



FICA – Press Release Thursday 20 December 2018

Forest Industry Contractors Association (FICA) have stepped up to take the lead in the facilitation of a Silvicultural Action Group (SAG), A meeting was held last week after a culmination of work that has been going on for the last year. The group is a collective of contractors, forest owners and government agencies who have showed an appetite to work together to build a credible and sustainable silvicultural industry sector.

Last year in November the Silvicultural industry came under the spotlight following the release of a report from MBIE which focused on employee exploitation and recognised serious concerns that employees within the sector were particularly vulnerable. The Labour Inspectorate led several key investigations into labour practices within the sector and these investigations implied breaches were widespread within the forestry industry and highlighted a need for substantial improvement regarding labour practices within this sector.

The SAG pulled together a significant piece of work in June where they researched and evaluated the industry as it was and identified many key factors that contributed to the challenges within that industry including contractor viability, agency relationships, advocacy and the absence of support systems. It also identified the need for greater recognition and reward which would assist with retention of the workforce. This has created the backbone for detailed discussions and a focus to finding solutions to improve the working environment.

In light of the government's announcement of the Billion Tree Programme, this has instigated a real desire to sort things out so involvement of Te Uru Rakau, Ministry of Social Development, Immigration NZ and Labour Inspectorate alongside the industry group FICA undertook a national roadshow in October and November. Across the country similar areas of concern were identified, including one of the greater challenges, the labour workforce

shortages and the group are subsequently working together to put forward solutions including training support, recommendations to amend policies and to upskill contractors with business mentoring.

The labour issue directly puts pressure on work programmes, tensions between contractors and principal companies and lack of time to train. “It is a yesterday problem and we are all responsible to sort it out and make the industry sustainable,” says Prue Younger, CEO FICA. “Its going to take us all to resolve and sort the issues but with industry leading it, there will be greater uptake and a real desire to get involved. If government agencies are willing to take that ride with us then we are going to be successful.”

FICA urge their members and others in the industry to learn from the mistakes made by others and undertake to pay their workers appropriately, pay for travel time, pay for tailgates, pay minimum wage and be compliant to be professional.

This week has seen the prosecution of a significant silvicultural contractor who was identified as non-compliant at the time of investigation in 2017. Subsequently this contractor has gone on to remedy the pay rates to meet minimum wage and has lifted its game by going through Safetree’s Contractor Certification programme which provides an industry standardised assessment of a contractor’s suitability to work and demonstrates professionalism to clients. It provides a benchmark that their health and safety systems can be designed to and means everyone is held to the same standards. For forest owners and managers, using certified contractors provides an assurance that the companies they hire are competent to do the job.

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Please contact Prue for more information as required.

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