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OPINION

Cement has not practical substitutes? Not Quite

The Government's recent "Domestic Cement Production Secured" media announcement highlighted their view on the strategic importance of maintaining New Zealand's domestic cement manufacturing capability. In explaining its decision to support Golden Bay Cement, the Government stated within the release that "*Cement has no practical substitutes*" and is needed for the construction of homes, hospitals, schools, roads, and other nationally significant infrastructure. [Govt Press Release - Domestic Cement Production Secured](#)

While cement undoubtedly remains an important construction material, the assertion that it has no practical substitutes does not reflect the growing role of mass timber, lumber, and engineered wood products in modern construction.

Across New Zealand and internationally, mass timber technologies such as cross-laminated timber (CLT), glue-laminated timber (glulam), and laminated veneer lumber (LVL) are increasingly being used as viable alternatives to concrete and steel in a wide range of building types. Homes, schools, healthcare facilities, offices, and multi-storey commercial buildings are already being successfully delivered in New Zealand using locally manufactured timber-based structural systems.

Importantly, the very building categories cited in the Government's announcement - homes, hospitals, and schools - are among those where timber solutions are proving particularly effective within New Zealand. Timber construction offers faster build times, reduced embodied carbon, lower building weight, and strong seismic performance, while also supporting domestic wood manufacturing, the economy and regional employment.

Roads, foundations, and many infrastructure projects will continue to require concrete and cement. However, it is equally important for this Government to recognise that for many building projects, timber and wood products are already a proven and practical substitute. The continued growth of mass timber demonstrates that innovation is expanding the range of options available to designers, builders, and building owners and that, in many cases, there are practical alternatives to cement already in use today.

Our message to Government is simple. When it comes to building homes, hospitals, schools, and multi-storey buildings, there is a practical, proven, and readily available alternative to construction materials such as cement. That alternative is New Zealand-grown, harvested, and manufactured wood products. Supporting wood in construction is not about picking winners. It is about making the most of one of our country's most important renewable resources, supporting our regions, and retaining hundreds of millions of dollars in additional economic value within New Zealand.



New Zealand-grown and manufactured CLT and LVL have replaced concrete and steel in the soon to be completed six storey parliamentary building in Wellington, which will stand alongside the Beehive.

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WPMA – who we are:

WPMA is an industry membership association representing companies involved in the wider wood processing and manufacturing industries, including sawn timber, pulp and paperboard, manufactured and engineered wood products, along with bio-forest products. Our vision champions wood processing and manufacturing as the core to New Zealand's economic growth, regional development, and sustainable environment.