

Open Letter to Government on its Wood First policy to address Climate Change

Dear Ministers,

We the under-signed call on the coalition government to honour its election pledge and prioritise the implementation of its wood encouragement policy for government building construction (Wood First).

All three coalition parties support this policy, with the Labour Party's 2017 Manifesto stating that if elected the government would require that:

“all government-funded project proposals for new buildings up to four storeys high shall require a build-in-wood option at the initial concept / request-for-proposals stage. ... Due to advances in engineering and wood processing technologies, we will increase the four storey requirement to 10 stories.”

We, and the more than twenty-five thousand employees across the forestry and wood processing sector, applaud the policy for these reasons:

1. The manufacture of cement and steel contributes 10-13 percent of global CO2 emissions.
2. There will always be a place for these materials, but joint research by Scion, University of Canterbury and Victoria University found that for each steel or concrete building, we can absorb its emissions with two wooden buildings of the same size. If we make that 2:1 ratio our national target, New Zealand can achieve 'Carbon Zero' in building structures by 2030.
3. Mass timber solutions are now used in buildings up to 20 storeys globally, with recognised advantages of construction speed, prefabrication, safety, waste, fire, earthquake and cost savings.
4. Housing New Zealand has achieved significant speed and cost gains from mass wood solutions, which should give confidence for the wider government roll out.
5. New Zealand now has the forests, wood processors, manufacturers, design professionals and construction firms to facilitate the policy. We're ready!
6. Greater demand for wood products can have a vital role in regional growth and job creation – especially in areas targeted by the Provincial Growth Fund, including Northland, Bay of Plenty and Gisborne.
7. The policy supports 1 Billion Trees, by sending a message to foresters that there is a market for healthy rotation crops, negating the risk of fire and disease prone forests planted only for carbon, and requiring less farmland.
8. Instead of incurring imported steel and cement costs, your procurement of wood solutions will support the economies of scale required to generate export markets for wooden structures and components.
9. New international carbon accounting rules allow New Zealand to claim credits for converting logs into long life wood products (Harvested Wood Products). Analysis has shown that government procurement leadership could result in over 4.2 million tonnes or m3 of additional Harvested Wood Products annually.
10. Embodied carbon from steel and concrete would make the government NZ's single largest emitter.
11. Addressing this now would make New Zealand a global leader in embracing clean green construction, further enhancing our country's brand and credibility in climate forums.

New Zealand can be carbon zero for building structures by 2030. Achieving these outcomes will take partnership between government and the sector. We look forward to supporting your policy's roll-out from 2020.

Sincerely,

Marty Verry – Red Stag Timber

David Rhodes – Forest Owners Association

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