the different forestry activities. Depending on the activity, rules in the NES or in the proposed Southland Water and Land Plan may apply.

Before harvesting you'll need to submit your harvest management plan, and you may need consents for some of your forestry activities. Environment Southland is also required to ensure compliance with the NES and your consent conditions.

There are more details and a range of free tools to help with planning and calculations available on the MPI website, www.mpi.govt.nz, plus Environment Southland has prepared a handy guide to help step foresters through which rules apply (regional or the NES).

Go to www.es.govt.nz for a copy, or contact our staff for more specific information.



▲ Tim Garlick