

CARBON FARMING ON MĀORI LAND: INSIGHTS ON THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

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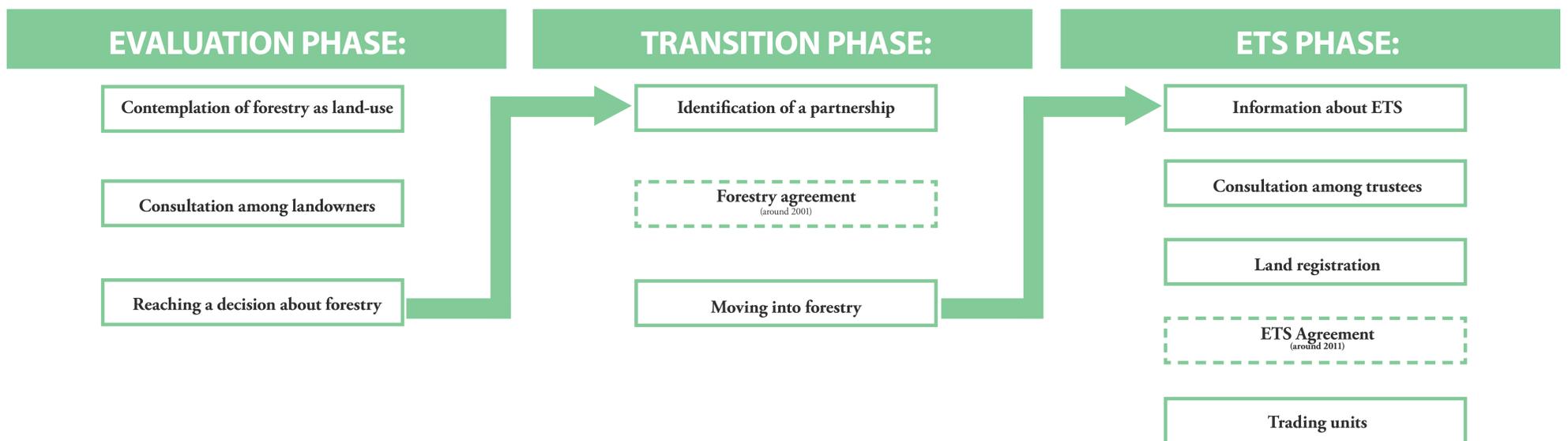


AIM: To explore the decision-making processes associated with going into carbon farming, with an emphasis on the New Zealand Emission Trading Scheme (ETS).

“What is carbon farming for you?”

“It is a payment for nothing. We get paid for growing forestry while the rest of the world screw-up.”

METHODOLOGY: Face-to-face semi-structured interviews (n=5) with Māori involved in commercial plantation forestry. These interviews showed three phases of historical decision-making about carbon farming.



Economic and cultural imperatives motivated land-use change.

“...there’s supposed to be some money coming out of it, which we may not see but our children and grandchildren will see.”

Co-operation and trust among the multiple owners are crucial.

“It was poorly farmed land, and we had to make a decision [...] finding alternatives for the land and its usage to best be beneficial for us all. [...] It took about 8 years. Well, that’s the protocols of Māori whenua [land].”

Resistance to change was an issue.

“...we were confronted with a tough decision because one of the points raised by whānau [family] is that you can’t eat trees but you can eat cattle, or sheep.”

Administration and regulation of Māori land were an issue.

“There’s been a lot of tracking people down, a lot of meetings, making sure that committees were set up right, and making decision-making processes that could all be mandated appropriately. And so a lot of that was a significant cost, because you’ve got lawyers going round to do that.”

Local relationships must be built between stakeholders and with those providing capital.

“Landowners have come along with their land, have been capital constrained, and a funding partner has come in, so they’ve put all the money in, the landowners have put their whenua in, and therefore that was how the forest was able to be established.”

Landowners relied on information from a trusted agent.

“Just trying to get the landowners to understand what the ETS is [...] and telling them that someone would pay them for air. I got a lot of looks and a lot of shakes of the head [...] I took a little whiteboard along and tried to draw little trees absorbing carbon from factories.”

Moving into forestry was motivated by an economic opportunity to access capital in the long term. Payments for carbon units provide revenue in the short term, before plantation harvest.

“They’re all existing forest owners, and then the ETS came along which meant basically a bonus for them because [...] there was an opportunity for our landowners to benefit from carbon.”

“We were sitting on our hands, right? With money invested from the sale of stock and other assets in financial portfolios. So each year we were reliant on what the share-market was doing, and what bonds were doing, in order to get income to operate the Trust, and still trying to grow that portfolio. So then to get a carbon cheque each year of – after tax – around \$150,000, it is quite a significant amount for doing nothing different.”



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