

Tōtara Industry Pilot News

PROJECT NEWSLETTER ■ FEBRUARY 2019 ■

He tōtara tuturu - He iwi tū tonu *Sturdy tōtara - Sustainable communities*



Pre-harvest karakia by Kaumatua Edward Beattie, Ngati Hine, May 2018.

PHOTO: PAUL QUINLAN

“It’s about more than just timber”

This is a story about Northland, its people, its forests and its future.

The Northland Tōtara Industry Pilot (TIP) is now well underway. Its purpose is to test the business case for a new regional industry based on the sustainable management of regenerating forests of tōtara. This is not just about timber production. It is about encouraging an appropriate and sustainable land use for the environmental, economic, social and cultural benefits that come with it.

Who are we?

The project partners: MPI, Scion, Northland Inc., Tane’s Tree Trust and Te Taitokerau Māori Forestry Collective, have a vision and a kaupapa:

“He tōtara tuturu - He iwi tū tonu – Sturdy tōtara - Sustainable communities.

Kei te tohunga te whakaaro – The carver brings the life to the wood”.

The TIP initiative is looking to re-establish the mana of tōtara for all: kaumātua can see the taonga take its rightful place again; people will have new jobs and a renewed medium for cultural expression and land management; a whole range of future prospects and the shared aspiration of the entire Northland community. This vision passes on a multigenerational benefit to the land and the people. This is a cycle of regeneration - the carver brings the wood to life and the wood brings the carver to life. The regenerating tōtara is both a vehicle, and a metaphor, for growth and resilience in Northland.



PHOTO: GARETH MAULCHLINE

The Tōtara Industry Pilot Steering Group (September 2018) oversees the project and longer term initiative (L to R: Pita Tipene, Elizabeth Dunningham (TIP Project Manager), Ramona Radford, Peter Berg (Chair), Mark Hollis, Paul Quinlan, Julian Elder and David Wilson (absent: Vaughan Cooper and Rawson Wright).

What are we doing?

The pilot project will establish whether a tōtara wood products industry in Northland is viable, the size of the opportunity and how that opportunity could be realised. It involves the harvesting, processing of 500 m³ (log volume) and market testing of farm-tōtara timber products at a commercial scale, something never done before. It has a total budget of \$1million dollars over two years.

The pilot project is split into six workstreams that focus on addressing key information gaps and a range of objectives:

1. Quantifying the availability and characteristics of the resource in order to provide security around supply continuity
2. Determining where the costs are incurred throughout the supply chain and create processes that reduce costs
3. Creating an enabling environment for success (social and legal licence to operate and development of an appropriate business/industry model)
4. Developing the product mix, brand story and associated channels to market.

On completion of the project, a functional supply-chain will have

been established, products sold, markets 'seeded', a brand story started, and a steady timber supply arranged to enable the work to continue following the successful completion of the project.

Why a tōtara industry?

Over 200,000 hectares of native forest and scrub cover private land in Northland. Regenerating tōtara is often the predominant tree species, yet this resource has largely been ignored and is considered of little value.

Several small studies have looked at different aspects of the viability of managing existing tōtara stands for sustainable timber production at a commercial scale, such as market potential and an initial financial model looking at possible costs and price points in the market. These studies have indicated there is potential to develop markets for tōtara wood products and that such a venture could be a financially viable under current costing assumptions. They also identified areas where greater certainty was needed to build a robust investment case and thus the idea for the pilot project was formed.

First harvest complete!



PHOTO: PAUL QUINLAN

Forwarder gathering logs after harvest.



PHOTO: PAUL QUINLAN

Michael Harrison enjoying his work, leading the harvesting crew for Stage 1, May 2018.



PHOTO: PAUL QUINLAN

Loading trees to be sent for milling in Rotorua, May 2018.

Stage One – 100 m³ harvest

In May 2018, 75 tōtara trees were harvested from a farm in Kaeo in the Far North. The trees were harvested sustainably using continuous cover forestry principles. Each tree to be extracted is selected carefully, considering the health and growth potential of the remaining trees and the ecosystem. Trees are felled so that other trees and wild life are not harmed then extracted so that grapple or forwarder does not need to enter the forest.

“In 30 years, this is my first load of native. My dad would love to see this!”

James Menzies (truck driver)

concept of the project was feasible. Thirty five trees were taken from another farm south-east of Kaeo. The trees harvested were on average 48 cm diameter and estimated to be ~85 years old. Heartwood boards comprised >45% of the recovered sawn lumber.

This compares to results from the 100 m³ harvest where trees with a similar average age yielded an average log diameter of 50 cm.



PHOTO: GREG STEWARD

Scion's Jamie Agnew assessing the heartwood content of logs at the Toi Ohomai training mill site, June 2018.



PHOTO: JOHN LEE

Early results. Data from a pre-pilot study (40 m³) and Stage One has already yielded some promising early indications. The pre-pilot study conducted in 2017 tested operational logistics and if the

The timber was milled at Toi Ohomai Training Mill in Rotorua and then graded and stacked for traditional air-drying. Grade recoveries for both the pre-pilot and this 100 m³ were viable, reducing risk in this area. In June, accelerated kiln-drying trials started at Scion, Rotorua, as is part of the processing de-risking. So far, the results are very promising. Accelerated drying would help with the future operation's logistics with less storage needed and more rapid time from harvest to dried timber being available. This would help address the need for continuity of supply. Planning is now underway for Stage Two.

Stage Two – 400 m³

The next step is to scale-up to harvest and process up to another 400 m³ of tōtara logs in Northland. This is planned for the early part of 2019.

The dried timber from both stages will be sold to seed the market, test performance and demand and determine price-point. Six project workstreams cover the entire value chain, from forest management to finished products.



Giving back...

Samuel Marsden Memorial Church in Matauri Bay

When John McGee saw the particle board floor in the Samuel Marsden Memorial Church, he offered to donate some tōtara trees from his farm to replace the floor. John's family has a connection to the small rural church – his grandfather's wife lies at rest there.

Tōtara timber from John's Kaeo farm was gifted by John, along with Scion and the Tōtara Industry Pilot project, who also contributed to the installation costs. The new floor was installed in November 2018 and completes extensive renovation to the church that included replacing the roof and outside cladding in 2015.

A thanksgiving service was conducted by the Whangaroa Anglican Pastorate on Sunday 27 January 2019. The service was attended by the church's congregation, Hon Shane Jones Minister of Forestry and Regional Development, Hon Kelvin Davis Minister of Māori Crown Relations, members of the TIP Steering Group, the Matauri Bay community and media.

The new floor acknowledges the historic relationships between people and native timber in Northland.



Original floor.



New tōtara timber floor.

CHURCH FLOOR PHOTOS: PAUL QUINLAN

For further information or to sign up to receive this newsletter contact:

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