

Wood fuel benefits beg for attention, say backers

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NEW ZEALAND'S greenhouse gas emissions could be cut by more 640,000 tonnes a year by burning wood instead of coal in boilers in the Otago region alone.

But to make it happen, someone will need to come up with more than \$3 million of funding.

The Bioenergy Association says the figures in a new report highlight again that the Government is failing to pick the low-hanging fruit when it comes to emissions reduction.

The report was commissioned by the Otago Mayoral Forum, the Bioenergy Association and the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority, and follows the Wood Energy South project in Southland which has led to cuts of more than 80,000 tonnes a year.

In the report, Ahika Consulting says that with 367 boilers (40 per cent of which burn coal) and more than 125,000 hectares of production forest, there is significant potential for emissions cuts in Otago.

COST-EFFECTIVE

“The Government cannot deliver a low-carbon economy without the support of the regions, and projects like this can delivery very cost-effective outcomes, especially when comparing against the current price of carbon (\$20.50/tCO₂),” the report says.

“If this project is successful at delivering its reduction targets of 640,000 tCO₂ over the lifetime of the boiler, this equates to a carbon cost below \$6/tCO₂.”

The report identifies 26 boilers – many of them in schools – as ideal for replacement now, with an immediate saving of 84,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions.

Other boilers that are not yet due for replacement could be converted to run on wood pellets, it says.

SHORT TIME

The project would cost \$3.3 million over three years.

Bioenergy Association chief executive Brian Cox says the report shows that at least 70MW of process-heat plant currently using coal could be replaced with wood fuel in a very short time.

“But it needs councils to step up and provide leadership and facilitation to bring the parties together, because it is an emerging market,” he said.

“Council-owned facilities such as swimming pools which use a lot of heat can be great role models for the private sector.”

It is frustrating, however, to see the Government not focusing on the easy wins for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, he said.

BEING IGNORED

“The use of wood fuel to replace coal uses proven technologies which don’t need research,” he said.

“The Government is putting a lot of effort into seeking to purchase international carbon credits while the low-hanging fruit of immediate greenhouse gas emissions are being ignored.”

Cox says he hopes the Government will recognise and support Otago’s efforts.

A workshop on the issue will be held in Dunedin next week.

New Zealand’s total gross annual greenhouse gas emissions stand at about 80 million tonnes. Reducing those emissions by 640,000 tonnes a year would be the equivalent of taking 237,000 cars off the road.

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