Podocarpus laetus

COMMON NAME
Mountain totara, Hall’s totara, thin-barked totara, totara-kiri-kotukutuku

SYNONYMS
Podocarpus hallii Kirk; Podocarpus cunninghamii Colenso

FAMILY
Podocarpaceae

AUTHORITY
Podocarpus laetus Hooibr. ex Endl.

FLORA CATEGORY
Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Gymnosperm Trees & Shrubs

NVS CODE
PODCUN

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 34

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2012 | Not Threatened

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2009 | Not Threatened
2004 | Not Threatened

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. North, South and Stewart Islands.

HABITAT
Lowland, montane to lower subalpine forest (but notably more common in montane forest). Often found on impoverished soils, immature (skeletal) soils, or sites that are naturally stressed by drought or extreme temperature fluctuations.
FEATURES
Robust dioecious conifer up to 20 m tall. Trunk stout, 1-1.5 m diam., clad in papery, thin, freely flaking reddish-grey bark. Trunk without branches at base, branches slender, erect, spreading or somewhat drooping. Leaf bud significantly broader than the diam., of the branchlet, surrounded by caducous, papery, ovate bracts. Leaves yellow-green, green, or brownish-green, erect, leathery; juvenile 25-50 x 4-5 mm, adults 20-30 x 3-4 mm., narrow-linear to linear-lanceolate, acute to acuminate, apex very pungent, mid-vein distinct. Male cones (strobili) axillary, 10-25 mm, solitary or up to 5 on a common peduncle. Female branchlets axillary, ovules solitary or paired. Receptacle of 2-4 scales, irregularly elliptic-oblong to obovate-oblong, maturing as a red, swollen, succulent, sweet tasting “fruit” this surmounted by a 1(-2) elliptic, elliptic-oblong or ovate-oblong, (5-)6.5-8.5 mm long, grey nut brown or dark brown (green when fresh) seed.

SIMILAR TAXA
Distinguished from Podocarpus totara var. totara by the leaf bud which is wider than the diameter of the branchlet (resembles a meat ball on a stick), and by the broadly ovate bud bracts. The bark is generally papery - hence “thin barked totara”, the leaves (especially juveniles and subadults) are longer and broader with a very sharp, pungent leaf tip. Hybridises with P. totara var. totara and hybrids can only reliably be distinguished by bud scale and bud diameter characters. See also Gardner (1990) in references below.

FLOWERING
(August-) October (-December)

FLOWER COLOURS
No flowers

FRUITING
Fruits take a year or so to ripen, and may be found throughout the year, usually peaking at about the same time that cones are produced. They are most frequently seen between April and May

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easily grown from fresh seed and hard-wood cuttings.

ETYMOLOGY
podocarpus: Foot or stalk fruit
laetus: From the Latin laetus ‘bright’

WHERE TO BUY
Uncommon in cultivation. Not often seen in gardens though it is commercially available.

TAXONOMIC NOTES
Molloy (2015) has outlined the complex taxonomic history of Hall's totara noting that there are three valid names that could be used for this species, P. hallii Kirk, P. cunninghamii Colenso and P. laetus Hooibr. ex Endl. Molloy (2015) concludes that Podocarpus laetus is the earliest legitimate and validly published name, and in the absence of any final ruling on the matter that name is now used here. Previously it had been recommended that P. cunninghamii should be used (see Molloy 1985; de Lange & Rolfe 2010).

ATTRIBUTION

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING
Connor, H.E.; Edgar, E. 1987: Name changes and Nomina Nova IV. New Zealand Journal of Botany 25: