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Prime Minister Turnbull backs woodchips and fibre as drivers of new economy

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has drawn on new export statistics to rightly nominate woodchips (used in paper making) and other fibre exports as key parts of the economy, delivering regional jobs in the wake of the decline in the mining investment period.

Prime Minister Turnbull told Parliament yesterday that Tasmania was rapidly becoming a major provider of rural produce and commodities to China, noting that woodchips and timber had grown by 102% in the last twelve months, far outstripping seafood export growth (78.6%), meat (48.7%) and fruit and vegetables (11%).

The Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA), Mr Ross Hampton said, "Prime Minister Turnbull is right to note the large positive impact forest industries are having in Tasmania, delivering sustainable year round jobs – especially and vitally in regional areas with high unemployment. It is important to note that all timber and woodchip exports from Tasmania come from world class sustainably managed sources (plantations and natural forests) which are replanted and regenerated after harvest, providing replacement trees in years to come."

Mr Hampton said "These Tasmanian figures are a reflection of the national picture. Last year Australia exported 5.82 million tonnes of woodchips, valued at more than \$1 billion dollars. This is up 11% in volume and more than 25% in value on the previous year."

"Australia's sustainable forest product industries employ some 120,000 people across the full value chain. The world is turning to this sustainable resource as a substitute for materials which are not able to be regrown and we are reaping the benefits."

"The opportunity, however, is there for us to do so much more to help the world meet its needs in a sustainable way. We need the Government to recognise the importance of plantation hubs around wood processing and transport centres with policies such as Carbon Farming Initiative payments being made available to farmers and growers in these areas. Without policy change we will not be able to continue to grow," said Mr Hampton.

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

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