

Speech by Andrew Morrison, Chairman Beef + Lamb NZ

Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen. My name is Andrew Morrison. I'm the chair of Beef + Lamb New Zealand.

I'm excited to be here tonight because like most of you and many farmers in our beautiful country, I'm intensely passionate about what I/we do as a sector.

I introduce myself as Chairman of Beef and Lamb New Zealand, but foremost I am a farmer from Southland.

Some might say in my case that it is kind of a wet and cold environment in Southland, but hey it is an environment in a rural community with rural people that I love.

Personally this is an environment that for six generations we have farmed our livestock; our families and our communities all along the way have respected it, nurtured it, taken a couple of beatings from it, but valued the environment as the source and enabler of all that we do.

That's why this Environment Strategy Vision coupled with the Implementation Plan is important to us at Beef and Lamb as it is to you all here tonight.

The Environment strategy that Beef + Lamb New Zealand is launching is about building on and supporting our passion as farmers. Building and supporting people and communities.

Farmers recognise there is unprecedented public concern for the natural environment.

We recognise as a sector that agricultural production has an impact on the environment.

As outlined in our strategy, and as you will all be aware, some of our sector's main environmental challenges are erosion, sediment, e-coli and carbon emissions.

While some good progress has been made, we also recognise that more needs to be done and we want to acknowledge that here tonight.

This strategy has been developed to help sheep and beef farmers set out their vision of success, and map out how the sector can get there.

We at Beef and Lamb NZ are a solutions based organisation and tonight we want to map out our action plan to addressing our issues. Julia Beijeman, our Environment Strategy manager will quickly run through the implementation plan after my talk.

Farmers fundamentally want to be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

The strategy sets out high level goals we want to achieve as a sector including:

- healthy productive soils;
- clean water that NZers can gather food and swim in;
- carbon neutrality; and
- thriving biodiversity.

Underpinning the strategy is a three-year implementation plan aimed at driving the sector forward towards meeting those goals.

The number of projects looks very ambitious, but a number of them are already underway and some are nearing completion.

As we get things underway we expect that these projects will develop and grow.

At the heart of the strategy is for every farmer to have a tailored land environment plan by 2021.

Currently we estimate about 40 percent of sheep and beef farmers have one, but they are of varying quality as the science has evolved over the last couple of years.

We also know that the greatest environmental improvements come when farmers in a catchment work together and that is why we are intending to significantly lift our support for catchment work and to collaborate with other industries like dairy and horticulture.

One of the main things we hear from farmers is that they don't know exactly what their impacts are. The science is complex.

The projects outlined in this strategy will help develop and provide access to the most cutting edge tools to help farmers understand where they are at, and identify the activities that will have the greatest impact. This is important when you have a finite budget.

As a farmer I am personally excited about having access to these tools. As a farmer I can say there are two things that farmers love:

- Farmers like tools,
- Farmers like physically doing stuff. Link the tool with the action and let them loose.

This strategy also takes into account all the main elements of the environment and how they intersect and interact.

We believe that this will be of great assistance in working with national and local government to develop sound policies going forward.

There have been a lot of reports released recently that just look at one environmental issue in isolation, when they are often inter-related.

We want to ensure that new rules going forward recognise a one-sized fits all approach does not make sense. Each farm is different and has different environmental impacts. On one farm it may be e-coli and on another erosion.

Our sector has already significantly reduced its carbon emissions, and though it will be a stretch, we are keen to target being carbon neutral by 2050.

We have already reduced our absolute emissions by 30 percent since 1990 as our sheep flock has reduced by 50 percent and beef cattle by 23 percent.

In conjunction we have significantly lifted our productivity and are producing nearly the same amount of sheepmeat due to improved lambing percentages and larger lambs. All of this achieved while reducing our land footprint by a quarter.

These figures demonstrate that we are an industry that responds and adapts to challenges, and we can do it.

Building on this we are currently undertaking work to understand how much carbon is being sequestered by the significant tracts of native forestry and forestry blocks on sheep and beef properties, but we think that would take us a considerable way to being carbon neutral.

For example, about quarter of all native vegetation in New Zealand and nearly half of all QEII covenants occur on sheep and beef farms.

As part of our goal to move towards carbon neutrality, we want to work with the government and the 1 billion trees policy. Our overriding principle is right tree, right place, and right time.

Some of our farmers are interested in planting pines, but in many areas this is either not economically feasible (as the land is too remote from ports) or desirable (as the land may be highly erodible and the impact of harvesting trees worse than the current situation).

We do see scope, however, for broader environmental wins if we were able to work with the government to encourage the planting of trees suitable for preventing erosion, riparian planting, or shade – particularly through the planting of natives.

I do feel that there is a fundamental change under way in the way we approach our job as stewards.

This strategy is about building and supporting the true essence of stewardship that many farmers already hold.

Like Sam, I would also like to acknowledge that the input we received along the way from a wide range of partners. We are committed to continuing working with you on these projects and on developing new ones. I hope you feel this strategy is just as much your Strategy as it is Ours.

This is where the rubber hits the road. This is the stuff you can hold us to account on. And that's the way we want it

This strategy is about supporting every farmer to develop and most importantly put a plan into action that will help us achieve our vision.

But our real power is where we as an agricultural sector are working together with a common goal.

Connect these farm based actions to the priorities that communities have for where we live work and play.

This is how our communities and our land will thrive.