



RPBC[®]
Radiata Pine Breeding Co



13 November 2024

Media release: *Pinus radiata* and *attenuata* hybrid tree provides an important alternative species option to New Zealand's forest industry

Long-term trial sites for a *Pinus radiata* and *attenuata* hybrid are proving its potential for use in high altitude, snow-prone sites.

Hybrid trees at trial sites in the Mackenzie Country of the South Island, one of several regional trial areas which were established in 1998 by the Forest Research Institute, are now nearing harvest and indications about the trees' growth and wood properties are positive.

"*Pinus radiata* tends to be prone to snow damage at high altitude," says Tree Improvement Manager for the Radiata Pine Breeding Company (RPBC), Mark Paget, "and *Pinus radiata* trees growing at the trial site alongside the hybrid have experienced high attrition rates.

"However, the hybrid trees are doing very well and traits we measure in *Pinus radiata*, such as stem diameter and form, and wood properties like density and stiffness show that the hybrid trees are equal or better than pure *radiata* on these sites."

Forest owners such as Rayonier Matariki Forests (RMF) are showing great interest in the hybrid trial results, says Mark.

"We have been an early adopter of the hybrid, with our earliest plantings dating from 2012, and we now have over 2,600 hectares established across our Canterbury and Southland regions," says RMF's Forest Estate Manager, Acacia Farmery. "Areas planted have increased since 2019 when more stock became available from forest nurseries. RMF believes the hybrid provides benefits over other species on higher altitude South Island sites, such as resistance to snow damage and reduced risk of wilding conifer spread, with harvest rotations of similar length to *radiata* pine."

The closely related *Pinus radiata* and *attenuata* species appear to lend themselves naturally to hybridisation, adds Mark.

"It's important to note that research into alternative species is a long-term process, as illustrated by this work which goes back decades," he says. "We're fortunate that industry leaders, such as Proseed's General Manager Shaf van Ballekom have chosen to

collaborate with RPBC and have invested expertise, energy, and funding into research activities such as these over an extended period. The wider industry is now able to benefit from this knowledge and to use it to support informed decision-making.”

Based on the encouraging trial results, and in parallel with its ongoing tree breeding activities, RPBC and Proseed have now established a new series of hybrid trials, focussing on conferring increased dothistroma resistance through the introduction of dothistroma-resistant and high-productivity radiata parents.

“The signs are very encouraging that the Pinus radiata/attenuata hybrid is a viable alternative to Douglas fir, which has traditionally been the preferred species in areas prone to heavy snow load such as Southland and inland South Island, where Dothistroma (needle blight) is not prevalent.”

Having a wider range of tested alternative species would be beneficial for the industry, says Mark, however it requires long-term planning and support from the industry and Government and market development for wood products using alternative species to radiata pine; it’s difficult to get traction and long-term commitment when working with new and alternative species.

“This trial is an important, evidence-based step towards that goal,” says Mark, “but the fast-growing and versatile Pinus radiata remains the tree of choice for New Zealand plantation forestry for very good economic reasons.”

“We were encouraged by our recent discussions with Minister of Forestry Todd McClay when we met with the Minister last month,” says RPBC General Manager Darrell O’Brien.

“The Minister understands the importance of forestry to the New Zealand economy and has stated that forestry’s success is an important part of the Government’s plan to rebuild New Zealand’s economy.

“We believe that this understanding combined with his complementary perspective as Minister for Trade means that Minister McClay appreciates the role that innovation such as the Pinus radiata and attenuata hybrid and RPBC’s work in general plays in supporting a thriving forestry sector in New Zealand and Australia.”

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About RPBC

RPBC is New Zealand's only specialist radiata pine breeding company and occupies a central position in the forest industry breeding supply chain.

RPBC breeds elite genetic material, and provides knowledge, support, and tools to continuously improve profitability for Australian and New Zealand radiata pine forest owners.

RPBC is a not-for-profit entity and has 16 shareholders in Australia and New Zealand representing organisations from across the value chain: vertically integrated forestry companies, forest owners, forest management companies, and seed and planting stock producers. Together, these shareholders account for more than one million hectares of radiata pine plantations in New Zealand and Australia.

For more information go to: www.rpbc.co.nz