

Submission

On

Green Economy Partnership Agreement

Submission to:
Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Trade

5 February 2026

New Zealand Forest Owners Association

The New Zealand Forest Owners Association Incorporated (FOA) is the representative membership body for the commercial plantation forest growing industry. FOA members are responsible for the management of approximately 1.2 million hectares of Aotearoa New Zealand's plantation forests and over 70% of the annual harvest.

In 2024, the forest growing sector was worth \$5.75 billion in export value and it is anticipated that total export returns for forest products will reach \$7.33 billion by 2027¹. The sector has a 12% share of rural land use and a high proportion of Māori landowners (48%). The sector contributes 1.6% of New Zealand's GDP and employs approximately 42,000 people in wood production, processing, and the wider commercial sector. Commercial forests sequester approximately half of New Zealand's carbon dioxide emissions.

General comments

We welcome the opportunity to provide feedback to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs on the Green Economy Partnership Agreement (GEPA). The FOA welcomes the opportunity to provide further context for the GEPA. Forestry and wood processing have a lot of unrealised potential in New Zealand trade and green partnerships offer us the opportunity to make the most of our sustainable bioeconomy for trade and enterprise.

What are the key economic opportunities and challenges with regard to sustainability, environment and climate change? What principles or priorities should guide the development of the GEPA?

Forestry has an opportunity in the coming decade to help decarbonise supply chains and transition to efficient circular bioeconomies. The Product Accelerator found that forestry bioproducts could contribute an additional \$19 billion to the New Zealand economy². The following priorities could help guide GEPA:

- Strengthen land-use sustainability, erosion risk, water quality, biodiversity and community socioeconomic good into priorities, along the lines of the UN sustainable development goals;
- Resilience – support meaningful climate adaptation of supply chains with collaboration, with a focus on learning and iterative models that support a response to the impacts of climate change through increased storm frequency and severity, global sea level rise, and increased droughts and floods;
- Just transitions – work on climate driven practice change that is inclusive of rural communities and cultures, including indigenous cultures;

¹ https://www.nzfoa.org.nz/images/FOA_Facts_and_Figures_2023-2024_-_Web_file.pdf

² <https://www.nzproductaccelerator.co.nz/2023/10/18/a-new-manufacturing-industry-for-nz-potential-value-of-bio-products-from-forests-report-release%F0%9F%8C%BF%F0%9F%93%A2/>

- Encouraging innovation, skills, and knowledge sharing across sectors.

What are the current and future barriers to accessing international markets for green goods and services from New Zealand, or to attracting investment for green transition activities? What environmental and climate standards and certifications for products, services and investment should be a focus for GEPA? How could GEPA promote alignment and coherence internationally?

- Mutual recognition of credible forestry and climate standards, creating simplified market access for certified NZ wood and forest-based products. This includes green building standards.
- Common metrics and definitions, akin to the work being done on global financial taxonomies.
- Data and transparency platforms that allow for interoperable digital traceability – the European Union is attempting this with the EU Deforestation Regulations but the lack of engagement on platform design and operation has led to major implementation delays and a lack of pragmatic interoperability. Agreements like GEPA could take a proactive and pragmatic approach to the development of these shared platforms.
- Guardrails for carbon and nature measures and markets, that ensure high quality credits and interoperability of markets, in collaboration with international groups like the Taskforce for Nature-Related Financial Disclosures.
- Unlocking market opportunities for transition to biomaterials like those manufactured from wood – bioeconomy strategies with shared goals are often built on analyses of how to decarbonise supply chains. This includes scaling up wood-based construction³.

How could the GEPA promote greater collaboration between research and education institutions across borders to support green skills and innovation, and to commercialise new technologies that offer climate and environmental solutions?

Forest Growers Research, our research organisation within Forest Owners Association, has a number of global research partnerships looking at green innovation, biosecurity, and productivity for the forestry sector. We would encourage GEPA to explore:

- Joint research programmes in forestry and the bioeconomy, including climate resilient forests and advanced wood products;

³ <https://www.fao.org/forestry/our-focus/forest-products/sustainable-forest-based-bioeconomy-approaches/webinar-5/en>

- Green skills and mobility, ensuring that forestry scientists, engineers, managers, and wood processors and manufacturers have access to exchanges and partnerships to build knowledge across systems;
- Innovation-to-market pipelines for remote sensing and forestry robotics, nature-based and circular economy solutions, and low emissions wood construction and manufacturing systems.

How could GEPA complement existing environmental treaties and trade agreements (e.g. Paris Agreement, Convention on Biodiversity, Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, Agreement on Climate Change, Trade and Sustainability)?

We would recommend complimentary initiatives to ACCTS that remove tariffs on environmental goods, discipline fossil fuel subsidies and promote emissions reduction services, including forestry and wood processing services. Also refer to our commentary above about aligning definitions and frameworks akin to the sustainable financial taxonomy work underway at the national level here in New Zealand.

It is important that products and projects can demonstrate measurable net gain across treaty values and priorities, and avoid rule conflict where possible with existing treaties and frameworks.

How could GEPA reflect Māori interests and perspectives with respect to the environment and sustainable trade? What Māori provenance qualities and business practices could be better recognised internationally for their sustainability attributes?

Māori own 190,181 ha and lease 511,817 ha to forestry companies in New Zealand for a total of 701,998 ha – roughly 40% of New Zealand’s stocked production forestry estate.

Indigenous peoples globally often have significant forestry assets and have massive barriers to finance, as well as a range of indigenous forest management practices that can be integrated into existing commercial models and supply chains. It is critical that GEPA priorities work for Māori land tenure structures, collective ownership and long-term planning horizons.

Closure

We do not object to our submission being made public.

We welcome the opportunity for further discussion and engagement.



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