

New Zealand Institute of Forestry

For Immediate Release

NZIF Responds to Pine Tree Debate

The New Zealand Institute of Forestry (NZIF) is calling for balance and accuracy in the debate over pine trees, following recent commentary questioning their value.

Wilding Pines: A Real Problem, but Not Radiata

NZIF President James Treadwell says much of the public commentary confuses commercial forestry with the problem of wilding pines.

“The worst offenders when it comes to wildings are *Pinus contorta* (lodgepole pine), not radiata pine. *P. contorta* was introduced through government programmes for erosion control and early runholders planted *P. contorta* for shelter, especially in the Mackenzie Country and Inland Otago. It was not introduced by the commercial forestry sector,” Mr Treadwell said.

“Wilding pines are a serious issue which damage ecosystems and landscapes, and the Institute fully supports continued collective efforts by government, communities, and industry to control and remove them. But it’s misleading to conflate wilding conifers with well managed radiata pine plantations.”

The Need for a National Wilding Control Strategy

Mr Treadwell says controlling wilding conifers requires a step up in coordination and investment.

“Right now, wilding control is being tackled in different ways by different agencies and communities, with variable results. We need a well-funded national body which brings together government, councils, iwi, landowners, and professional foresters. This body should be charged with forming and delivering a long-term, catchment-by-catchment plan for wilding control,” he said.

“Professional foresters must be part of this effort; they bring the practical skills and land management knowledge needed to prioritise resources and ensure we get the best results for every dollar spent.”

Slash and Storm Impacts

Forestry has also come under scrutiny for storm damage and slash left after harvesting.

“The industry is investing in better slash management practices, including improved harvest planning, debris catchment systems, and more careful placement of residues, to reduce risks in future events.” Mr Treadwell said.

“But it is important to note after Cyclone Gabrielle, more than half of the woody debris found on beaches was not pine at all. It came from riverbank protection plantings, erosion control plantings on farms, and even native forests torn out by unprecedented flooding. Blaming pine plantations alone oversimplifies the problem.”

The Positives of Plantation Forestry

Mr Treadwell says New Zealand’s plantation forests, made up mostly of radiata pine, deliver a wide range of benefits which are often overlooked:

- Protecting native forests: “Because we have a strong plantation estate, New Zealand’s native forests are safeguarded from commercial logging. Indigenous forests are now legally protected, and our plantation estate ensures timber supply comes from sustainable, renewable sources.”
- Economic contribution: Forestry is New Zealand’s third largest export earner, contributing nearly \$6 billion annually and supporting thousands of regional jobs.
- Climate change mitigation: Radiata pine plantations sequester carbon quickly and play a central role in New Zealand meeting its climate commitments.
- Environmental services: Plantation forests stabilise soils, protect water quality when well managed, and in many cases provide habitat for native species.

Looking Forward

Mr Treadwell says forestry is committed to improving practices and diversifying species.

“We recognise forestry must continue to evolve. Better slash management, more diverse plantings, and stronger collaboration with local communities are all part of our future. But we must also acknowledge the enormous value radiata pine forestry brings to New Zealand.”

A Balanced Conversation

The Institute stresses pine trees are not “all bad” or “all good.” Like any land use, they come with challenges and responsibilities.

“New Zealand’s forestry estate is a success story when looked at in balance. Yes, we need to work together to control wilding pines and improve management practices. But we should also celebrate the fact our plantation forests protect our native bush, support our economy, and are one of the most effective climate tools we have,” Mr Treadwell said.

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About NZIF

The New Zealand Institute of Forestry (NZIF) serves as the professional body for New Zealand's forestry sector. It represents the interests of foresters, forest scientists, and other professionals involved in the management of all forests. The Institute advocates for sustainable forest management and emphasises the significance of forests of various types and forestry in combating climate change.