

Innovation key to firm's SUCCESS

Karen Phelps

Ernslaw One is a vertically integrated softwood plantation company with the fourth largest forest estate in New Zealand.

The company's estate is comprised of mainly Radiata pine and Douglas fir softwood species in privately owned forest and Crown forest leases.

Since the company was started in 1990 it has grown substantially from 23,000ha to 110,000ha of productive forest in Gisborne, the Southern North Island and Otago/Southland.

Company CEO Paul Nicholls says Ernslaw One is focused on maximising the value of its forest asset through improved management, genetics and better practices.

For example in Gisborne the company's sustainability efforts are targeting the region's erodible soils.

Ernslaw One is looking to find ways to increase the productivity of that forest while reducing environmental issues from events such as large storms, which can move slash into streams and rivers.

Paul says that Ernslaw One is trying to find innovative ways to harvest that reduce site disturbance.

"It's about asking questions such as – how do we harvest each water catchment? How much should we take and over what time period? How can we maintain vegetation along the river system to keep slash and silt out?"

The company has forged a reputation on being forward thinking.

For example in the 90s the opportunity was seen to plant Douglas fir in the South Island in conjunction with Radiata pine.

The company now has over 25,000 ha of post-1989 Kyoto compliant forests, making it one of the largest owners of post-1989 forests in New Zealand.

"The two species also puts Ernslaw One in a unique position to manage the carbon liability from harvesting the forests."

"Radiata pine is clear-felled anytime from age 25 onwards, whereas Douglas fir is from 45 years."

This means that when Ernslaw One starts harvesting the Radiata pine in approx 2022, the Douglas fir will still be growing and will cover any carbon liability that may occur.



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Similarly when the Douglas fir is being harvested, the Radiata pine will be growing. Ernslaw One can thus manage their forests for timber production, as well as ensuring that no liability arises for any carbon that is sold from the forest," explains Paul.

He says that Ernslaw One is seeking a third species to add to the mix to diversify, providing a different source of income and reducing risk, while continuing the drive to maximise the carbon sequestered.

The company's focus on sustainability also extends to its workforce.

"We hire a lot of independent contractors so how do we retain these people? We do this by providing financial incentives and training as well as a commitment to giving them ongoing work," he says.

"If we are trying to achieve our environmental objectives a good workforce is an important part of this. We want a stable well-trained workforce that is rewarded for working productively."

