

Power Outage in Napier

The experience of electricity consumers in Napier vividly illustrates two of the big mistakes made back in the 1990s and 2000s during the neoliberal restructuring of the electricity industry. First, Max Bradford's forced separation of local lines network from local generation and retailing of electricity (breaking up the old community-level supply authorities) has prevented development of local-level integrated community energy pools that could sustain local supply independent of the failure-prone grid. Second, Max Bradford and Pete Hodgson's decisions to allow (in fact encourage) monopolistic conduct by the gentailers and grid operator meant (and continues to mean) that the full weight of massive vested interests has opposed development of small-scale distributed renewable generation such as rooftop solar, which could now have been sustaining supply in Napier. Instead of bleating excuses for the failure of the industry's big vested interests, Megan Woods would do better to repeal the lines/energy split, clear away the disincentives to small-scale renewable generation, and embark on making electricity supply genuinely resilient.

Geoff Bertram

Written 16 February 2023

Try 'chipping' to save rivers

One of the more distressing aspects of the recent floods was the vast quantity of "slash" washed down the rivers and flood plains, ending up despoiling some beaches.

In many cases the buildup under bridges has been a direct cause of flooding, and in even worse cases has damaged or destroyed the bridge. The fines imposed on a forestry company (if they can be identified) are minuscule compared to the cost of the damage inflicted.

If forestry companies were obliged to "chip" all material not extracted as logs, it would go a long way towards reducing problems in heavy rain. They might claim the slash is left to rot and refertilise the land, but this is obviously untrue.

The chipped material might even be pelleted if this is feasible. It seems rather ridiculous that companies such as Fonterra import pellets, in a country with such a vast amount of raw material.

However, the main reason for chipping is to stop the vast amount of branches and logs causing havoc to waterways.

Pete Herridge, Upper Hutt

Fix Bradford's mistakes

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"Slash" knocked out Hikurangi Bridge, north of Tolaga Bay, in this week's storms.

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Instead of bleating excuses for the failure of the industry's big vested interests, minister Megan Woods would do better to repeat the lines/energy split, clear away the disincentives to small-scale renewable generation, and embark on making electricity supply genuinely resilient.

Geoff Bertram, Karori

More sensitive approach

It is with interest that we watch on television the enormity of the weather disaster around the country.

Yet in the commercial breaks

Letters

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companies appear on TV as if nothing has happened and we are supposed to just get on with our lives and buy their products.

Would it not be nice and more sensitive if some of those highly successful companies used their advertising time to indicate how they were willing to help their customers and communities in these difficult times.

After all, these companies are reliant on the wellbeing of so many people who support them in good times. Now it is time to support their customers in bad times.

Gus Van de Roer, Mt Victoria

Pine planting

An RNZ report following Cyclone Gabrielle said: "There is widespread damage to farms across the North Island, with those in parts of Gisborne and Hawke's Bay particularly hard hit and forestry slash is once again a huge problem."

How long is the government going to turn a blind eye and continue to encourage large-scale planting of pines?

It should not be forgotten the forestry companies are corporate in structure so that the environment and the public interest are minor considerations for them. Profits and maximising profits is paramount.

Nor should it be bypassed that the forestry industry is over 80% foreign-

owned, so that an overseas corporate has even less interest other than money.

Has the government comprehended that pine forest runoff - whether commercial forestry or speculative carbon farming - with virtually no undergrowth has a rainfall runoff much more than native forest?

So floods from a valley with a pine forest monoculture are much bigger than if native vegetation had remained. The damage to the environment, farms and rural communities and town is consequently much more severe.

Clear felling of forests lacks effective controls, with wholesale logging of a slope. Instead, European practices of two or three cuts, say, six months apart, along the contour should be mandatory.

While we need forests for timber the creation of pine monocultures falls well short of the public interest.

Andi Cockroft, Council of Outdoor Recreation Associations of NZ (labridged)

Caustic contempt

This week's Christophobic jibe from Joe Bennett takes *The Dominion Post* very low.

Turning on the TV, he was pleased to see the Australian cricket team embarking on a doomed innings against India: "It was like arriving at the Colosseum as they released the Christians" (*Playing possum with an old foe*, Feb 15).

Ordinarily, smirking at mass murder is so off that a journalist wouldn't attempt it and a mainstream newspaper wouldn't publish it, but the mass murder of Christians seems to be an exception. This injures a great many Kiwis, including many recent immigrants. Are Christians not welcome in this country?

Also, spraying caustic contempt over people you despise is a tad lazy when those people are the softest target in town.

Gavan O'Farrell, Lower Hutt