

Target: One Billion Trees

Forestry NZ head Julie Collins tells **Bill Bennett** the Government's goal is ambitious but achievable and a winning target in many ways

At first take, the Government's goal to plant a billion trees in the 10 years to 2028 seems ambitious. Julie Collins, who heads Te Urū Rakau (Forestry New Zealand), the organisation leading the programme, says it is an achievable target.

"Current planting gets us half way. Traditionally the commercial forestry sector has planted about 50 million trees a year. This is mainly the exotic forests that are replanted after they are harvested. On top of this we estimate that between five and ten billion native trees are planted each year by small community groups, local councils and other activities."

Collins says to reach the Government's billion tree target we need to plant an additional 230,000 to 430,000 hectares of new forest.

To put this number in perspective, today's commercial forests occupy 17 million hectares.

Collins says we're only taking it up to just over 2 billion hectares. At the end of the programme about three percent of New Zealand's existing grassland area will be planted some form of trees.

Much of this will be less productive farmland.

"There's a lot of marginal grassland in the back country, much of it is uneconomic for farming or grazing at the moment," Collins says. "There are opportunities there for farmers to convert that land either to regenerate native forests and get carbon credits or to plant manuka for honey. They could also grow pine for cropping."

Though the billion tree programme is an opportunity to expand the commercial forestry estate and that will happen, Collins says the real aim of the programme and the government funding behind it is to help landowners re-integrate trees back into the landscapes. Much of the time this will mean native trees.

Re-integrating trees this way brings a number of win-win benefits. It improves water quality, improves bio-diversity and creates shade for livestock.

"This, in turn, means better animal welfare and improved production. There's also a carbon benefit. This is the sweet spot for New Zealand, it means producing food and planting trees can go hand in hand. It's not a question of either-or," she says.

In the case of sheep and beef farms, Collins says in a lot of cases there are steep gullies with streams coming down the middle. That's land that isn't great for animals but is ideal for trees. "There are opportunities for livestock and dairy farmers to make sensible decisions about rethining areas where there is poor water quality or where things don't stack up economically and getting some tree cover."



Forestry Minister Shane Jones, Head of Te Urū Rakau (Forestry New Zealand) Julie Collins and Director-General of MPI Ray Smith on a 1300ha sheep and beef farm that includes 520ha of forest.

About half of all trees planted, or replanted, in New Zealand each year are commercially grown radiata pine. This is the main commercial forestry crop and it doesn't attract a subsidy. Collins says the forestry companies are looking to expand their commercial planting areas. Here, the main role of Te Urū Rakau and the billion tree programme is to reduce barriers to planting.

The One Billion Tree fund, says Collins, is an incentive using government money to encourage more tree planting away from commercial forestry. It has a target of adding an extra 60 million trees over the next three years. Collins says the aim is for landowners to integrate these trees into the environment. She says at least two-thirds of the trees planted under this scheme will be natives.

There are two parts to the fund. The first is \$180 million tree planting fund. It gives landowners a financial incentive to plant trees and helps remove barriers such as planning which may have stopped them planting in the past. This has now been running for six months. Collins says to date there have been 81 grants and 61 of these include native trees.

The remainder of the government money is in a Partnership Fund, Collins says this is for more complex initiatives. One of the projects it supports is the Tōtara Industry Pilot in Northland.

"This is an area where tōtara is almost a weed. The trees spring up everywhere, but the stock don't like eating it. We are trialing a way of looking at managing the output so it is sustainably harvested."

Te Urū Rakau has a case study from Northland where milled tōtara has been used to renovate an historic church in Matatui Bay. Collins says the renovation shows there is potential for tōtara.

This is a key to the partnership fund, there is support for people who want to experiment with finding viable uses for natives like tōtara and kauri, as well as for exotic species like redwood or durable eucalyptus.

There is also \$6.6 in financial support for the Trees that Count programme. This is an online market where people who plan to plant local trees can connect with corporations and philanthropic organisations. The government money is to help the programme scale up to encourage more native tree planting.

Collins says radiata pine is great for sawmills where consistency is important, but when it comes to future landscapes and the environment more diversity is important. So far \$36 million has been spent on partnership projects, of that \$26 million has been for initiatives involving native trees. Some of this has gone on restoring existing or previous plantings, other money has been spent on projects to help nurseries produce native seedlings more efficiently.

Collins says the commercial exotic nurseries have already demonstrated they are capable of quickly scaling up to meet the extra demand for seedlings. "They have been producing 50 million seedlings a year for the commercial exotic forestry sector. We estimate this year they have grown around 71 million seedlings. We always knew it was going to be harder for the native side and that we would need to create more support for the native trees."

"There's been a lot of interest in expanding native tree nursery capacity, but the people in this area need support. We've been working with them on issues such as managing the biosecurity aspects of their operations and about helping them improve their business practices. The companies tend to be small and need advice on things like contracts and so on."

"We aim to make the industry more robust. We're also working with them on ideas like moving away from using plastic for seedling containers to paper-based containers."

WITH THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS



ALLIANCE
FARMERS' PRODUCE
SINCE 1948

Rabobank



Ministry for Primary Industries

Manatū Ahu Matua

“The discovery of agriculture was the first big step towards a civilised life.”
- Arthur Keith