

Position Statement on the Regional Impacts of Permanent Carbon Farming in Tairāwhiti

February 2022

OVERVIEW

In Tairāwhiti, land-use change is occurring at an alarming pace. While carbon markets have the potential to present new regional opportunities, in Tairāwhiti the current Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) market prices and related policy settings are resulting in the unconstrained conversion of significant blocks of land into permanent carbon-only forests¹ at a rate and scale which is likely to result in a lost opportunity for the environment and detrimental impacts for our communities and local economy (BDO Gisborne, 2021).

The Regional Impacts of Permanent Carbon Farming Group (RIPCF)² was formed to activate a community-led response to the impacts of government set incentives driving permanent carbon farming in the Tairāwhiti region. We seek to have the regional impacts of permanent carbon farming more deeply understood and considered by both regional and national decision-makers.

This position statement outlines the potential for Tairāwhiti to provide an exemplar model of integrated land use³, identifying solutions that have broad support from a range of regional stakeholders. We also highlight the risks associated with permanent carbon farming in Tairāwhiti, specifying those considered urgent and requiring immediate attention.

VISION & ASPIRATIONS

Tairāwhiti is committed to proving that a sustainable and holistically beneficial model for land use in Aotearoa can be achieved while helping New Zealand to satisfy our domestic and international climate change targets.

¹ **Permanent Carbon-Only Forests:** Exotic forests that are managed for the economic benefit of carbon sequestration provided by the ETS, but are not intended to be harvested nor are planted for their purpose of providing environmental, social and or cultural benefits.

² **Regional Impacts of Permanent Carbon Farming Group (RIPCF):** A community-led multi-sector group with interests in the regional impacts of permanent carbon farming in Tairāwhiti, established with the intention of understanding the viewpoints and expressing a shared vision of a diverse group of regional stakeholders (see list of contributors in Appendix).

³ **Integrated Land Use:** Land-use that seeks to balance the economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits of the land, often using a coordinated approach across multiple sectors aiming blend or coordinate management strategies and implementation across multiple sectors and authorities.

Our vision is for a thriving, prosperous region in which land uses including horticulture, sheep and beef farming, production forestry⁴ (including nature-based forestry⁵) and permanent indigenous forests are well-matched with suitable land types across the region. We aim for a sustainable regional economy, based on a 'mosaic' approach to land use that optimises a healthy, flourishing environment, rewarding active land management, providing long term jobs and the production of high-value goods and services.

The RIPCF group has set up four workstreams to actively build on these aspirations:

1. data collection to understand the current situation and future scenarios to ensure that real-time regional data is presented to policymakers and stakeholders
2. shared long-term visioning for the future of land use in the region to ensure a united vision can be considered by policymakers and stakeholders and contributions made to see these realised
3. policy, exploring innovation and opportunities to ensure our regional voice is heard and regional risks and opportunities are acted on in a timely manner
4. education and communication amongst regional stakeholders to ensure we continue to include the voice of all stakeholders and enable widespread understanding of the regional impacts of permanent carbon farming across Tairāwhiti

Changes in land use should be monitored and considered on a regional scale, with attention to the rate of change. We propose that the success of any land use decision should be measured against regionally specific frameworks based on the aspirations and unique context of that region, as defined by the region. The six muka of He Rangitapu He Tohu Ora (Trust Tairāwhiti, n.d.) regional wellbeing framework provides Tairāwhiti with a structure for the assessment of regional wellbeing outcomes impacted by our land-use choices:

- Ōhanga | Economy
- Taiao | Environment
- Tūtangata | Cultural Identity
- Mātauranga | Knowledge
- Hapori | Communities
- Tūhono | Relationships

Our shared preference is for:

- active management of the land across all land use types over passive land use
- increased biodiversity over monoculture in any sector
- a mosaic of land use over domination by any particular sector
- working together in unity with a focus on solutions

⁴ **Production Forestry:** Any forests which are managed for commercial production/harvesting of timber, fuelwood, charcoal, biofuels, or non-timber forest products.

⁵ **Nature-based Forestry:** Forests that are managed on a continuous cover basis and allowed to reach their full potential in terms of the holistic services they can provide, including timber, (Quinlan, 2020).

- long term vision and intergenerational change
- celebration and showcasing of our kaitiekitanga as an example for all

Collaboration is essential to achieving a shared sustainable vision. It is important that all stakeholder perspectives are considered in the ongoing assessment of land use impacts. In pursuit of this aim, the RIPC group; a community-led multi-sector group was established with the intention of understanding the diverse viewpoints and land-use scenarios of our region, expressing a shared vision and action plan supported by regional stakeholders. A just transition is paramount to a thriving region. Ensuring that real-time data is able to be collected from the frontline is key to monitoring the wellbeing of our community, and to understanding the actions needed for the transition from current to our desired future state. Developing clear communications and education opportunities support community-wide understanding of risks and opportunities and influence decision making and behaviour. Long term visioning supports an intergenerational approach to land use considerations, informing policy, decision making and the development of innovations to reach new goals.

Tairāwhiti is motivated by the urgency of our rapidly shifting land-use profile to develop and engage in innovative solutions and to test system change. RIPC provides a springboard for regional collaboration and a touchpoint for national and regional policymakers.

RISKS & CONCERNS

Climate change, biodiversity losses and erosion are all inter-generational challenges, and long-term thinking as kaitieki is vital for Tairāwhiti's future.

We urgently seek to alert national and regional decision-makers to the following risks and concerns associated with the rapid increase of permanent carbon-only forests in Tairāwhiti.

The Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) is New Zealand's primary response to meeting our national and international commitments, it is important that the impacts of regional land-use changes driven by this market are monitored for any unintended impacts to the environments, communities and regional economies they are impacting.

Rapid, large-scale and indiscriminate land-use changes, especially those driven by short term economic incentives arising from government intervention, have historically led to harmful long-term impacts for our region. A recent summary report of intentional land-use change driven by the rising price of carbon in the Emissions Trading Scheme identified a total confirmed area of 28,218ha currently being transitioned from pasture to woody vegetation either through land sale or transition by the current owner (Worsnop, K., 2022). The region holds valid concerns that the rate of land-use change already taking place will have major detrimental impacts on our communities, the environment and the regional economy, and that these may become irreversible if left unchecked. We have an opportunity now and for future generations to support ecological and biodiversity outcomes to be recognised under the current policy landscape.

Caring for our land, ecosystems and communities requires ongoing and sustained management. Practices of 'lock up and leave' management often associated with permanent carbon-only forests do not incentivise active management of the land in comparison to other land-use types. The region is concerned about the scale of transition to permanent carbon-only forests without comparable economic incentives driving alternative or varied land use.

The scale and severity of Tairāwhiti's erosion challenges are well-known as one of the worst in Aotearoa, NZ (Gisborne District Council, 2020). Without careful consideration of the intergenerational impacts of land-use change, our region is at risk of continued erosion as weather events become increasingly severe (NIWA, 2020). There is concern that the regional and national policy settings do not effectively mitigate the erosion risks while allowing unsuitable and counterproductive land use.

We acknowledge that all land uses can have negative impacts if not managed appropriately and undertaken in the right place. All can also have positive impacts. The RIPCF group is focused on land use, appropriate land management and regulation to support outcomes communities want. The national settings drive land-use change in one direction, and a land-use with minimal controls is a key lever and where we want to influence change.

We intend to avoid these adverse outcomes by ensuring that:

- National and regional decision-makers are alerted to current and projected risks to the regional economy and communities associated with a rapid increase of uncontrolled carbon farming in Tairāwhiti, and the urgency of the situation;
- National and regional policy settings that currently incentivise permanent carbon farming with exotic species are urgently revisited;
- The Emissions Trading Scheme is urgently rebalanced to give landowners viable options for alternative forms of afforestation to sequester carbon;
- Regulations that guarantee that the right tree is planted in the right place are introduced;
- Adjustments for climate change projection scenarios are made;
- The authority of mana whenua is upheld;
- Incentives to move to more biodiverse land management principles and practices across all industries are implemented

Tairāwhiti is well-positioned to deliver an exemplar of regional collaboration, working toward a self-determined sustainable future state. The alarming trends of land-use change outlined in this position statement have provided a burning platform for this region to take action. We invite all interested parties to engage with the work of this multi-sector group for the purpose of building greater understanding, consultation on policy decisions, access to frontline real-time data and as a test-bed for innovation.

CONCLUSION

The potential impacts of permanent carbon farming have been recognised in the Tairāwhiti region for a number of years, these impacts are now starting to be seen. We are committed to moving with urgency to raise awareness both locally and nationally, targeting policy change and innovation, the collection of reliable, easily accessible, real-time data and long term visioning. We want a region with a mosaic of land use that balances the well being of the land and community as a model of long term prosperity.

***Ko au te whenua, ko te whenua ko au.
I am the land, and the land is me.***

This position statement was developed by representatives of Tairāwhiti's Regional Impacts of Permanent Carbon Farming Group:

This position statement is endorsed by...

--	--	--	--

References

- BDO Gisborne. (2021). *Report on the Impacts of Permanent Carbon Farming in Te Tairāwhiti Region*. Report. Retrieved February 14, 2022, from <https://trusttairawhiti.nz/assets/Uploads/Impacts-of-permanent-carbon-farming-on-the-Tairawhiti-region-July-2021.pdf>
- Gisborne District Council. (2020). *Tō Tātau Whenua, One Hoki | Our Land & Soil*. Report. Retrieved February 14, 2022, from https://www.gdc.govt.nz/data/assets/pdf_file/0026/9971/soe-report-2020-land-soil.pdf
- NIWA. (2020). *Climate change projections and impacts for Tairāwhiti and Hawke's Bay*. Report. Retrieved February 14, 2022, from https://www.gdc.govt.nz/data/assets/pdf_file/0023/19733/2020-Climate-Change-Projections-and-Impacts-for-Tairawhiti-and-Hawkes-Bay-Niwa-Report.pdf
- Quinlan, P. (2020). *Nature-based Forestry: Regenerative Forestry Models for Aotearoa*. Retrieved February 21, 2022, from <https://pureadvantage.org/nature-based-forestry-regenerative-forestry-models-for-aotearoa>
- Trust Tairāwhiti. (n.d.). *He Rangitapu He Tohu Ora | Regional Wellbeing Framework*. Website. Retrieved February 14, 2022, from <https://trusttairawhiti.nz/he-tohu-ora-tairawhiti-wellbeing/>
- Worsnop, K. (2022). *Summary report of intentional land-use change (pasture to woody vegetation) for the Tairawhiti region gathered between the 28th January and the 4th February*. Unpublished.
- Yule, L (2022). *Managing Forestry Land-Use under the influence of Carbon, The Issues and Options*. Discussion Paper. Retrieved February 21, 2022, from <https://beeflambnz.com/sites/default/files/news-docs/Green-Paper-Managing%20Forestry-Land-Use%20-Carbon.pdf>

Supporting Resources

<https://www.canopy.govt.nz/>

<https://environment.govt.nz/assets/Publications/our-land-2021.pdf>