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A proposed industry-wide forest levy has gained the backing of the New Zealand Farm Forestry Association's executive, representing 2000 small-farm foresters.

The Forest Owners Association (FOA) wants a referendum held on a proposed compulsory levy, but the members of the Farm Forestry Association (FFA) could hold sway with an overwhelming voting majority.

An industry-wide levy, charged by the cubic metre only at harvest time, could be a defining move for the forest industry and its fragmented ownership and multitude of products and markets. It would be used for industry training, pest control and bio-security, research and development and global marketing.

FFA president John Dermer said, when contacted, last Thursday's executive meeting had gone well, and while no definitive vote was taken on having an official stance on the levy, the referendum proposal had the support of at least eight regional branches.

He said voting would be based 50% on forest area and, as the FOA members had more than 11 million ha of the country's total forest estate of 18 million ha, "they can easily control" the forest-area vote. The other 50% of the vote is based on the number of growers, of which small forests are the overwhelming majority.

Mr Dermer said the while the FFA could help the FOA contact small growers, the FFA did have "serious concerns" about the body which would be finally formed which would then allocate the levy-generated funds.

"This must give the small grower an adequate say in how these funds are spent," Mr Dermer said.

Small-forest owners had 29 years during the growing cycle to pay nothing, then make a one-off contribution at "year 30", harvest time, he said. By the early 2020s there would be a doubling of the number of small growers harvesting, following a planting boom in the early 1990s.

Source: Simon Hartley, Otago Daily Times. To read the full story, [click here](#) .