



NATIONAL WILDING CONIFER
CONTROL PROGRAMME

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Discussion Document:

New Zealand Wilding Conifer Management Strategy Refresh

Document Control

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1. Purpose of this document

This discussion document supports upcoming stakeholder workshops for the refresh of the New Zealand Wilding Conifer Management Strategy (NZWCMS). It is intended to:

- Provide a shared understanding of the emerging themes and proposed direction for the refreshed Strategy
- Set out an initial, testable view of what long-term success looks like
- Frame the key discussion questions that will be used in workshops to gather participant insights

The content reflects an initial synthesis of background documents and discovery interviews undertaken to date. It is deliberately not a settled or final position. Workshop discussions will be used to test, challenge, refine, and strengthen the emerging direction.

2. Context: Why refresh the Strategy now?

New Zealand has made a substantial, long-term investment in wilding conifer management through the National Wilding Conifer Control Programme (the ‘Programme’) and related action by landowners, councils, iwi, and communities. This represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to address a problem with nationally significant environmental, economic, cultural, and social

impacts—including impacts on water resources, biodiversity, fire risk, productive land, and iconic landscapes.

While significant progress has been made, wilding conifers remain a multidecade challenge. Underinvestment, stop-start funding, or deferred maintenance can quickly erode past gains and shift higher costs and impacts onto future generations. Protecting and building on the value of prior investment is now critical.

The refreshed Strategy needs to be aspirational, but at the same time set a clear, realistic, and durable direction that supports long-term outcomes and enables a transition toward affordable and sustainable wilding conifer management over time.

3. Emerging themes informing the refresh

The following themes have emerged from the background review and discovery discussions (the themes are further explained in Attachment 1, and key participants in the discovery interviews are listed in Attachment 2). They are intentionally high-level and are expected to be tested and refined through workshops.

1. **Reset the strategic vision and aim and a shared view of “what success looks like”** - The Strategy must be aspirational and framed as an intergenerational opportunity, but at the same time it also needs to be realistic and achievable. Both the current vision and aim are no longer fit for purpose and need to be updated. These should enable progress to be tracked through a focus on progressive containment, protection of the places and values that communities care about (through site-led objectives), enabling transition² to sustainable control by land managers, and building enduring community understanding and social license.
2. **Embed Treaty partnership and place-based relationships with tangata whenua** - Enduring success depends on embedding genuine Treaty based partnerships that enable iwi and hapū to help shape priorities, decisions, and delivery in ways that reflect local context and values.
3. **Further develop ongoing control by land managers (including transition)** – Protecting past and future investment in wilding conifer control requires that ongoing management is practical, affordable and enduring. This includes addressing legacy¹ seed sources and emerging risks, harnessing innovation and clearly planning transition from Programme-funded operations to land-manager-led responsibility (including lands administered by the Crown, as well as lands of other tenures-with well-defined expectations.
4. **Stronger use of science, technology and adaptive management to improve efficiency, affordability and outcomes** - Wilding conifer control needs to make better use of science, technology, and data so work can be targeted more effectively, costs reduced, and results improved. This will require turning existing knowledge into practical tools, investing in getting it used on the ground, and improving monitoring and feedback so decisions are based on

¹ Legacy plantings are historic conifer plantings (for erosion control, shelter, research, production forestry, etc.) that predate the Resource Management Act 1991, or wildings that originated from those pre-RMA plantings. These plantings often date back “two to three generations” and were established by both private occupiers and government agencies (e.g. catchment boards, NZ Forest Service).

clear evidence of what works. The science system must be responsive to Programme needs, and those needs must be clearly defined and communicated.

5. **Difficult decisions demand strengthened prioritisation** - Limited resources require transparent, evidence-based prioritisation that clearly defines what will be protected, where investment will be focused, and what will not be addressed. Difficult decisions need to be taken around how challenging and intractable sites are addressed. There needs to be appropriate consistency across national and regional prioritisation frameworks and communication so that rationale and trade-offs are understood.
6. **Nationally aligned and consistent regulation is required** - Nationally consistent expectations and clearer allocation of responsibility are needed to close reinfestation gaps and ensure those who create or benefit from risk contribute fairly to its management.
7. **Retain but streamline national coordination and regional delivery** - The current collaborative, regionally delivered model should be retained and future-proofed, while continuing to pursue ways to streamline and do things better (e.g., consider if layers can be reduced in some regions, and explore shared services opportunities across regions).
8. **A resilient funding model that protects investment and secures lasting impact** - Because wilding conifers are a multi-decade problem, greater success will be achieved with predictable, sustained funding that protects prior investment and avoids costly cycles of resurgence. However, funding levels may continue to fluctuate over time and across political cycles. Resilience to this, along with a fair and equitable funding approach, will be important.
9. **Grow social license, confidence and shared ownership** - Durable progress requires maintaining the programme's strong "grass roots" culture and shared ownership of the wilding conifer problem, while strengthening public understanding through a clear, consistent national narrative, supported by locally relevant messaging that resonates with communities.

4. Emerging view of success

The strategy overall needs to reflect and capture the broad collaboration and passion that sit at the heart of the wilding conifer management, so that all groups involved can see themselves in the refreshed strategy. And it needs to build on (and clearly set out) the gains made over the term of the previous strategy.

The following statements represent an initial view (emerging from background review and discovery discussions) of success – if wilding conifer management is to be successful over the next 10+ years what we will see is:

- (a) Legacy seed sources are addressed, and prevention is embedded in land use decisions, reducing future wilding problems before they emerge.
- (b) Landscapes are stable and resilient, supporting their intended ecological, cultural, or productive use with wilding conifer regrowth limited, managed, and not compromising those values.

- (c) Wilding conifer management is delivered through strong partnerships between the Crown, landholders, iwi/hapū, communities, and those whose activities or interests both contribute to the problem and benefit from its control.
- (d) Enduring, place-based partnerships with Māori are embedded, enabling meaningful involvement in decision-making, delivery, and long-term stewardship.
- (e) Maintenance is routine and affordable, rather than reliant on periodic large-scale intervention funding.
- (f) Science and innovation are applied in practice, improving effectiveness and lowering costs over time.
- (g) Limited resources are focused where they matter most, guided by clear and defensible priorities.
- (h) Progress is visible and measurable, building confidence, trust, and long-term commitment.
- (i) There is durable public support for, and community and landowner commitment to sustain, wilding conifer management.

Workshops will test which aspects of this view resonate, what is missing, and where this view of success can be strengthened.

5. Workshop “pre-work” and discussion questions

Pre-work:

Prior to the workshop participants will be asked to:

- identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the programme.
- What aspects of the current strategy represent strong foundations to build on? What aspects invite reconsideration or fresh thinking?

Workshop questions:

The following questions will be used to structure workshop discussions. Participants are encouraged to come prepared to reflect on their own experience, role, and place.

1. SWOT and critical shifts

- With reference to strengths, weaknesses, opportunities or threats, if the refresh achieves just three critical shifts, what must these be? (Describe what we need to shift ‘from’, and ‘to’?)

2. Direction and success

- Looking ahead 10–20 years, what would tell you that wilding conifer management (under a refreshed Strategy) has been genuinely successful? (*Test and strengthen the emerging view of success, above*)
- What should the core vision and goal(s) of the NZWCMS be?
- What principles should consistently guide wilding conifer control and keep everyone focused on the core strategy vision and goal?

3. Managing risk, transition and trade-offs

- What is needed to improve the way we deal with challenging seed sources and emerging risks (e.g., carbon forestry, land use change)?
- What needs to change to make the transition to enduring land-manager stewardship timely, realistic and effective for both Crown land and lands of other tenures?
- What improvements are needed to ensure that prioritisation works coherently across national, regional, and local decision-making?

4. Science, technology, and learning

- What needs to change to enable more effective use of science, data, and technology to improve wilding conifer control decisions and outcomes?

5. Partnership, place and social license

- How can the Programme improve the effectiveness and durability of Treaty partnership and place-based working with iwi and hapū? What does this look like in practical terms if it is working well?
- What needs to happen to ensure durable public support for, and community and landowner commitment to sustain, wilding conifer management?

6. Regulation, delivery, and funding

- What changes are needed to current regulatory settings in order to improve national consistency and long-term effectiveness across the system?
- What parts of the current delivery model should be retained, streamlined, or changed?
- How should the current cost sharing model evolve to better reflect responsibility, benefit, and risk over time?

7. Final reflection

- What aspects of the current strategy represent strong foundations to build on? What aspects invite reconsideration or fresh thinking? *(Add to the “pre-workshop” perspectives with further insights from the workshop)*

How workshop input will be used and what happens next

Workshop input will be used to:

- Test and refine the proposed direction, priorities, and definition of success for the refreshed Strategy
- Identify areas of alignment, tension, and trade-offs requiring further consideration
- Ensure the refreshed strategy is grounded in practical experience and can be effectively implemented

Next steps

- Workshop insights will be synthesised and tested with the Strategy Working Group
- A draft refreshed Strategy will be developed, and you will have an opportunity to review and provide feedback
- The final Strategy will be refined for endorsement and approval by the Governance Group

Other background reading:

NZ Wilding Conifer Management Strategy 2015-2030

Attachment 1: Emerging Themes

1. **Reset the strategic vision and aim and a shared view of “what success looks like” -**

Established areas of wilding conifers cannot realistically be contained or eradicated by 2030, so the Strategy vision and aim need to be updated. These must be clear, long-term and aspirational; however, they also need to be realistic (noting eradication is unrealistic) and ultimately measurable. These should enable progress to be tracked through a focus on progressive containment, protection of the places and values that communities care about (through site-led objectives), enabling transition² to sustainable control by land managers, and building enduring community understanding and social license.

A shared view of what success looks like is needed (see emergent view, above), and an inter-generational view should anchor the strategy refresh – the question we should ask is ‘what will our mokopuna say about the decisions we’ve made?’.

The Programme and wider wilding conifer control programmes needs to be more cognisant of connections with other sustainable land management programmes and initiatives at place - better coordination could reduce duplication, improve efficiency, and enhance benefits.

2. **Embed Treaty partnership and place-based relationships with tangata whenua** - Effective wilding conifer management will benefit from authentic partnership with Māori, including building enduring, place-based partnerships with tangata whenua. While some engagement with Māori occurs, the current strategy lacks a clear role for Māori, resulting in engagement that is uneven, transactional, and not well connected to wider Māori priorities and worldviews.

A refreshed strategy should clearly embed Treaty-based partnership by providing for early, consistent, and appropriately resourced engagement with iwi and hapū, and by enabling Māori participation in governance, prioritisation, and delivery. Māori perspectives emphasise intergenerational stewardship, the protection of culturally significant places, and a systems view that links wilding conifers to broader past and present land use and policy decisions. Strengthened partnerships will support enduring outcomes, shared ownership, and improved legitimacy of the Programme.

3. **Further develop transition to ongoing control by land managers** - Protecting past and future investment in wilding conifer control requires a deliberate and carefully managed transition from Programme-funded control to enduring land manager responsibility. This includes lands administered by the Crown as well as lands of other tenures. This transition needs to be planned from the outset, rather than treated as an end-stage handoff. Ongoing control must be affordable, practical, and embedded in normal land management; otherwise, gains will be lost, and reinfestation will occur. This requires driving down control costs through scale, coordination, and fit-for-purpose methods, alongside clear and nationally consistent expectations for maintenance obligations. But it may also require difficult decisions about how to address intractable sites where control is not affordable (at least at a particular point in time) – also refer to Theme 4 that deals with prioritisation.

² ‘Transition’ refers to the process of transferring the responsibility, including funding, for controlling wilding conifers from the National Wilding Conifer Control Programme to land occupiers.

Protecting past and future investment also requires a strong and sustained focus on prevention and risk management. This includes identifying and addressing unmanaged legacy plantings and other high-risk seed sources—such as contemporary forests, shelter belts and amenity plantings, while proactively responding to emerging pressures from climate and land use change. The Programme needs to promote land-use decisions that explicitly account for these risks and embed wilding conifer management as an integral part of sustainable land management.

Strong partnerships remain critical. Land managers need clarity about what is expected of them, confidence that neighbouring risks are also being addressed, and access to practical support, such as monitoring, advice, and mechanisms for working collectively to secure cost-effective services. Regulatory settings should reinforce these expectations, with clear consequences for neglected maintenance.

4. **Difficult decisions demand strengthened prioritisation** - The scale of the problem is such that prioritisation is essential and difficult choices are inevitable. Wilding conifer management is increasingly constrained by limited funding, growing spread, and competing expectations. While the Programme is seen as operationally capable, available resources cannot address the full scale of the problem, making clear prioritisation essential. Without sharper choices, effort risks being spread too thinly to deliver lasting results.

Strengthened prioritisation must be evidence-led (based on the best available data and information), transparent, and explicit about what will not be addressed. There needs to be appropriate consistency across national and regional prioritisation frameworks. Clearly defining protected values, setting thresholds, and acknowledging and communicating the rationale and trade-offs being made will be critical to maintaining credibility and ensuring limited resources achieve maximum impact.

5. **Stronger use of science, technology and adaptive management to improve efficiency, affordability and outcomes** – Wilding conifer management requires a shift from incremental refinement of established approaches to a more integrated, mission driven system that embeds science, technology, and adaptive management at its core. Advances in remote sensing, improved herbicides, drones, modelling, and monitoring frameworks provide strong foundations for better targeting of effort, anticipating spread, and improving cost-effectiveness.

Although a solid body of science exists, it is not yet used consistently, applied at scale, or well-connected with related programmes. The gap between knowledge generation and operational delivery remains a key constraint. Central to addressing this is dedicated investment in science transfer. Unlike other national programmes (e.g., Wallabies, Bovine TB, Predator Free), limited funding is available to translate research into practical tools, guidance, and uptake on the ground, reducing the return on research investment.

Effective risk management requires a nuanced, science led approach. Not all conifer species pose the same wilding risk, and their behaviour varies by species traits and landscape context. Differentiating species and risks based on best available evidence will enable proportionate, targeted responses and better alignment with forestry, climate, and land use objectives.

A stronger emphasis on adaptive management is also needed, supported by real-world trials, clear feedback loops, and improved use of monitoring and data. While systems such as the Wilding Conifer Information System (WCIS) represent progress, there is still no consistent, systemwide picture of infestation extent, future spread risk, or performance.

6. **Nationally aligned and consistent regulation is required** - Nationally aligned regulation is critical to closing reinfestation gaps and protecting public investment in wilding conifer management. Current biosecurity, forestry, and land use rules vary across regions and districts (between territorial local authorities), creating inconsistent obligations, weak incentives to act early, and opportunities for unmanaged risk in one area to undermine control efforts elsewhere.

Clear national alignment would provide greater certainty about responsibilities, minimum standards for control, and more consistent management of risks across landscapes. Better aligned regulatory settings can help ensure that costs and responsibilities fall more fairly on those who create or benefit from wilding conifer risk, rather than defaulting to public funding.

Current RMA-based land use planning and Regional Pest Management Plans under the Biosecurity Act 1993 remain fragmented and uneven in their scope, rules and obligations (including cost recovery), resulting in inconsistent obligations and weak management of externalities. A National Pest Management Plan provides a mechanism to achieve greater consistency while allowing locally appropriate implementation and more suitable cost allocation options. And there is strong support for RMA reform and stronger national direction and land-use planning to manage wilding conifer risk.

7. **Retain but streamline national coordination and regional delivery** — National coordination and cooperative models are generally working well. The national Programme and wider wilding conifer community have a mature, pragmatic and deeply collaborative “culture” where people and organisations ‘lean in’ to solve problems together and get work done on the ground. This is an asset and strength to protect.

The regional delivery model is strongly supported because it aligns decision-making with where impacts occur and where practical knowledge is held. Regional structures were seen as better able to respond to variations in landscape, land tenure, infestation risk, and community expectations, which are difficult to manage effectively through a centralised approach.

However, there are currently too many layers between MPI national funding and the contracted service provider. And there remains some duplication and variability in systems and capabilities across regions that are suboptimal. There appear to be real opportunities to improve the efficiency of the regional delivery model to minimise duplication and improve consistency, flexibility (e.g., to better support community or NGO-led delivery) and value for money.

The current model has demonstrated flexibility in scaling up to accommodate increased funding and activity (for example, when additional ‘Jobs for Nature’ investment was allocated). However, there is less evidence of a corresponding ability to scale down proportionately as funding and activity levels reduce.

Fluctuations in funding levels, and in particular funding uncertainty, tend to increase transaction costs within the system. This can manifest as additional planning and forecasting cycles, reprioritisation of activities, and increased effort to maintain alignment with stakeholders and delivery partners.

In addition, there is currently limited visibility of the full cost of delivery across the programme. Some overhead contributions appear to be provided on an “in-kind” basis and are not consistently reported, making it difficult to fully assess the balance between delivery and support costs at a programme level.

Building on existing regional capability, the Strategy should actively explore options to streamline and coordinate regional delivery, including exploring shared services opportunities, reducing layers, and smarter use of data and technology to lift consistency and improve cost-effectiveness across the Programme.

8. **A resilient funding model that protects investment and secures lasting impact** – Wilding conifer control is a long-term, landscape-scale challenge that requires funding settings aligned with its multi-decade nature. Short-term, uncertain, or stop-start funding undermines effectiveness by forcing reactive decisions, eroding workforce capability, and allowing reinfestation that rapidly reverses earlier gains – at an estimated 30% per year.

Durable success depends on predictable, multiyear investment that supports strategic planning, prioritisation, and sustained suppression rather than repeated cycles of control and recovery.

Fairness is a second critical dimension. An effective funding framework must recognise that different phases of wilding conifer management may warrant different funding approaches—particularly where legacy infestations and initial control represent a stronger public-good responsibility than the long-term maintenance and prevention that follow. In this context, shared responsibility means more than high-level principles. It requires clearer, more consistently applied funding settings that equitably distribute costs among those who have exacerbated the problem, benefit from its resolution, or have an ongoing role in prevention.

Levels of funding may continue to fluctuate over time and political cycles. A level of resilience to this, along with a fair and equitable funding approach, will be important.

A Funding Summit held in Blenheim in October 2024 explored ways to diversify future funding for wilding conifer control. The refreshed Strategy can build on this work to support a funding model that is resilient, protects past investment, and delivers long-term impact.

9. **Grow social license, confidence and shared ownership** — Durable progress requires maintaining the programme’s strong “grass roots” culture and shared ownership of the wilding conifer problem. Awareness of wilding conifer risks has increased over time, particularly in regions directly affected by spread and control operations. However, levels of understanding and concern vary across the country, and this awareness has not consistently translated into broader political or public support. In some areas, the links between wilding conifers and downstream impacts—such as impacts on tourism, fire, water yields for hydroelectric generation and irrigation, biodiversity, cultural impacts and economic well-

being - are not well understood, particularly by urban communities located far from affected landscapes.

As a result, support for wilding conifer management can remain fragile, particularly where impacts are indirect or long-term. A clear and consistent national narrative, supported by locally tailored messaging, is needed to clearly articulate the consequences of inaction, make future impacts more tangible, reinforce expectations around prevention and maintenance, and build more durable social licence.

Attachment 2: List of key participants interviewed (discovery interviews)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Role</i>
	DOC Governance Group Members (past and present)
	Science/Research Leaders
	Whakatipu Wilding Conifer Control Group Chair
	Programme Governance Group Member
	Regional council operations leaders
	Wilding Pine Network
	Te Tira Whakamātaki
	Central North Island
	Regional Council Leader
	Forest Manager for Ngati-Rangi owned Karioi forest
	NWCCP Manager
	Philanthropic view - ZIP/NEXT foundations