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15 December 2023

Submission on Proposed Change 1 to the Natural Resources Plan for the Wellington Region

From Peter Handford, NZ Institute of Forestry Registered Forestry Consultant.

I have been involved in the delivery of sustainable land management solutions to conservation, agriculture and forest sectors for over 20 years. This support ranges from planning to project oversight across native forest restoration, sustainable forest management and environmental management for agriculture. This submission comes from practical experience on the ground working with landowners, forest managers, catchment and restoration groups.

This is a submission on the consultation document “Proposed Change 1 to the Natural Resources Plan for the Wellington Region” dated October 2023.

Key points I wish to make in relation to this submission are:

- That the focus should be on achieving environmental outcomes, not prescriptive blanket removal of land uses from particular areas.
- Forest management is dependent on objectives. Environmentally sensitive approaches to forest management such as permanent native forest restoration or continuous cover close to nature forestry can be applied where there is strong focus on environmental outcomes such as soil and water protection and biodiversity.
- It is critical that any plan change does not create a blanket exclusion for a land use such as forestry. Rather it should set out the practically measurable outcomes sought across all land uses and identify the monitoring approach to confirm these outcomes are achieved.
- In its current form, the plan change appears to create a blanket exclusion of forestry from particular “highest erosion risk” areas without recognising the range of forest management that is possible. This removes the potential for forest management to provide a wide range of ecosystem services including biodiversity, carbon sequestration, soil and water protection and recreation.

Innovative and environmentally sensitive forest management approaches should be facilitated and encouraged. Low impact forest management such as continuous cover forestry with high value timber species, either native or exotic, is possible without creating negative environmental impacts. Opportunity for high quality forest management matched to site and delivering high quality ecosystem services should be retained across all areas. Excluding forest management from “highest erosion risk areas” misses the point that careful forest management in these areas can be a highly effective and economically sustainable way of achieving improved water quality, climate mitigation, biodiversity and other ecosystem services.

Yours sincerely

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Peter Handford