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Fonterra ahead of schedule on emissions reduction

Auckland

Fonterra says its emission reduction efforts are running about a year ahead of schedule.

The firm, which has pledged to get its 2030 emissions 30% below those in 2015, and to have net zero emissions by 2050, recently opened a co-fired boiler conversion at its Brightwater plant south of Nelson.

The $1.75 million project would reduce the site's coal use by about 30% and its carbon dioxide emissions by about 2400 tonnes, or the equivalent of 530 cars coming off the road.

Fonterra's director of New Zealand manufacturing, Alan van der Nagel, said the company was serious about meeting the goals it has set itself.

"I'm particularly proud of what we have delivered on this action, and in fact we're a year ahead of schedule," he told guests at the site today.

"Fonterra is serious about supporting New Zealand's commitment to the Paris agreement and the global goal of keeping temperature change well below 2degC."

New Zealand's biggest exporter operates 30 plants nationally and is a major user of gas and coal for its milk powder drying.

It started running the Brightwater plant, which produces whole milk powder, on a blend of coal and wood last week. In August it announced plans to convert the boiler fuel at its cheese plant at Stirling — south-east of Balclutha — from coal to electricity.

Mr van der Nagel said Brightwater was an ideal scale for the co-firing project, which received $250,000 of funding from the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority.

Brightwater processes about 230,000 litres of milk a day, compared with 13 million for the company's biggest site. Being relatively open also made it easier to install new wood storage and fuel blending plant, while its location within a strong forestry region meant there was a ready fuel supply.

Brightwater hosts a 7.2MW Maxitherm boiler installed in 1986. It will now run on a 50-50 blend of coal and wood by mass, or 70-30 by energy.

The plant, which gets its coal from Reefton, will receive about 250 cubic metres of wood a week and be able to hold about 100 cubic metres on site. It is being supplied by Nelson-based Azwood Energy.

Azwood general manager Brook Brewerton noted that co-firing with wood is not only commercially viable, it also has other environmental benefits beyond emissions reduction.

A project like Brightwater might take 2000 tonnes of wood waste out of the environment annually, reducing the risk it poses through forest fires, and preventing it getting into waterways.

EECA chief executive Andrew Caseley said New Zealand faces a real challenge reducing emissions from its food processing industry. That is particularly true on the South Island where firms are more reliant on coal due to the absence of natural gas.

Projects like Brightwater show what can be achieved, he said.

"We have to show to our large industrial processors, particularly agricultural processors, that initiatives like this will work and that they are part of the future."

— Business Desk