

TIP project report confirms viability of a regional native species-based industry

Promising log-to-lumber recovery rates for sustainably-managed totara

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FURTHER to our recent article on the business case for a sustainably managed farm-totara industry in Northland, New Zealand ... a two-year investigation has confirmed there is enough totara on private and Maori-owned land to sustain a regional industry.

The Northland totara initiative got off the ground in 2014 when a number of groups (previously active in separate projects and research tasks) came together to run several small programs – including a harvesting and sawing trial in 2017.

More partners joined the initiative and eventually a steering group structure was formalised in the shape of the Totara Industry Pilot (TIP) project. The current partners include Tane's Tree Trust (also representing the Northland Totara Working Group), Scion, Taitokerau Maori Forestry Inc. and Te Uru Rakau – along with other government agencies and private landowners.

Elizabeth Dunningham, a qualified project manager with Scion, was appointed by the steering group, and it was agreed that Scion would be the project's fund holder and contracting entity.

The TIP project addressed key uncertainties throughout the supply chain ... with many of the identified risks mitigated via two harvesting and processing trials.

According to the recently released project report, estimates of the total value



1/ Continuous cover forest management principles were successfully applied in the trial harvests.

2/ Processing totara on a commercial scale at Northpine's Waipu sawmill.



range of interior applications. But there was no requirement to market the product for exterior use, given that long-term field tests on the heartwood of farm-totara have yet to be completed.

According to the project report, JSC is presently marketing farm-totara "as a 'cut of log' grade";

the acceptance of farm-totara. Potential North Island customers were more receptive, whereas South Island prospects were concerned about "cutting down native trees", so more information is needed to make an informed decision."

The project report highlighted a number of key findings ... most notably that there is sufficient farm-totara in Northland "to sustain a small industry for the first 10 years. There is a greater resource of younger trees (<50-years-old) that will grow over time to merchantable size and add to the available resource."

The trial harvests demonstrated that continuous-cover forest management and low-impact harvesting principles (via single-tree selection and extraction) were applied successfully to farm-totara stands.

And the report noted that totara can be processed in existing (radiata) sawmills with promising log-to-lumber recovery rates; and successfully kiln-dried on a commercial scale.

(Reference: Totara Industry Pilot project, Final Summary Report, V2.1 August 2020).

• *Next week we conclude our analysis of the TIP project report with a look at remaining gaps, risks and issues – including efforts to more accurately gauge Northland's totara resource.*

to the economy (after 10 years) range from \$5 million p.a. using a basic NZ-only strategy, to a high-value scenario of nearly \$40 million p.a. – depending on harvest rate and product mix.

The targeted mix includes higher-value items such as wall panelling, ceiling sarking, and other interior fit-out and joinery products, as well as furniture, and decorative objects such as carvings.

Timber merchant JSC Timbers was engaged to sell the project timber for a wide

meaning it is not graded into clears but includes 'rustic' features such as knots and defects. Architects have been coming forward with requests for totara – commonly for old growth in large sizes – but after a conversation are open to farm-totara options.

In addition, JSC found a geographic difference in

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