

Climate Action Week Marlborough 24-28 February 2025

Tom Powell

I attended the Tuesday through Friday sessions. The Monday session that I missed was focussed on Climate Finance and our MP **Stuart Smith** gave the keynote (the presentation was reported to be very sobering – a lot of “no because” rather than “yes if”.)

Tuesday - Energy (at Yealands Winery, Seddon)

The keynote by Nelson based climate activist **Lindsay Wood** focussed on some of the lesser-known climate risks, such as the slowing of the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC) which will have the effect of cooling northern European climate. He also touched upon Energy Return on Energy Invested (EREI).

Jayden Salzke of Rewiring Aotearoa presented on the kick-off of a new Electrify Marlborough campaign, similar to that in other regions. The goal is to improve energy resilience through increased uptake of solar and battery storage.

Andree Piddington, ESG manager at Yealands, presented on Yealands’s role in the new 5 MW solar farm followed by presentations on Marlborough’s electricity supply by Marlborough Lines (ML) manager of development **Ray Brown** and another on ML’s solar development company Energy Marlborough. We then toured the Seaview solar farm at Yealands.

A notable roundtable discussion was given by **Tim Street** on the BraveTrace renewable energy certificates. Consumers can purchase these certificates (reportedly for a few dollars per MW) to ensure that their generation comes from renewable sources. Generators of renewable electricity then get the benefit.

In discussions with **Ray Brown** of ML, I learned that only 40% of the justification for system battery storage would come from energy arbitrage (i.e., filling batteries when electricity prices are low and selling the stored electricity when electricity prices are high, like at dinner time). Further justification would come by virtue of being able to energise the grid in the event that our 600km transmission lines from So. Canterbury are cut by an earthquake or storm. Marlborough Lines could then bring their solar farms and other generation back online for a local grid. ML now supplies 26% of Marlborough’s power.

Wednesday - Nature Based Solutions (at Rangitane Centre, Grovetown)

The keynote address was a TED talk by **Jonathan Foley** of Project Drawdown, since he couldn't join the meeting online. He pointed out that 38% of global land is devoted to food production, with a full 22% for animal farming. Agriculture represents 22% of global emissions, with half (11%) from deforestation alone. Adding indirect emissions related to food production and the emissions rise to 34% of global emission. These emissions are still growing. There is room for efficiencies since 30-40% of food is wasted. He further points out that we should not be importing products related to deforestation, such as palm kernel to feed cattle.

Patricia Cruz visiting from The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Colombia gave a talk on the TNC program there. I was gobsmacked to learn that TNC now has 1.6 billion acres globally under their care. That is roughly equivalent to 83% of the land area of Australia!

Liz Webb of NZ Trade & Enterprise hosted a workshop session on how New Zealand can be more sustainable in its exports. The group came up a number of interesting ideas.

Jamie Sigmund of MDC led a notable roundtable discussion on the new central government requirements for councils, all the while budgets for councils have been cut. He is overwhelmed and trying to triage the new work load in changing regulations and systems.

Steve Triggs and **Lewis Jones** of NZ Fire and Emergency gave a brief discussion on low flammability plants for wild fire protection.

Our own **Simon Harvey** led a roundtable discussion on nature inclusive farming (which I unfortunately missed).

At the end of the day we headed out to **Pyramid Farms** in the Waihopai Valley to look at their diversified vineyard, forestry and sheep & beef farm. The vinyards were notable for planting methods that create minimal soil disturbance, and for underground irrigation to suppress weed growth. They also run sheep in the vineyard during favourable times to "mow the grass".

Thursday - Circularity (at Hortus Village Rec Centre, Blenheim)

The keynote speaker was Nelson-based **Des Casey**, author of the book "Nature's Future, Our Future". I'll bring a copy to the meeting for members to read and share. Des's key idea is that we work to get our professional and occupational societies to make statements in support of climate action and he elaborates on this in a number of essays in the book. Des stayed with me for the two nights he was here and we had some enlightening discussions.

Aine O'Neill of NZ King Salmon led a notable roundtable discussion on waste management. King Salmon now uses 93.8% of their fish, including the fish dying from disease and heat. This means very little fish waste is going to landfill now.

Steve Brennan of Green Circle led a roundtable discussion on the benefits of biochar in soils and how vineyards can use it to retain soil moisture and nutrients.

We had a quick tour of Hortus's commercial composting machine, which has been their solution to 100kg/day food waste at their RSE residential camp. It takes most food waste except big bones and corn cobs, though they still have problems with rice gumming up the composter.

There was also a field trip to Marlborough Pre-cut, which makes building trusses and frames and how they minimise wood waste. Then a field trip to Caythrope Vineyard to look at an installation of new MCA (copper treated) vineyard posts from One Forty One's mill at Kaituna.

Friday - Climate Positive Futures (at Hortus Village)

Ed Massey of New Zealand Wine gave the keynote address, discussing the net zero emissions by 2050 aspirational goal of the NZ wine industry. The goal is to reduce emissions by 90% by 2050 and address the remaining 10% of emissions offsets or forestry.

57% of the emissions in a bottle of NZ wine is just from the bottle. 26% is in transporting the wine to markets and only 17% comes from the vineyards (and 60% of that is from diesel fuel). Since there is so much emissions footprint in the bottles, some premium wines in Otago are trialling bag & box containers.

It was notable that international exports, amounting to \$2.06 billion, are down by 14% and domestic sales (\$40.1m) are down by 9%. There are reports that the price of bulk Australian red wine is now as low as \$0.50 per litre and vineyards there are taking out vines. NZ Wine expects continued growth in the wine industry, though.

There was a field trip to OneFortyOne (OFO) Kaituna mill hosted by **Tracy Goss**, to look at their new MCA copper treatment for timber, replacing the much more toxic CCA timber treatment. OFO was driven to switch to MCA for worker safety, environmental safety and the fact that they can chip and burn returned posts for their process heat (for drying timber). MCA treatment costs 50% more than CCA and OFO will be absorbing the difference in cost in order to be competitive. The MCA timber needs to undergo pre-treatment and post-treatment drying, with two post-treatment drying steps instead of just one for CCA. Much of their MCA

treated timber goes to Bunnings Australia, where regulations require MCA treatment. Here in NZ, OFO is focussed on selling MCA treated posts to vineyards.

Of the afternoon roundtable discussions, I was struck by a quote that Debbie Early relayed from James Renwick - the climate change is essentially a change in our water cycle.

My overall impression of the 4 days was that climate action is progressing in this part of the business community. There was lots of lively discussion and eager energy in the rooms. I hope we can keep it up!