

Opinion (/category/opinion)

Nash is right to shun timber-first policy

The goal is to make buildings more sustainable, whatever the materials.



By **Nick Collins**

Sat, 17 Jul 2021



The University of Canterbury's Science precinct building was built using innovative multi-story timber-framed construction.

“There is no ‘timber-first’ policy. There is a policy to reduce the carbon impact of government buildings.”

This is Minister for Economic Development, Government Procurement and Forestry Hon. Stuart Nash's [response last week](https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/order-paper-questions/written-questions/current?Criteria.page=Channel&Criteria.PageNumber=1&Criteria.DateFrom=2020-11-24&Criteria.ParliamentNumber=53&Criteria.QuestionNumber=25299&Criteria.ParliamentStartDate=2020-11-24&Criteria.ParliamentNumber=53&Criteria.ViewDetails=1) (https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/order-paper-questions/written-questions/current?Criteria.page=Channel&Criteria.PageNumber=1&Criteria.DateFrom=2020-11-24&Criteria.ParliamentNumber=53&Criteria.QuestionNumber=25299&Criteria.ParliamentStartDate=2020-11-24&Criteria.ParliamentNumber=53&Criteria.ViewDetails=1) to written parliamentary questions from Opposition spokesperson for Construction Tim van de Molen, inquiring into the government's timber-first policy.

The minister and his predecessor have been subjected to significant lobbying by sector players to adopt a timber-first policy for the procurement of government buildings. The minister was right not to yield to pressure.

New Zealand's Building Code and government procurement are material agnostic, focused on delivering resilient and high-performing buildings. Decisions with respect to which material is used in what building needs to be left to architects and engineers based on independent robust data, informed by International Standards and New Zealand's specific seismic/climatic challenges.



Metals NZ CEO Nick Collins.

Currently these professionals, along with our constructors, materials suppliers and manufacturers are challenged by significant supply shortages and a failure of international supply chains. Mandating a timber first policy for government buildings would have created significant additional delays along with significant additional costs in both design and construction – so well done minister in keeping the sector moving.

The three principle materials – steel, concrete and timber are all present in most of our buildings. In [New Zealand's current tallest wooden building](https://www.nzherald.co.nz/business/homeground-new-110m-auckland-city-mission-hq-being-finished-tallest-nz-wood-building/DCLZVWYQJXWGZEHV3XNSQMEIM/https://www.nzherald.co.nz/business/homeground-) (https://www.nzherald.co.nz/business/homeground-new-110m-auckland-city-mission-hq-being-finished-tallest-nz-wood-building/DCLZVWYQJXWGZEHV3XNSQMEIM/https://www.nzherald.co.nz/business/homeground-

[new-110m-auckland-city-mission-hq-being-finished-tallest-nz-wood-](#)

[building/DCLZVWTYQJXWGZEHV3XNSQMEIM/">building/DCLZVWTYQJXWGZEHV3XNSQMEIM/](#)), under construction in Auckland, for example, it's evident that the north and west faces of the building are braced with a significant steel frame, and will be supported by substantial concrete foundations.

So, how do we reduce carbon in buildings? Not only do we need to minimise carbon over the life of the building and maximise the resilience of our buildings to the threats of climate change, (which include overheating, freak flooding, increased risk of fire and likely sea level rise), but we also need to ensure that at end of life, we reuse the valuable building materials, avoiding landfill and further reducing the materials' carbon footprint.

The challenge for New Zealand's construction sector is to transition to this circular and low emission economy. Favouring one material over another only serves to pit parts of the sector against each other at a time when all parties need to collaborate to deliver the best outcome for New Zealand Inc.

A recent report from [BRANZ - Environmental challenges, opportunities and transitions for construction in Aotearoa New Zealand \(https://www.branz.co.nz/about/construction-sector-accord/\)](#), commissioned by the Construction Sector Accord, outlines the magnitude of the challenge for the construction sector. It identifies seven key environmental challenges for our construction sector – which include greenhouse gas emissions, energy, waste, water, land use, climate adaptation and regenerative construction.

The sector has a big footprint across the first five, and adaptation to climate change will be significant. Designing/constructing and managing buildings that generate more than they consume is a challenge worth getting out of bed for.

The construction sector, enabled by the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment needs to work together to solve these challenges, leave our built environment in a better place than we found it, and ensure we create great places to live, work and play.

Nick Collins is former Chair of the Sustainability Committee for the New Zealand Construction Industry Council. He is also CEO of Metals New Zealand

By **Nick Collins**

Tags:

[timber industry \(/tags/timber-industry\)](#) **[Metals NZ \(/tags/metals-nz\)](#)** **[Stuart Nash \(/tags/stuart-nash\)](#)**

© All content copyright NBR. Do not reproduce in any form without permission, even if you have a paid subscription.

Comments

4 comments

sam17 **Anonymous**

Type something...

750 / 750 characters

Posting this comment indicate you've read and will abide by [NBR's terms and conditions on commenting \(/terms-and-conditions\)](#).

Add comment

deekers44

Sat, 17 Jul 2021 - 3:22pm

And guess where NZ's CLT is produced??? Australia. This after Xlam shuttered their nelson plant. Red Stag starting to produce off their new line but that needs to be proven as engineered timber isn't as easy to produce as the masses think.....

Reply

Anonymous

Sun, 18 Jul 2021 - 9:52pm

Red Stag CLT is up and running, and has apparently successfully delivered a number of project since launching 2 months ago. Nash has not responded to lobbying - a wood priority policy has been long time Labour, Greens and NZ First policy. It has effectively been implemented via the lowest carbon building procurement policy. A win for the planet, New Zealand's balance of payments, local production, build speed and cost (steel is up 45% this year)

Reply

Anonymous

Mon, 19 Jul 2021 - 9:50am

Amazing! Can we now have similar thinking about electricity generation (rather than a religious crusade for 100 percent renewables). There is always a role for some thermal generation in order to maintain supply continuity in a word where the sun doesn't always shine and the wind doesn't always blow.

Reply

david_79833

Mon, 19 Jul 2021 - 2:39pm

Nothing wrong with steel. After we have pockmarked the face of the earth and exhausted iron ore supply we can start mining asteroids. Makes much more sense than using sustainable forest products

Reply

NBR

FOLLOW US ON



BROWSE

[Meet the crew \(/editorial-profiles\)](/editorial-profiles)

[Advertise \(/advertising-nbr\)](/advertising-nbr)

[Contact us \(/contact-us\)](/contact-us)

[FAQs \(/faq\)](/faq)

[Privacy Policy \(/privacy\)](/privacy)

[Terms & Conditions \(/terms-and-conditions\)](/terms-and-conditions)

[RSS Feeds \(/rss\)](/rss)

STREET ADDRESS

Level 3, Suite 306

Achilles House

8 Commerce Street

1010, Auckland, NZ

CONTACT

0800 843 627

Ph: +64 (0)9 307 1629