

Media release

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New Zealand's first food waste-to-energy facility gets underway

New Zealand's first large-scale food waste-to-bioenergy facility gets underway today at Reporoa, in the central North Island.

Following the blessing of the land by Ngati Tahu-Ngati Whaoa, construction will begin on the new anaerobic digestion facility which is owned by Ecogas – a joint venture between Pioneer Energy Ltd and Ecostock Supplies Ltd – on land owned by T&G Fresh, one of New Zealand's largest fresh produce businesses.

Ecogas Director, Andrew Fisher says this world-class facility will help New Zealand deal with some of its 327,000 annual tonnes of food waste, which currently goes into landfills around the country.

“By using world-leading, innovative technology, our anaerobic digestion facility will not only help address New Zealand's food waste challenge, it'll help power up the local community, local glasshouses, enrich local farmland, and create jobs and growth for the region,” says Andrew Fisher.

The facility, which will be operational in 2022, will recover 75,000 tonnes of organic waste from businesses and kerbside food scrap collections throughout the North Island back to this very central location in and turn it into sustainable renewable clean energy.

“It will create enough energy to annually power up the equivalent of around 2,500 households in the region, produce clean bio-fertiliser for approximately 2,000 hectares of local farmland, and provide CO₂ and heat to enhance the growth of tomatoes in T&G Fresh's local glasshouse. The outcome is a carbon-neutral, circular economy solution.

“By revolutionising our reuse and recovery of this organic resource, each year the facility is expected to remove up to 10,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide – that's the equivalent of planting 218,400 trees every year. It's innovative solutions and real-world science like this, which we believe New Zealand needs to increasingly pilot and adopt, that will help us as a nation meet our zero-carbon targets,” says Andrew Fisher.

Anaerobic digestion technology is well-proven overseas, with similar plant's operating in Europe and the United States, however through this joint venture, it will be the first commercial-scale facility in New Zealand.

Co-funded by Ecogas and a 2019 \$7 million loan from the Provincial Growth Fund, this \$30 million state-of-the-art facility will provide a welcome infrastructure boost to the local economy and generate close to 60 new jobs through the construction process.

Andrew Keaney, Managing Director of T&G Fresh, the New Zealand domestic division of T&G Global, says partnering with Ecogas helps T&G source renewable energy and reduce its carbon emissions.

“We have firm targets to reduce our carbon emissions by 22% by 2025. To help meet this, we're continually exploring innovative solutions to source renewable energy.

“Partnering with Ecogas, and enabling them to build this facility adjacent to our tomato glasshouse operation in Reporoa, enables us to purchase renewable electricity, heat and CO₂, which is needed to enhance the growing conditions of our tomatoes.

“Kaitiakitanga is an integral part of how T&G does business. We see ourselves as guardians of our land, people, produce, resources and community – and we want to do everything we can to treat them with the greatest of respect and care. So, partnering with like-minded organisations like Ecogas, to be part of New Zealand’s first commercial bioenergy and biofertiliser plant, is a very exciting opportunity for us, the region and New Zealand,” says Andrew Keaney.

Ecogas was recently awarded Auckland Council’s 20-year kerbside food scrap processing contract, which is expected to supply some of the initial food waste to the Reporoa facility, using construction trucks that would otherwise be returning to the region empty. The Reporoa facility is well-positioned to access many existing transport infrastructures as they criss-cross the North Island including backloads out of main centres such as Auckland and Tauranga, who receive construction aggregate generated in the local quarries. Ecogas has also acquired a second site to build another anaerobic digestion facility in Auckland as demand grows.

Parul Sood, General Manager for Waste Solutions at Auckland Council, shares why this project is significant for New Zealand. “Food waste is a major source of greenhouse gas emissions. Almost half the weight of a kerbside rubbish bin is actually food scraps. Rather than throwing them away, we can be turning them into more food and renewing the land. This sustainable solution brings a practical approach to addressing the climate emergency we are in. Auckland has a goal of getting to zero waste by 2040, and this project will help us get there.”

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