

Presentation to Nelson City Council Public Forum - May 2019

The Friends of the Maitai (FoM) is a group of residents who have been actively advocating for the health of the Maitai River for the past five years. We've played a partnering role with the Council during that time especially during the Council's Project Maitai/Mahitahi, and we're still in regular communication with Council staff responsible for the Healthy Streams programmes.

FoM has been very happy with the work the Council has done in the past few years to better monitor and improve the river. We especially note the work of the Council in removing significant fish barriers, restoring the wetlands at Groom Creek, improving riparian planting along the main river banks and funding research into the issues of e-coli, cyanobacteria and the fine sediment that clogs the river bed. These have been significant steps and should be celebrated. We also applaud the current efforts to assist small landowners convert to natives or other forestry species.

Currently the river is looking marginally better, but while we have made it easier for fish to move upstream and we know more about the health of the river, the hard yards towards making the river healthier are still ahead of us.

Today, FoM is calling on the Council to tackle the difficult issue of plantation forestry and its impact on the catchment of the Maitai River. We now know, without a doubt, that sediment from plantation forestry has the biggest negative impact on river health, and also the health of Tasman Bay.

About half of the total area of the Maitai River catchment is planted in pine trees. Production pine plantations up the Maitai became big in the 1980s. The Council contributed to the pine industry by building roads and bridges up the catchment to facilitate the movement of logging trucks down the river and to Port Nelson. NCC also planted its own pine plantations up the river although it's doubtful the pine harvest ever produced the "green gold" its advocates touted during the late 20th century.

The first significant harvest up the catchment took place from 1998 to 2005. During those seven years, hundreds of truck trips went through the city and residents had to advocate for relief from those intrusions and for the safety of children walking to and from schools along the trucking route. At that time, long-term complications with pine plantations were raised. Despite this, replanting of the entire catchment took place, meaning the future of the catchment was set for at least another 20-25 years.

FoM wants to congratulate the Council for the recent decision to retire 20% of its own pine plantations. This is a step in the right direction as steep areas are most prone to erosion. As some of you know, research on sediment flows from pine plantations indicates catchments are most at risk five to seven years after harvest. It is believed the roots of harvested pine trees hold soil for five years after harvest (when their roots finally deteriorate) and newly planted pine tree roots take seven years to become big enough to hold the soil.

Theoretically, since most of the pine was harvested over 15 years ago, the amount of sediment in the river should be at its lowest and the issues with toxic algae should also be at

a very low levels. Unfortunately, this isn't the case. Cyanobacteria and other algae have proliferated in the river with some major blooms stimulating the remedial activity that was part of Project Maitai/Mahitahi and is now part of the Healthy Streams programmes.

Given the forestry plantation cycle, now is the time for the Council to lead key stakeholders in tackling issues associated with plantation forestry and the health of the Maitai. Specifically, FoM calls on the Council to convene regular meetings with all key stakeholders in the health of the catchment. This would include:

- Ngati Koata as the largest land owner within the catchment
- Tasman Pine Forests Ltd and PF Olsen, the main logging companies within the catchment
- Cawthron Institute experts on river sediment and algal blooms
- Friends of the Maitai
- Interested Nelson City Councillors and relevant Council staff
- Smaller landowners with forestry blocks in the catchment.

The forum would be tasked to develop a plan that remediates and minimizes the impact of plantation forestry on the health of the river. FoM asks Council to set a timeline of six to nine months for this forum to develop practical and implementable changes to plantation forestry practice within the Maitai catchment.

Such a dialogue will bring the best of the Nelson community to play in solving this challenging problem. The Council is the right body to bring stakeholders together. It has responsibility for ensuring the river is healthy and continues to be a healthy recreation option. Convening and facilitating this forum will allow the Council to get stakeholders to talk with each other, rather than at each other, an approach FoM has consistently advocated for.

We have our own ideas on the way forward based on our own research and studies completed by Cawthron and NIWA . Five years of thinking about this issue has led FoM to advocate for a new paradigm of forestry. The future of plantation forestry should have more rigorous resource consents that include smaller clearcut areas, riparian planting of all gullies and smaller order streams, more varied species on different rotations and mandated targets for fine sediment. These changes will lead to less large areas being clear cut at any one time which will in turn lead to less erosion and less sediment in the river. This would place the Maitai catchment in line with the best practices of similar forestry near urban areas in Europe and North America.

Convening and facilitating the forum will help the Council be the environmental leader the residents want and the river needs. This approach could also be a potential model for other catchments within the district. We know those who advocated for and planted pine thought they were doing the best for future generations. However, we also now know the river has suffered. The Council has the power and responsibility to take this issue on and lead us to a sustainable solution to the sediment problem we now better understand.