

Forest funds welcomed

Association chief praises research centre commitment

WE ALL know that research and innovation is fundamental to the international competitiveness of businesses and industries, not least the forest products industry, which requires large capital investment and long-term market planning.

However, in Australia our national forest products industries have experienced a decade of decline in research and development, with too many decision makers not realising the massive potential we offer for economic growth and prosperity.

One decade ago there were over 730 researchers working in our industries and \$100m a year was being spent.

That has now plummeted to about 250 researchers and \$30m.

In contrast, our competitors such as New Zealand and Canada have seized the initiative and invested heavily in focused research and development for their forest industries.

The Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA) has continually urged that this state of affairs demanded urgent and decisive action, that it was time for government and industry to act together and to act decisively.

The Turnbull Government has responded to three years of campaigning by announcing \$4m in funding to establish a National Institute for Forest Products Innovation (Institute) in two key hubs of Launceston and Mount Gambier.

If the Federal Government funding is matched by both state government and industry funding, it would provide the Institute ultimately \$12m.

This welcome announcement represents



FUNDING COMMITMENT WELCOMED: Australian Forest Products Association chief executive Ross Hampton has welcomed the Federal Coalition's funding commitment for forestry research in Mount Gambier.

a turning back to our industries after years of decline.

Most importantly it signals that the Turnbull Government understands that the forest and forest product industries are not industries of the past, but of the future.

This announcement is recognition of the fact that in a carbon constrained global economy, in which renewable resources are at a premium, and when the plastics and fuels currently derived from oil can be also made from wood fibre, our forest industries truly are one of the best bets of the 21st century.

In relation to the Mount Gambier R&D hub, the member for Barker Tony Pasin, must be acknowledged for his determined and resolute advocacy for the Institute and our industries.

It is not meant to be a political statement, but in our business you meet

with many politicians.

Some take your proposal and do nothing with it.

Mr Pasin took our institute proposal and ran with it - right to the try line.

It makes great sense that the Institute will operate equally from two initial nodes, one in Launceston and one in Mount Gambier.

This will provide the Institute with the broad coverage of both the natural forest and plantation sectors.

There are areas of overlap and areas which are different.

Ultimately the Institute should also encompass at least a third hub to gather in tropical forestry R&D and the potential of Northern Australia.

Ross Hampton
Chief Executive Officer,
Australian Forest Products
Association