

To our Government.

We are here, many of us, as custodians of this incredible land. Our lives are deeply connected to it, it is our home, it is often our businesses, it is our identity as a nation.

My name is Kerry Worsnop and in June of this year I began a petition asking for this Government to reject legislation incentivising the Blanket afforestation of farmland.

I'm going to tell you why.

My first job out of high school was two hours north of Gisborne inland from Tokomaru Bay. On a Station called Puketoro. I arrived 10 years after the blanket afforestation of most of the Mata and Ihungia Roads.

Of the road that once had its own dog trials, horse sports, and social club, there was now a 1 hour drive out to Tokomaru bay with very little in between. In Tokomaru bay the empty buildings and employment statistics told a similar story.

The farms went into trees in quick succession during the 1990's post cyclone Bola. Afforestation was seen as the answer to widespread erosion and was heavily subsidised by the Government.

Thirty years on, few would say the blanket afforestation experiment was successful on the East Coast. Many foresters themselves will tell you this.

The roads haemorrhage money, the logs are exported unprocessed and the profitability of the forests themselves is highly dependent on the log and fuel prices, meaning prolonged downturns are not uncommon.

The population of the East Coast has been declining steeply since the planting era and now has some of the highest deprivation rates in the country. Add to this the frequent environmental and infrastructure catastrophe's which further challenge those remaining behind.

There could have been a better way.

The integrated economic models of the modern era combine measures of human wellbeing, within the sphere of environmental sustainability. They emphasis balance; they emphasise the importance of looking after people, while looking after the world.

Good policy **can not** ignore this, but **flawed** policy will.

There is no doubt that the market economy is not perfect and that at times it may well be necessary for governments to intervene to re-establish equilibrium. The fundamental issue here, is that these interventions **must not lead** to further imbalance'

Had many families remained on the East Coast, the communities would still be there, had the trees formed part of a well-planned land treatment program, the stock agents, painters and electricians, hairdressers and sports clubs would still be thriving in Tokomaru bay and Te Puia springs.

There would still have been work for foresters, but not as the wholesale expense of rural communities.

Blanket afforestation can-not be seen as a temporary solution to buy rights to carbon dioxide emissions. Afforestation at the farm scale is final, and for communities, beyond a certain point, it is usually terminal.

Our small towns and rural landscapes are what people know this country for. It's why they come here, right?

With one exception. Foreign forestry investors come here for safe reliable financial returns.

They don't come to send their children to the local school, to buy from the local merchant stores and play rugby for the local club. They come here to make money, and under the proposed changes to the ETS, we will essentially guarantee them that money, risk free by paying them for carbon sequestration.

You can't blame the investors for making the most of this. That's what investors do... and our rules, rules made by this Government, will encourage it. The only price is our rural communities, our infrastructure, our tourism, our economic diversity and yes, to a certain extent, our identity as a nation.

That's a high price. And our children and their children will ultimately pay that price.

As a nation it seems we are utterly hopeless at learning from our historic mistakes.

We have a long and painful history in this country of going too far, too fast, and bugger the consequences.

- When land development grants helped clear the land so many years ago, we cleared everything and often we made a mess in the process. We've been putting trees back ever since.

- When dairy boomed, we did the same thing, anything remotely capable of carrying cows went into milk production, we are still grappling with the effects of this.

- Do we really want to do the same thing with forestry? Do you as a Government want that on your record??

The effects of unattainable water regulations, distorted carbon market incentives and an open door to foreign forestry investors **will achieve this**. The next wave of wholesale land-use change *littered* with unintended consequences is rapidly approaching.

You say it hasn't happened yet. Do we wait till it has?

To our forestry friends I would say this.

Foresters themselves have nothing to fear from our voices here, it is not now, and nor will it ever be the future of the forestry industry that hangs in the balance. It's the future of rural communities, communities you are a part of.

The forest industry has and always will be, a part of rural New Zealand, but I can't see sense in encouraging one complimentary industry to consume another. We should be woven carefully together, we belong in balance, and Government policy right now has the potential to destroy that balance.

So my message to the Government today is this,

- Take a good hard look at these faces, these are the people you were elected to govern, you swore oaths to do what is best for **them** and this country. They need you do a **better job** than what was done on the East Coast thirty years ago.
- Carbon forestry **can not** be given to the free market – or it will devour the landscape and this country's future
- And lastly, to our Prime Minister, please ask yourself what you want your legacy to be. It could be a country thriving under a balanced landscape which supports biodiversity, communities and economic sustainability through diversity – or it could be exactly the opposite. The choice is yours to make.

You have a **great responsibility** to lead us, **before** you lead the world.