

**BEFORE INDEPENDENT HEARING COMMISSIONERS APPOINTED BY THE  
TIMARU DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**IN THE MATTER OF**

The Resource Management Act 1991 (**RMA** or  
**the Act**)

**AND**

**IN THE MATTER OF**

Hearing of Submissions and Further  
Submissions on the Proposed Timaru District  
Plan

**AND**

**IN THE MATTER OF**

Submissions and Further Submissions on the  
Proposed Timaru District Plan by **Port Blakely  
Limited**

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**EVIDENCE OF ANDREW COCKING  
ON BEHALF OF PORT BLAKELY LIMITED REGARDING HEARING (A)  
INTRODUCTION & GENERAL PROVISIONS**

Dated: 22 April 2024

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Presented for filing by:  
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## INTRODUCTION

- 1 My name is Andrew Cocking.
- 2 I hold a National Diploma in Forest Management and Business from the Waiariki Institute of Technology, School of Forestry Management.
- 3 I am currently the General Manager Forestry at Port Blakely Limited.
- 4 I have worked for Port Blakely since 1997 in numerous roles. Prior to my current role, I was the South Island Regional Manager for Port Blakely Limited, from 2008 to 2023.
- 5 My role in relation to the Timaru Proposed District Plan (**Proposed Plan**) is as an independent expert witness to Port Blakely Limited (**Port Blakely**) on general forestry operations.
- 6 Although this is not an Environment Court proceeding, I have read the Environment Court's Code of Conduct and agree to comply with it. My qualifications as an expert are set out above. The matters addressed in my evidence are within my area of expertise, however where I make statements on issues that are not in my area of expertise, I will state whose evidence I have relied upon. I have not omitted to consider material facts known to me that might alter or detract from the opinions expressed in my evidence.

## SCOPE OF EVIDENCE

- 7 In my evidence I address the following topics:
  - (a) The role plantation forestry plays in mitigating the effects of climate change;
  - (b) How over regulation of the forestry sector can stifle the positive role the sector plays in mitigating the effects of climate change; and
  - (c) Proposed amendment to the Strategic Directions Chapter to recognise the role that plantation forestry plays in sequestering carbon and thereby mitigating the effects of climate change.

## SUMMARY OF MY EVIDENCE

- 8 New Zealand has international obligations to reduce greenhouse gas (**GHG**) emissions and has a national plan to transition to a carbon neutral economy.

- 9 New Zealand's first emissions reduction plan acknowledges that planting trees and plantation forestry play an important role in this transition, through sequestering atmospheric carbon in forests.
- 10 The Proposed Plan contains an Objective within the Strategic Direction chapter that addresses climate change (SD-03). However, this objective fails to recognise the role of plantation forestry. The amendment proposed by the Officer Report in response to the Port Blakely's submission also fails to recognise this point.
- 11 My evidence promotes an amendment to SD-03 to better distinguish between activities which mitigate climate change and activities which emit zero or less GHG emissions.
- 12 The National Environmental Standards for Commercial Forestry (**NES-CF**) provides a nationally consistent set of provisions which cover the full lifecycle of forestry operations.
- 13 Provisions in district plans which vary from the standards in the NES-CF without reasonable justification have a stifling effect on investment in plantation forestry and reduces the beneficial contribution it makes towards mitigating the effects of climate change.

## **CONTEXT**

- 14 Port Blakely manages 14,629 ha throughout the Canterbury region. The location of these forests is shown in **Appendix A**.
- 15 Port Blakely is also a member of the New Zealand Forest Owners Association and has internationally recognised certification for responsible forestry practices across all of its forests since 2003. Port Blakely is committed to a strong Health and Safety culture across our staff and contractors along with responsible environmental management as per the company value of Stewardship.
- 16 Port Blakely's commitment to positive environmental practices in the Canterbury region is proven with examples such as an invitation to be a member of the Timaru District Council Biodiversity Steering Group and the significant involvement and support of the South Canterbury Long-Tailed Bat project.

- 17 Port Blakely lodged a submission on the Proposed Plan, which included a submission on the Strategic Directions Chapter, in particular SD-O3 which concerns climate change.

### **ROLE OF PLANTATION FORESTRY IN SEQUESTERING CARBON**

- 18 Well managed plantation forestry can deliver beneficial social, environmental and economic outcomes. Plantation forestry supports New Zealand to meet its climate change targets and emissions budgets by offsetting carbon emissions. New Zealand's first Emissions Reduction Plan identifies that the forestry sector as the only major sector to remove emissions.<sup>1</sup> In comparison, other major sectors (such as transport, energy and industry) are required to make sustained cuts to their gross emissions.<sup>2</sup> Where these major emitters overstep their budgets or the forestry sector is not able to meet expected targets, offshore mitigation will be needed.<sup>3</sup>
- 19 Expected emissions reductions from plantation forestry is set to increase over the next 10 years.<sup>4</sup> Forests remove emissions because trees absorb atmospheric carbon as they grow, this is known as mitigation. Planting trees help mitigate the impact of other activities which emit carbon, by acting as a carbon sink. Trees also provide renewable, locally sourced replacements for fossil-hydrocarbons in our economy, which makes it a carbon neutral source of energy. If done on a large enough scale, planting trees can help reduce carbon emissions overall.<sup>5</sup> The Ministry for Primary Industries predicts that approximately 1 million hectares of additional afforestation is need by 2050 to meet New Zealand's climate change emission targets.<sup>6</sup>

#### The role of the forestry sector in meeting New Zealand's emissions targets

- 20 The previous Government found that making it easier for the forestry sector to plant more trees is the most cost-efficient way of New Zealand meeting emissions targets. The forestry sector is expected to achieve these targets

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<sup>1</sup> *Aotearoa New Zealand's first emissions reduction plan*, Ministry for the Environment, May 2022, p.33.

<sup>2</sup> *Aotearoa New Zealand's first emissions reduction plan*, p.35.

<sup>3</sup> Offshore mitigation refers to when a project located in a different country generates carbon credits and sell those on the international market. *A redesigned NZ ETS Permanent Forest Category*, Ministry for Primary Resources Discussion Paper No: 2023/07, p.7.

<sup>4</sup> *Aotearoa New Zealand's first emissions reduction plan*, p.33.

<sup>5</sup> Cabinet Paper, *The One Billion Trees programme*, Office of the Minister of Forestry, p.3.

<sup>6</sup> *A redesigned NZ ETS Permanent Forest Category*, Ministry for Primary Industries, Discussion Paper No: 2023/07, p.10.

through replanting of land currently being harvested and increasing the area of land currently afforested. Government policy identified (through the One Billion trees programme) that this could be achieved through changes to the Emissions Trading Scheme and broader incentives to encourage the conversion of non-productive and less productive pastoral land to plantation forestry.<sup>7</sup>

- 21 Government policy also recognised it is important to identify areas not suitable for rotational clear-fell regimes (due to environmental, work safety or commercial viability reasons). The NES-CF provides a nationally consistent set of provisions which cover the full lifecycle of forestry operations and provides a framework for identifying these areas.<sup>8</sup>
- 22 As the NES-CF is intended to be applied in a consistent manner across New Zealand, it provides a stable regulatory framework for the forestry sector to make long term decisions about investment in existing and new areas of plantation forestry.

#### **PORT BLAKELY'S SUBMISSION ON THE STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS CHAPTER**

- 23 Port Blakely submitted in opposition to the wording of SD-O3 of the Strategic Directions Chapter. This provision provides the basis for how decisions relating to resource use and climate change will be made in the Timaru District over the life of the Plan.

- 24 The wording of SD-O3 as notified is below:

- 25 *Strategic Direction: SD-O3 Climate Change*

*The effects of climate change are recognised and an integrated management approach is adopted, including through:*

- 1. taking climate change into account in natural hazards management;*
- 2. enabling the community to adapt to climate change;*
- 3. encouraging efficiency in urban form and settlement patterns.*

- 25.1 Reason for opposition:

Port Blakely's reason for opposing the notified version of SD-O3 (above) is that there should be recognition of different land uses which help mitigate the effects of climate change, especially activities which sequester carbon.

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<sup>7</sup> Cabinet Paper, *The One Billion Trees programme*, Office of the Minister of Forestry, p.2.

<sup>8</sup> Cabinet Paper, *The One Billion Trees programme*, Office of the Minister of Forestry, p.8.

25.2 Relief sought in the submission:

The relief sought in our submission was to change the wording of SD-O3, so that decisions relating to resource use on a District-wide level, encourage land use practices which mitigate the effects of climate change. This includes plantation forestry.

## SECTION 42 REPORT

26 The Officer's Report on the Strategic Directions and Urban Form and Development Chapters (**Officer's Report**) recommended Port Blakely's submission be accepted in part. The reporting officer notes that other land uses could mitigate the effects of climate change, in addition to plantation forestry. Therefore, they did not support recommending any particular land use. The reporting officer mentions that SD-O3 seeks to reduce emissions through clause (3) and considered that clause (3) could be broadened to also refer to activities that reduce carbon emissions.<sup>9</sup>

27 Appendix A to the Officer's Report contains the recommended amendments. In response to Port Blakely's submission, the officer recommends the following amendments to SD-O3 (3)<sup>10</sup>:

SD-O3	Climate Change
<p>The effects of climate change are recognised and an integrated management approach is adopted, including through:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. taking climate change into account in natural hazards management;</li> <li>2. enabling the community <u>and activities</u><sup>17</sup> to adapt to climate change;</li> <li>3. encouraging efficiency in urban form and settlement patterns <u>and encouraging activities which reduce carbon emissions</u><sup>18</sup>; <u>and</u></li> <li>4. <u>recognising the important role renewable electricity plays in achieving New Zealand's net carbon zero target by providing for renewable electricity generation, electricity transmission and electricity distribution</u>.<sup>19</sup></li> </ol>	

28 Port Blakely is opposed to the Officer's recommendations because the changes proposed focus on reduction of carbon emissions, whereas plantation forestry mitigates carbon emissions by sequestering carbon from the atmosphere. Reduction and mitigation are different concepts and should not be conflated. Both have a role to play in helping New Zealand achieve its 2050 climate change targets. The forestry sector is different from other

<sup>9</sup> Proposed Timaru District Plan, *Officer's Report: Strategic Directions and Urban Form and Development*, report dated 30/10/2023, p.19.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., Appendix A.

economic sectors because it is the only major sector to remove emissions. It therefore makes sense to identify the forestry sector in SD-O3(3) as a land use activity that mitigates the effects of climate change by removing carbon from the atmosphere.

#### **PROPOSED AMENDMENT**

29 In light of the above comments, the following amendment to SD-O3(3) is proposed:

Insert the words "*or mitigates carbon emissions*" after the words "*reduce carbon emissions*",

#### **OVER REGULATION**

30 Local government's role in facilitating the forestry sector to meet New Zealand's emission reduction targets is as a regulator and implementing national direction to make sure the right trees are planted in the right place, for the right purpose.<sup>11</sup> However, plantation forestry is a long-term investment, a stable investment environment is important for providing confidence to the forestry sector to plant new trees.

31 Price incentives through New Zealand's Emissions Trading Scheme had the effect of incentivising new plantings. However, provisions in regional and district plans which reduce the amount of land that can be replanted into plantation forest reduces the amount of credits foresters originally calculated for that block and puts into jeopardy the stability of that long-term investment.

32 Other examples include earthworks, roading and harvesting practices. This is where operational aspects haven't been a problem for the decades, then regulations come in seeking to move the goal posts, which often restricts operations, or changes operational approaches resulting in increased environmental impacts rather than reducing them. For example in the harvesting context, where foresters invest in infrastructure to support certain harvesting methods. Then the rules change, and the infrastructure needs to be modified to comply with the changed rules. This can result in adverse environmental impacts, where increased earthworks and tracking is required. Similarly, where increased setbacks from SNA's are required to protect the

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<sup>11</sup> *Aotearoa New Zealand's first emissions reduction plan*, p.290.

biodiversity in these area. But it also results in deforestation liabilities and land management issues / pest control within the 'retired' area.

33 Proposed regulations which seek to increase local government control undermines the national standards, reintroducing the impacts that national documents sought to remove. I appreciate and agree that additional regulation is warranted in some circumstances, where it's required to align with other national instruments or where there is a demonstrated local issue that needs to be addressed. Regulation for regulation's sake often results in perverse environmental outcomes, the opposite of what was intended and does not add value in relation to the perceived issue.

34 A key driver for the National Environmental Standard for Plantation Forestry (**NES-PF**), the predecessor of the NES-CF, was to address unwarranted variation across regions and districts in the management of plantation forestry under the RMA. This variation was creating significant operational and regulatory uncertainty for the forestry sector and leading to uncertain and inconsistent environmental outcomes.

35 Regulations in district plans which vary from the standards in the NES-CF, or create an uncertain long-term investment can have the effect of stifling the forestry sector as a whole and the sector's role in mitigating climate change.

#### **MATTERS RAISED BY SUBMITTERS**

36 There are no matters raised by submitters that are relevant to my evidence.

#### **CONCLUSION**

37 I consider the requested relief is appropriate for the following reasons.

38 The relief distinguishes between activities which remove atmospheric carbon, and activities which emit zero carbon. Both activities reduce carbon emissions, but are not interchangeable.

39 It recognises at a high level within the Proposed Plan, activities which mitigate carbon emissions and that those activities should be encouraged on a District-wide level.

40 Thank you for the opportunity to present my evidence.



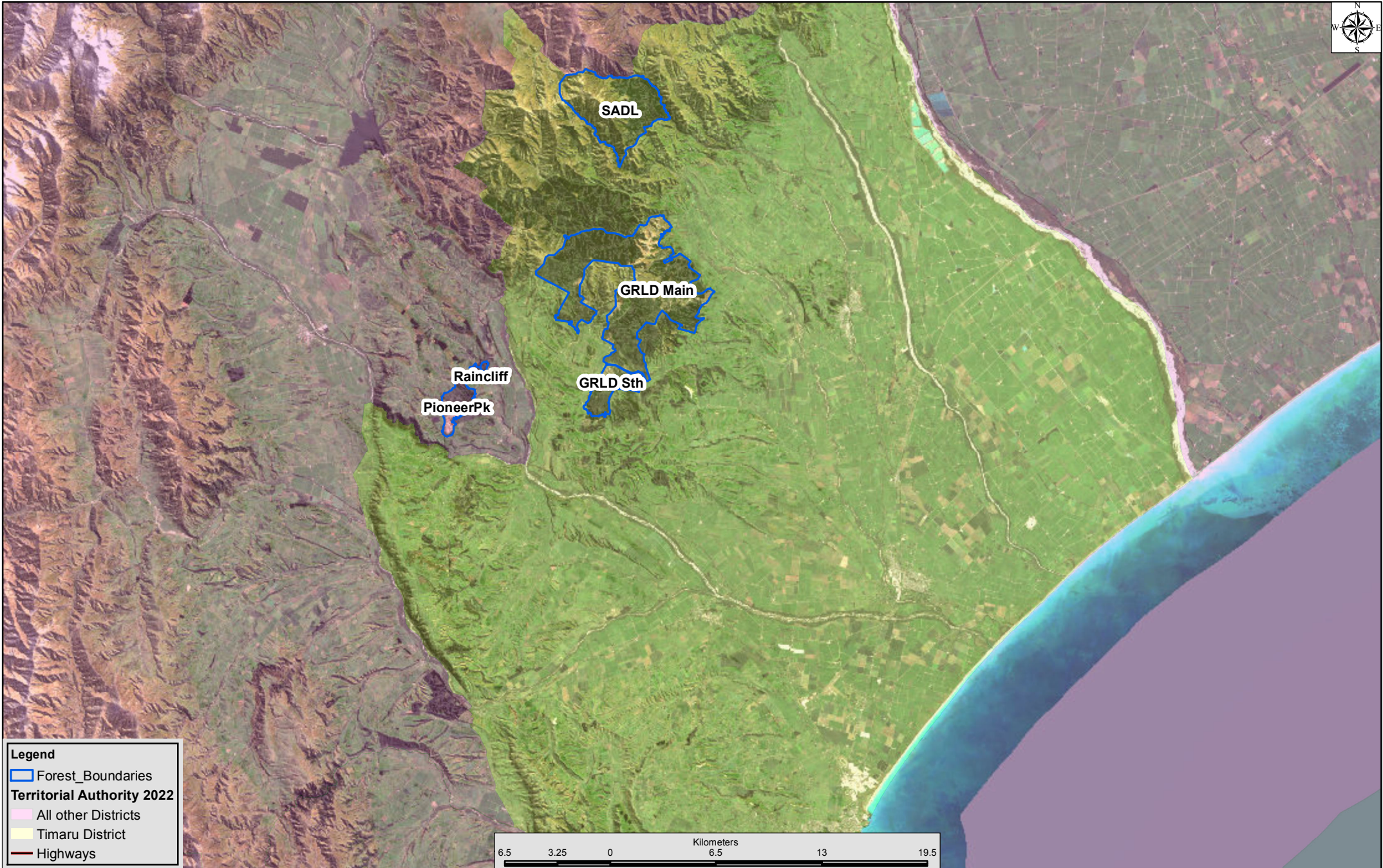
Andrew Cocking

22 April 2024

## **APPENDIX A**

### PORT BLAKELY'S FOREST IN THE TIMARU DISTRICT

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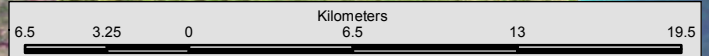


**Legend**

- ▭ Forest\_Boundaries

**Territorial Authority 2022**

- ▭ All other Districts
- ▭ Timaru District
- ▭ Highways



Port Blakely Ltd Forests in the Timaru District  
Total land area managed by PBL in Timaru District = 7179 ha



Created by user:  
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