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New report shows plantations going backwards: National Forestry Plan must deliver

Federal Government figures released today showing a continuing decline in Australia's plantation timber estate, should be a wakeup call for policy makers, according to Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA), Mr Ross Hampton.

The ABARES report graphically shows the decline in available timber for domestic processing and continues a troubling trajectory of several years.

The *Australian plantation statistics 2018 update* released today by ABARES shows that in 2016-17, Australia's total commercial plantation area was 1,955,100 hectares, down 19,700 or 1 per cent.

"This is a crisis", said Mr Hampton. "Nowhere in the world is there large scale tree planting without government policy backing. Australia only has a timber manufacturing industry employing tens of thousands of regional Australians thanks to the foresight of policy makers in previous generations who created the environment to enable the establishment of our national plantations estate of some two million hectares.

"We urgently need to grow to about 2.4 million hectares if we are to keep pace with housing growth and ensure the viability of our mills and processing plants and the towns they underpin.

"We already import the timber used to frame about 60,000 houses a year. We have a constant deficit in wood products as a nation of about \$2 billion. For a nation with ample land and expertise this is a travesty. Plantations use about half a per cent of agricultural land. Adding another 400,000 hectares would take that to about 0.6 per cent.

"AFPA welcomes the \$20 million set out in last week's Federal Budget towards the Federal Government's National Forestry Industry Plan, but it is unclear yet just how the Government plans to generate a new round of tree planting. Industry presumes this will be addressed in the release of the full plan later this year.

"Without more trees to support our sawmilling, processing and pulp, paper and packaging businesses, and the jobs they provide, everything else we do is just skirting the real issue," Mr Hampton concluded.

*ABARES; *Australian plantation statistics 2018 update* can be found [here](#).

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

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