

AFPA Chair speech

Gala Dinner

Tuesday 12 September, 2017

Good evening everybody and thank you for the introduction.

I would like to give a special welcome to Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull who has come along to join us tonight.

The Prime Minister has made time for us tonight despite having pressing national security commitments this evening. We do appreciate how vital this work is – especially given the current worrying regional tensions and we understand that you will have to leave soon after you speak to us PM. We are very grateful for whatever time you can spend with us.

Unfortunately the Opposition Leader Bill Shorten was unable to join us tonight for drinks. Bill was going to come along and spend about half an hour with us but he had other commitments. He unfortunately had parliamentary commitments this afternoon and

could not make it but he will be trying to come along later tonight, so in his absence we thank him for attempting to get here.

We have with us the Shadow Minister for Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry Joel Fitzgibbon and Joel will be speaking on behalf of the Opposition Leader a little later. He will be joined on stage by his co-chair of the Parliamentary Friends of Forestry and Forest Products group, Tony Pasin MP.

Also I would like to welcome the Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce who is here with us tonight.

Can I ask you to keep your applause until the end of the night. I have a long list here. The Environment Josh Frydenberg, the Minister for Infrastructure Darren Chester, the Minister for Industry Arthur Sinodinos, the President of the Senate, Senator Parry, Assistant Minister with responsibility for Forestry Anne Ruston and other Assistant Ministers Laundry, Hartsukyer, Gillespie, McCormack, Shadow Ministers Carr, Dreyfus, O'Connor, Chesters, Kelly

And Members of Parliament. There are about 45 of you present....too many to thank individually so please ladies and gentlemen pat them on the back or shake their hand sometime tonight and give them some applause.

Also I would like to welcome Daryl Quinliven – Secretary of the Department of Agriculture.

We have two tables of colleagues from New Zealand – thank you for making the journey across the ditch to be with us tonight.

We have the President of the National Farmers Federation Fiona Simson and the whole Board and CEO of the NFF.

Co-chair of the Forest Industry Advisory Council Rob de Fegeley is here.

The Australian Industry Group is here represented by CEO Innes Willox.

Industry Chairs, CEOs and my fellow AFPA Directors...

Ladies and gentlemen...Thank for attending.

Before I move on to the rest of my speech I would like to make a special welcome to Anne Ruston. Anne has been instrumental in getting a press release out today regarding the joint ministerial forestry statement signed by most states where state governments have come out and issued their full support of the expansion and continued prosperity of the forestry industry in Australia which is a really fantastic effort and we really appreciate it. Minister, thank you very much.

I would now like to introduce you to somebody else, Damien Ambrose.

Damien is the service manager at Onetrak. That's him in front of the business in Tumut. In that shed behind Damien there are ten people working on servicing equipment which some of our businesses use.

Damien tells me there are another 50 people spread across the country doing similar work for that one company.

I wanted you to meet Damien down there in regional Tumut to help you put a face to the following statistics.

Forest industries in this country deliver a massive community benefit through high quality, well paid, year-round meaningful jobs. Jobs which don't come and go with the tourist season. Jobs in managing sustainable forests, harvesting, hauling the logs out, regenerating and replanting the areas which have been harvested, looking after forest health as the trees regrow, fighting bushfires, sawmilling, making paper products and creating new engineered wood products and bio products.

If you include the folks who turn timber into products like the framing and roof trusses you see in our houses there are some 120,000 Australians who derive a living from our industries. When you include indirect jobs - like those being performed by Damien and his team in Tumut - you are talking now about some 300,000 people. We generate some \$23billion in economic contribution and make up about 6% of manufacturing GDP.

Prime Minister those are the facts to make you smile. So far so good. But here are four more facts to ponder.

Fact one: The globe is using non renewable resources at a rate which means that by 2050, when we have to house, clothe and feed 9.5 billion people, we will need three planets worth of resources.

Fact two: Every serious environmental organisation, the UN plus serious development agencies such as the World Bank, agree that sustainably managed forestry operations (where every tree which is harvested is replaced like we do in Australia) – must be a big part of that answer.

Fact three: Australia is the seventh most forested nation on earth.

Fact four – and this is the one I wish to emphasise – whilst this nation exports about \$3.0 billion worth of forest products each year we import about \$5.5 billion.

Prime Minister this is just not good enough.

We should be helping provide the sustainable, renewable timber and wood-fibre resource the globe needs – not continually taking in more than we are sending out to a needy world.

How do we change that import deficit?

We need to grow.

Scale brings great economies. We are proud that Australia has some of the best environmental standards for native forests and plantations and our workers have some of the highest standards of living in the world. However, this means our products carry some extra costs not borne by other countries. We are a high cost manufacturing country – I think everyone knows that. We face very real challenges in spiralling energy costs and we have other high input costs. But we have much in our favour. We have highly skilled people, best practice forestry management, and many productive forest regions.

So we must grow.

We are very pleased to have seen the Government deliver some great things for our industries over the last few years: the CFI Plantation Forestry Methodology, the Tasmanian RFA, R and D investment in Mt Gambier and Launceston. Thank you Prime Minister, Assistant Minister Ruston and all those involved in

delivering those key outcomes for our industries over the last two years.

The missing piece though is a new vision and plan shared by industry and Governments of the future place of our industries in Australia.

The policy documents guiding our industries are as you know the 1992 Forest Statement and the 1997 Vision 2020 Plantations documents. They are both of last century – a generation old – and we are a very different industry to the industry of the 20th century.

Prime Minister We look forward to continuing to work with you and your team towards a new vision for our sector.

Joel we also seek the support of the ALP. Our industries have been buffeted by political point scoring in past years. It is a great relief to us all that those days seem over.

Thank you very much.

I would like to now invite a great champion of the industry to the stage. The Assistant Minister with responsibility for Forestry,

Senator Anne Ruston to introduce the Prime Minister. Thank you

Anne.