

Biofuels need backing of the nation, says Scion

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NEW ZEALAND could run its heavy vehicles on locally produced low-carbon biofuels – but only if the country decides collectively to act.

A Biofuels Roadmap report launched in Wellington last night by the forestry research agency Scion says that the country’s trucks, ships and aeroplanes could be powered by biofuels made from a range of materials readily available.

But national, strategic and business leadership is needed to make it happen.

“The market alone will not bring about a biofuelled future for New Zealand,” the report says.

“The level of forward-thinking, commitment and investment required means it is difficult for significant biofuel production to come into being without strong leadership to initiate and implement major components in a strategic national plan.”

Energy crops

Scion says placing 30 per cent of the current liquid fuels used in New Zealand with biofuels could cut greenhouse gas emissions by five million tonnes a year – equal to taking half the car fleet off the road.

Developing a biofuels sector would involve planting tens of thousands of hectares of energy crops on low-production land, and investing billions of dollars in plants to turn those crops into biofuels.

Production could start in Auckland, for example, using canola grown in Northland, it says.

After 2025, increased volumes of logs and residue from Central North Island forests, along with energy crops like willow and miscanthus from Northland, East Coast and the central North Island, would allow production to increase, with specially planted energy forests coming on-stream in the 2040s.

Low prices

Scion hopes the report will prompt a national discussion on the future of biofuels.

“Government policy support will be required in the short-to-medium term to enable large-scale biofuel production to occur,” the report says.

“Currently, fossil fuel and carbon prices are too low and the technical risks still high. Stable long-term policies will be critical for required investment to occur.”

Scion’s clean technologies science leader, Dr Paul Bennett, says a plan is needed.

“If New Zealand can agree on the future role and scale biofuels should play in decarbonising New Zealand transport, then we can develop a nationally coordinated implementation plan, aligned with stakeholders,” he said.



Dr Paul Bennett

Public accord

“Part of that internal agreement needs to be getting the public on-board as key beneficiaries of a sustainable liquid transport fuels approach.”

Those benefits include reducing emissions to meet the Paris Agreement target, rejuvenating regional economic and employment, and reducing reliance on oil imports.

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