

Position statement**Proactive government action is needed to prevent disasters, rather than relying on reactive responses after the fact**

“How many more storm events are required before decisive action is taken to avoid ongoing damage to communities and businesses from flooding and soil erosion?”

Rather than just repeatedly reinstating infrastructure and farmland only for it to be damaged again in the next storm, New Zealand must take action that prevents the same harm occurring time and again. The cost to communities and businesses of repeated damage far exceeds the cost of taking remedial action to avoid it in the first place. We need policies and actions that recognise it is better to act before disaster strikes, rather than picking up the pieces afterwards. It is, quite simply, a no brainer.”

The devastating floods and landslides that continue to occur have once again highlighted the issue of forestry slash – an urgent, nationwide problem.

“The Bioenergy Association welcomes the renewed discussion,” says Executive Officer Brian Cox, “However, solutions must focus on the opportunities created by the availability of biomass and be embedded within broader landuse and infrastructure strategies that include all technologies, especially bioenergy”.

“Forest harvesting slash, when recovered and used as an energy fuel, can replace electricity and fossil fuels for process heat in industries such as food processing. This provides an economic solution to remove slash before it becomes a problem, while freeing up scarce electricity for critical applications. Abundant slash and low-value export logs can be used as feedstock for bioenergy, helping to reduce electricity price pressure for New Zealand households. Without an energy strategy that includes bioenergy, energy costs will continue to rise.”

“Effective slash management—handling the woody debris left during or after harvesting—can significantly enhance regional communities resilience and economic diversity,” says Cox. ***“Slash is only left in the forest when there is no market for it.”***

“The solution is to create a nationwide demand for slash so there is a clear incentive to recover it rather than to leave it where it can cause damage during high rainfall events. Communities and businesses can help forest owners establish markets for harvest residues, but the private sector cannot do this alone. Government support is essential.”

Collaboration between regional communities, agribusiness and forestry can deliver both environmental and economic gains, including:

- Managed forests that enhance ecosystem diversity and provide riparian protection.
- Improved environmental standards that reduce slash entering waterways and beaches.
- Chipped slash used as a carbon-neutral energy fuel or to improve soil structure.
- Reduced sedimentation and protection of aquatic ecosystems.

- Future technologies that convert slash into ethanol or hydrogen, creating local value-added manufacturing.
- New business opportunities that could more than double biomass energy supply by 2050, meeting up to 27% of New Zealand's energy needs.

“Proper slash handling also reduces the risk of debris clogging waterways or damaging critical infrastructure like bridges and roads during storms, especially in erosion-prone areas. Clearing or stabilising slash improves health and safety, increases access for planters, improves net-stocked area, accelerates regeneration and reduces fire and spontaneous combustion risks at skid sites.”

At the same time, New Zealand faces growing energy and infrastructure challenges, including natural gas shortages and rapidly rising electricity prices. Integrating slash management with energy policy offers a solution that benefits all New Zealand, particularly regional communities. Biomass energy can free up electricity and natural gas for higher value applications, reduce transmission losses and strengthen energy security. Similarly, food wastes-to-biogas projects – such as those operating in Reporoa – demonstrate how waste streams can diversify and strengthen the gas supply market.

Government support is needed to assist rural communities to invest in businesses requiring heat that can be supplied from slash. Without economic demand, slash will continue to be left on forest floors, posing an ongoing risk to downstream communities.

“Forestry is our fourth-largest export sector and a major employer,” says Cox. “We must maintain and grow the sector, but we must also ensure it operates to the highest environmental standards. Creating commercial uses for slash is a practical and effective way to achieve this.”

Additional information

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