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Lift in timber imports highlights need for enforcement of product safety and sustainability standards

The Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA) welcomes the announcement of a Senate Inquiry into non-compliant building products, co-sponsored by Senators Nick Xenophon, Jacqui Lambie and John Madigan.

“The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission needs to take a stronger stance on increasing trade and product safety compliance”, said AFPA Chair, Mr Greg McCormack.

“AFPA supports trade-liberalisation so long as there is comparable effort in reducing tariffs with our trading partners. It is also critically important that in parallel with more open trade there is the enforcement of compliance with Australian product safety and environmental standards”.

The latest Customs statistics show a significant lift in imports in the last three months to the end of April of particleboard and softwood sawntimber into Australia of 44% and 11% respectively. This reflects stronger demand from local building and construction activity.

Similarly, there has been steady demand for plywood, with imports from China increasing by over 36% between 2012-13 and 2013-14. Chinese imports of printing and writing papers have increased 12% over the same period. This comes on the back of the recently signed China Australia Free Trade Agreement.

“In the absence of Government policing, there is a greater risk of building products not complying with product safety standards. The Engineered Wood Products Association of Australasia (EWPAA), for example, administers a quality control and product certification program. In 2013, they found in surveillance testing of imported plywood sheets that up to 70% failed to meet Australian safety standards”, said Mr McCormack.

“Government procurement policies also need to adequately assess the sustainability of paper product imports, such as the risks from illegal logging, poor forest management and inadequate certification. Australian paper producers operate at the highest standards of sustainability”.

“In the Asian region there is considerable scope for greater two way trade with Australia in forest products. We must be vigilant however in not dropping the ball on ensuring compliance of imports with Australian product safety and environmental standards. AFPA will continue to advocate for better policing of Australian mandatory standards, as well as the removal of remaining tariffs on our wood and paper product exports into the Asia-Pacific region.”

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

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