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\$30 million for agriculture R&D but little for forestry. AFPFA is looking at the budget for future innovation.

The Australian Forest Products Association (AFPFA) is concerned about the lack of public support for vital research and development (R&D) in the forest, wood and paper products industry.

The Minister for Agriculture Barnaby Joyce this week announced \$30 million for new R&D projects – almost one third of the available \$100 million which was earmarked for research and development for the Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry portfolio in the last budget.

Apart from one indirect project led by Sugar Research Australia, which will look into the development of bio-refinery technologies and the suitability of agricultural and forestry residues, there were no specific projects targeted at the \$22 billion forest products industry.

The Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Forest Products Association (AFPFA) Mr Ross Hampton said, “The Abbott Government has said it wants to see a new and brighter future for the forestry and forest product industries which support some 120,000 jobs. Forest research has been decimated in this country over the last ten years. The CRC for Forestry has ceased, universities have closed forestry schools, and the CSIRO has shed half of its remaining forestry related researchers. This at a time when the rest of globe is focused on the potential of forestry and forest products to save the planet as the greenest of industries and are investing in new uses of timber for building systems, biomaterials and smarter packaging to name just a few areas.”

Mr Hampton said, "Faced with population pressures and the necessity to replace carbon intensive materials with renewable and sustainable products, the world is turning to fibre and all the things we can gain from fibre as never before. In other parts of the world they are making rapid advances in fast growing trees, engineered wood building systems, high rise timber buildings, biochemicals, biofuels and bioplastics. Australia risks missing the boat. Australia is a heavyweight in forestry (the third most forested nation on a per capita basis) and yet we have no national research institute - as they do in Canada and New Zealand. AFPFA has produced a plan for such an Institute but has yet to see any positive budget response from the Government."

“We will be listening carefully to Treasurer Joe Hockey’s delivery of next week’s budget for some indication that the Government believes that the forest products industries will play just as important a role in our future as other forms of agricultural production and value added processing”.

AFPFA represents forest growers, harvesters, and manufacturers of timber and paper products.

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