



Judges' Report

CATEGORY:

Forestry

Tasman Pine Forests Limited, MaLaren Wetland

INTERVIEWED	Dan Montgomery (Technical/Environmental Forester)
DATE	19 November 2024
JUDGES	Rob Miller, Kristie Paki Paki, and Wendy Sullivan

INTRODUCTION

For the past seven years, Tasman Pine Forests Ltd (TPFL) has been focused on restoring the MaLaren Wetland in the Marlborough Sounds. The project's primary goal is to protect and enhance an existing wetland in a region where wetlands are a threatened ecosystem. This wetland is home to at least five indigenous species, including the 'At-Risk-Declining' South Island fernbird, as well as 31 recorded indigenous plant species. It is one of seven active wetland areas under TPFL's management.

An initial assessment revealed that, while the wetland was in relatively good condition, it faced significant threats from invasive weeds, such as Spanish heath and gorse, as well as wilding and planted pines. Pigs and other predator species also posed a threat to the wetland's biodiversity.



TPFL engaged multiple technical experts to guide their approach and implemented key recommendations to address these challenges. Their primary actions have focused on:

- Controlling woody weed species and wilding pines in the wetland interior and surrounding margins to establish a practical stand boundary that will minimize the impact of future harvesting activities.
- Minimizing environmental impact through a "tread-lightly" approach, conducting weed control in alternate years to allow seed bank germination and reduce chemical use.
- Poisoning pines and allowing them to decay naturally, avoiding the use of machinery in the sensitive wetland area.
- Controlling pig populations.



These efforts are supported by an objective and systematic monitoring program using Survey123, which ensures adaptive and informed management decisions.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The MacLaren Wetland is located approximately 3.5 kilometers north of Okiwi Bay, off Croisilles French Pass Road in the Marlborough Sounds. Spanning 1.3 hectares, it is a long, narrow wetland nestled within a gully that drains steep hill country within a *Pinus radiata* plantation. The predominant vegetation includes *Carex secta*, patches of toetoe and raupo, and woody species such as manuka and mingimingi along the margins.

Previously owned by Sumitomo Forestry Ltd, along with its subsidiary TPFL, the forest was transferred to Ngāti Koata ownership in July 2024. TPFL retains rights to the existing plantation trees through Forestry Right Agreements and a Management Agreement; however, the next rotation of trees will be owned by Koata Ltd.

Located in the D'Urville Ecological District, the wetland is classified as a High Conservation Value Forest under Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) Principle 9. This designation requires forest managers to maintain or enhance conservation values using a precautionary approach, which TPFL has demonstrated through its ongoing commitment to restoration efforts.

THE JUDGES WERE IMPRESSED BY:

The judges were impressed by the following aspects of TPFL's approach:

- **Long-Term Vision:** Sumitomo, along with its subsidiary TPFL, has a long-term vision for forest management and ecological restoration, which has remained consistent even after they no longer own the land. This top-down approach demonstrates the ongoing commitment necessary for the success of restoration projects that require sustained care and considerable financial investment.
- **Ecological Assessments:** TPFL has actively sought ecological assessments and demonstrated that it has implemented the recommendations of experts. Significant progress has been made in controlling invasive weeds in the interior and margins of the wetland.

- **Use of Technology:** The use of systematic tools like Survey123 to inform adaptive management practices.
- **Partnerships:** Strong partnerships with landowners and mana whenua, Ngāti Koata, evident at various management levels.
- **Removal of Pines:** TPFL has proactively removed some plantation pines to prevent potential damage during future logging operations.

PROBLEMS AND HOW THEY HAVE BEEN TACKLED

The judges noted the following challenges and how TPFL has addressed them:

- **Interface Between Commercial Forestry and Wetland Protection:** One of the biggest challenges was managing the interface between a productive commercial forest and the environmental protection of a sensitive wetland.
- TPFL addressed this challenge through thoughtful planning and resource allocation, effectively restoring wetland habitats in remote locations.
- The company minimized vegetation and hydrological disturbance by using selective herbicides and manual weed control, while limiting foot traffic in sensitive areas.
- Herbicide impact was reduced through targeted application methods, and wetland areas were rested after treatment to allow native plants to germinate and colonize, providing cost-effective treatments and minimizing human disturbance.



SUMMARY

The judges were impressed by TPFL's in-depth knowledge and long-term vision for the MaLaren Wetland. By seeking thorough technical assessments and implementing as many recommendations as practical, TPFL has demonstrated kaitiakitanga that exceeds the principles required by their FSC status.

SUGGESTIONS

- **Sediment Control Planning:** Begin planning for sediment control ahead of harvest, as sediment movement is a significant risk for wetlands in steep forestry areas.
 - Understanding hydrological pathways into and out of the wetland will provide better protection.
 - Developing native vegetation buffers in tributaries could act as natural sediment traps.
 - Thinning or poisoning pines in the 5-meter buffer zone would allow pockets of 4-5 years of native regrowth, improving sediment control and reducing the risk of damage during future harvesting.

- Increasing the size of the buffer to 10 meters would further protect the wetland.
- **Delineation Maps:** Use delineation maps in the management plan to clearly define the wetland and its buffer, preventing conflicts over native vegetation expansion.
- **Possum and Rat Control:** Consider using New Zealand auto-traps for possums and rats, elevated to 1.3 meters to avoid weka, or explore AI traps if the budget permits.
- **Revised Management Plan:** Work with Ngāti Koata to develop a revised management plan that incorporates cultural assessments and shared learnings.
- **Pig Control Program:** Establish a pig control program based on damage thresholds, guided by research such as [the Auckland Ecology paper](#), to focus resources more effectively.
- **Biodiversity Goals:** Increasing native biodiversity should be a specific goal within the wetland and its margins.
- **Public Engagement:** Provide more information through social media channels to promote sustainable forest management practices and educate the public.
- **Cultural Health Monitoring:** Invite Ngāti Koata to carry out Cultural Health Monitoring to complement the western science monitoring metrics.