

Review of Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) Afforestation Schemes

Afforestation Grant Scheme (AGS) – Low Sequestration Rate Category (Indigenous Forest)

Submission by Tane’s Tree Trust Inc (TTT)

Executive Summary

1. TTT supports the policy objectives behind the Low Sequestration Rate Category of the AGS.
2. TTT supports and recommends that the Low Sequestration Rate category component of the AGS be retained.
3. TTT has a number of suggestions as to how to improve the number and quality of Low Sequestration Rate AGS applications.
4. TTT, in its own right, was not and is unlikely to be an applicant under the AGS. Nevertheless, TTT sees itself as a major stakeholder in the promotion of indigenous forestry in New Zealand and thus the Low Sequestration Rate category. Accordingly, TTT believes there is considerable merit in the scheme administrators actively engaging with TTT to improve communications and uptake of the AGS Low Sequestration Rate Category.
5. TTT believes that that part of the AGS currently called the Low Sequestration Rate Category be re-labeled Indigenous Forest Category and the existing level of funding maintained with a view to increasing it, in line with the sentiments expressed in the Draft National Policy Statement on Indigenous Biodiversity, as the participation rate improves.
6. So long as the current level of funding is maintained, TTT does not hold strong views as to the merits of administering the scheme via a separate public pool and a regional pool. However, on balance, TTT suggests a regional focus to reviewing applications for the Low Sequestration category may have efficiencies in terms of local knowledge and oversight.

Background to TTT

In October 1999, a Conference entitled “Native Trees for the Future” was held at the University of Waikato. The Conference highlighted the need for a vehicle to foster and encourage the planting and sustainable management of indigenous tree species in New Zealand. In due course the steering committee incorporated a charitable trust – Tane’s Tree Trust – whose objectives included the promotion of education and research as to the establishment, growth and productive use of

NZ indigenous tree species. Today TTT has 13 Trustees and 276 subscription-paying Supporters both Corporate and Individuals.

TTT has been active in working to its mandate and with assistance from the likes of the MAF Sustainable Farming Fund and ASB Bank:

- has produced a number of high quality booklets on various aspects of the establishment and management of NZ indigenous tree species (eg totara and kauri)
- available in late April 2011 is a loose leaf technical handbook entitled "*Planting and Managing Native trees*" which is in sections that can be revised, or new ones added as they are produced. To date the bulk of the material relating to site preparation and establishment is complete.
- produces a four monthly newsletter
- is actively engaged in various projects such as the Northland Totara Working Group, a survey of indigenous plantations, Lake Taupo protection trials and a bulletin on the beech species.

Further details on TTT and its activities can be found on its website www.tanestrees.org.nz

Comment

TTT supports the objectives of the AGS and in particular the Low Sequestration Rate category targeting the establishment of new indigenous forest. TTT is of the view that the establishment of new indigenous forest clearly meets AGS objectives such as reducing soil erosion, improving water quality and enhancing indigenous biodiversity. Bearing in mind the longer term rotation cycles of indigenous forests, the AGS is appropriately targeted at providing compliant indigenous forestry applicants with very useful funding assistance in the all-important establishment phase.

The AGS has clearly resonated with some potential indigenous foresters as the information set out by the discussion document shows (although there appears to be some differences to that obtained by TTT under the OIA). In any event, approximately \$600,000 of AGS grants appear to have been made or allocated to date covering some 800 hectares. However, informal comments from MAF officials suggest some disappointment with both the volume of Indigenous Forest Category applications and the relative lack of applications involving major forest species such as totara, kahikatea, and kauri. Concern has also been expressed at an apparent drop-off in the latest application round.

TTT is concerned that this may lead to a reduction or cessation of the Indigenous Forest Category component of the AGS. Accordingly, TTT wishes to advance some reasons as to the lower than anticipated levels of interest and make some

comments and suggestions to improve the AGS Indigenous Forest Category uptake.

What needs to be kept in mind is that the AGS was only one of several carbon reduction/Kyoto Protocol government initiatives being debated/shaped at the time. The uncertainties surrounding, in particular, the format and place of the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) which to some extent still exist, may have contributed to a wait-and-see attitude among potential applicants. Further, having a number of policy initiatives on the table at the same time may have led to inadequate communication of the AGS and its relevance to potential indigenous foresters.

Naturally, TTT took some steps to publicise the potential of the AGS to its database but, unavoidably, such communications were in the context of one scheme amongst several, albeit different. By way of example, we attach the TTT newsletter No. 15 of September 2008, in which TTT devoted the editorial to a discussion of the relative merits of the ETS, the PFSI and the AGS. TTT also involved itself in a critical examination of the various growth/sequestration tables then being promulgated for indigenous species.

With the benefit of hindsight, we suggest greater liaison with a major stakeholder like TTT may have been desirable given the wealth of information being generated at the time. Going forward, a recommendation of this submission is that the MAF/Regional Council administrators meet with TTT and explore ways for TTT to better assist officials achieving what we see are the positive and desirable policy objectives of the AGS Indigenous Forest category.

In response to the discussion paper query as to whether the current split between a public and regional funding pool should be maintained or merged, TTT has no strong views. However, on balance, there may be local advantages of having a strong regional focus on applications, that is to say, more focused interest and local knowledge. In any event, we believe the current level of funding should be maintained.

Finally, as the dust settled following the introduction of the various schemes, the Board of Trustees of TTT decided to try and obtain hard data as to the success or otherwise of the AGS scheme. This process coincided with advice that MAF was conducting this review and we welcome the chance to participate.

TTT would welcome the opportunity to address the review panel in person if possible.

For and on behalf of Tane's Tree Trust Inc