

NORTHLAND TOTARA WORKING GROUP NEWSLETTER 2011

SURVEY OF EXISTING USES AND MARKET POTENTIAL OF REGENERATED 'FARM-TOTARA' – RESULTS OUT!

A survey project about the uses and market potential of regenerated 'farm-totara' timber has been completed. This involved over 54 participants across 7 different key stakeholder groups, including land-owners, saw-millers and timber merchants, builders, cabinet-makers, craftsmen and wood processors, architects and designers, wood-quality scientists and carvers of totara for cultural use. In short, the results are all very encouraging!



Richard Davies-Colley with a gate made from treated totara sapwood, over 40 year old and still fine. He says "farm-totara is much stronger than pine".



Interiors Dundee Totara Bed Set.



- Hine Rangi Trust -



The survey found that the timber from relatively young naturally regenerated totara trees off farmland has been widely used. It is considered to be an excellent native softwood timber, relatively easy to mill, dry, work and finish, and is considered to be suitable for all interior uses, particularly feature linings, joinery and furniture.

All stakeholder groups consider it has very good market potential and they support the initiatives of the Northland Totara Working Group to promote its use and the development of a sustainable commercial industry around it.

This project builds on and complements the previous work and projects completed by the Northland Totara Working Group. An inventory project by Chris Kennedy demonstrated that a significant resource of naturally regenerating totara exists in Northland, and extensive silviculture trials by Scion scientist David Bergin, show excellent potential for sustainable management and that growth rates can be boosted through thinning and pruning.

This survey project has captured extremely valuable practical knowledge and experience and expert opinion about the use and market potential of 'farm-totara'. In-depth interviews covered a wide range of topics from felling, harvesting, milling, drying, working, gluing, finishing, uses, potential markets, stumps and sawn-lumber prices, legal issues, and perceptions around using native timber generally. The full project report will be available from the NZ Landcare Trust & TTT websites: www.landcare.org.nz or www.tanestree.org.nz

Funding has been provided for this project by the MAF Sustainable Farming Fund and co-funding from the Hine Rangi Trust with support from the Tane's Tree Trust, Scion, Future Forest Research and the Northland Regional Council.

Carving by Paul Marshall

Totara chair by Kit Warr
(courtesy of Steve Crouch)



Some key findings include:

- Timber from regenerated 'farm-totara' was often from trees that participants estimated to be between 50 and 120 years old, but mostly from around 80-100+ year old trees. Many also had experience with older trees that they estimated to be often well over 200 years old.
- Farm-totara is considered to be a relatively easy timber to air-dry but many craftsmen recommend 'finishing it off' in kiln before use.
- Regenerated 'farm-totara' is considered to be a very good timber to work. It machines very well.
- Some people have found the dimensional stability of totara from younger regenerated trees to less consistent than that of old-growth totara timber.
- Gluing 'farm-totara' timber did not appear to be a significant issue.
- Some problems have been experienced with applied finishes to totara timber, particularly the heartwood, however a range of satisfactory finishing products and procedures exist.
- Generally people have been well-pleased and satisfied with the performance of farm-totara timber that they have used.
- Many participants consider totara sapwood to be relatively more durable than most other sapwood timbers and to be much more resistant to the common house borer. Most have not experienced any kind of durability issues with using it untreated in interior situations.
- Farm-totara is definitely considered to have potential in the market place.
- Architects and designers indicated a clear preference to specify/use timbers from sustainably managed New Zealand indigenous forests, above any other source.
- Supply-chain issues around sufficient scale, quality grades and continuity of supply are identified as the greatest impediments or constraints.
- Sustainability issues are considered to be very important by stakeholders.
- There is overwhelming support from all stakeholder groups for the promotion of the use of 'farm-totara' timber and development of an industry around this naturally regenerating resource.
- Opinions on relative market position of farm-totara ranged between equivalent to Rimu and Kauri down to equal with macrocarpa. This indicates that farm-totara should be a relatively valuable specialty timber.

Totara bowl by Mark Astill





- Air-dry totara timber can be successfully 'finished off' in a drying kiln or dehumidifier. Recommendations are for a long slow process with little or no heat.



Nearly 20 years service from gates made from untreated totara milled off the farm.
Photo courtesy of John Guy.



- Harvesting regenerating 'farm-totara' is perceived as being more ecologically acceptable to the consumer. This may provide a marketing point of difference from other native timbers. *John McGee extracting farm-totara logs.*



- Carvers prefer well-seasoned heartwood from old-growth trees but still consider farm-totara to be a very good timber for carving. *Peter Griffiths starts carving the top part of one of the pou for Kaitaia's Te Ahu centre.*



- Farm-totara has been used for a huge range of applications from stockyard rails, boat-building, to the kitchen-sink – even a log house! *Bathroom sink by Roger Browning and Log house by Paul Leonard.*



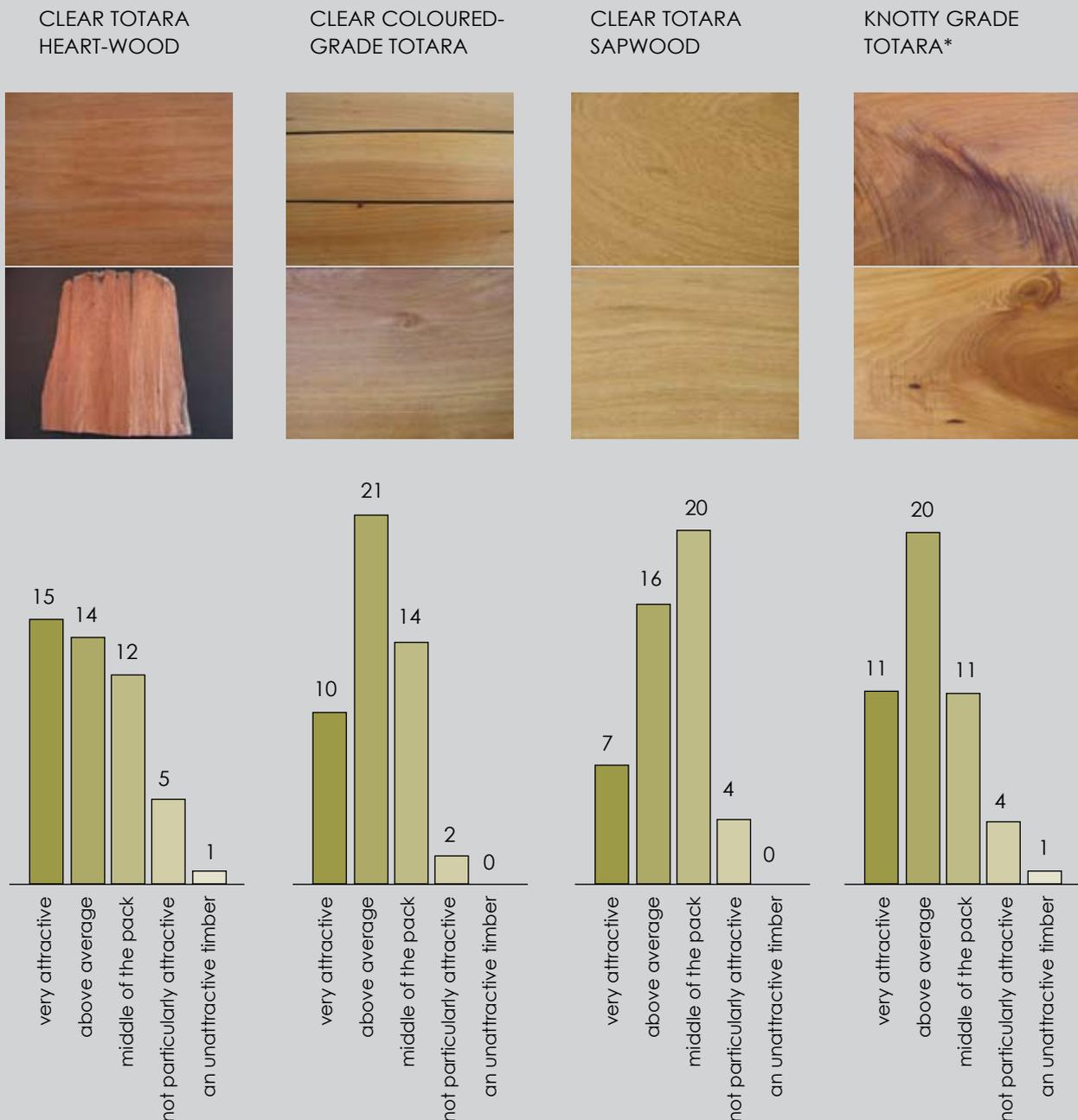
SURVEY QUESTION NO. 50

Survey participants were shown samples and asked to rate the appearance and market potential of various grades of totara in comparison to other timbers generally. These grades were:

- Clear totara heart-wood
- Clear coloured-grade totara
- Clear totara sapwood
- Knotty grade totara (that may include some sapwood)

Overall attractiveness of timber sample

(Total sample group 48)



* 'Feature grade' (boards that included partial or fully intergrown knots). This included a wide board with a combination of knots and sizes that exceeded the specification of "Dressing" appearance grade as specified in NZS 3631: 1988 New Zealand Timber Grading Rules (For Native Softwoods).



- Farm-totara timber was generally rated “above average” in respect to its appearance and visual appeal.



'Float' designed by David Truebridge for Design Moebel.



Table and chairs made from farm-totara by Roger Browning.

- Interior linings, finishings, joinery and furniture, are clearly indicated as being the main target markets for 'farm-totara' timber. *Farm-totara used by John Guy for ceiling over macrocarpa rafters. Bathroom vanity out of coloured-grade totara by Natural Timber Creations.*

- Saw-millers generally consider 'farm-totara' to be a very easy timber to mill. *Nuka Woods of Northland Portable Sawmilling.*



Mark Astill finds sap-totara easy to bend and laminate.



- Most timber merchants, cabinet-makers, carvers and architects indicated interest in purchasing 'farm-totara' if a reliable supply and continuity of suitable grades was available. *Coloured-grade totara floor. Photo courtesy of Alan Goodhew.*



FREE WORKSHOP ON TOTARA

The full results of this project will be presented at a joint Tane's Tree Trust and NTWG free public workshop in Northland.

Where: Dairy NZ Conference room, just north of Whangarei, 259 Jordan Valley Road, (off S.H. 1) Hikurangi.

When: Sunday the 21st August. Start time: 1.30pm

Those interested in the planting and management of other native trees will also find presentations and news updates from Tane's Tree Trust of interest on the day. An opportunity for an additional field visit to a silvicultural trial-site can also be arranged.

To register interest: please contact Sarah at Tane's Tree Trust: office@tanestrees.org.nz and you will be advised details of the full programme.

Artist and master-carver Paul Marshall with a fresh farm-totara carving log. 115 rings were counted on this log.



DARGAVILLE FIELD DAYS

Considerable interest was again shown in the work of the Northland Totara Working Group at the Dargaville Field Days in early March with many landowners from North Auckland and throughout Northland signing up to our mailing list. A joint display with Tanes Tree Trust included several posters, free pamphlets and newsletters, publications for sale on totara and other native forestry species, and timber samples of farm grown totara and second-growth kauri.

The Northland Totara Working Group (NTWG) was formed in 2005 with 5 main objectives:

1. To quantify the resource of naturally regenerating totara on private land.
2. To demonstrate the growth and response of naturally regenerating and planted stands of totara to silviculture.
3. To determine wood-qualities and potential uses of farm-grown trees.
4. To investigate the feasibility of developing a supply-chain from resource to market.
5. To identify and overcome hindrances to sustainable management of totara.

Funded projects to date have now made significant inroads into the first three of those objectives.

The NTWG is co-ordinated by NZ Landcare Trust. Members include; landowners, farm-foresters, FNDC, NRC, wood-millers, wood processors, Tanes Tree Trust, NZ Forest Owners Association, MAF and Scion.

Development of a sustainable industry based on the commercial-scale use of this native timber tree is also seen as a practical way to encourage the integration and management of this regenerating native tree species on private land within existing largely pastoral land use. This vision is aligned to broader goals of weaving resilience and sustainable land management practices into our productive landscapes nationwide.

People interested in knowing more about this initiative or joining the mailing list are welcome. Please contact:

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