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Bioenergy – the forgotten renewable

The significant potential of bioenergy sourced from renewable woody biomass, including the recognition of the industrial heat component, is being ignored in energy policy development.

Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA) Mr Ross Hampton said, “At the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Energy Council meeting tomorrow, Federal and State Ministers will discuss major transitions in the energy sector, seeking ways to ensure energy markets remain stable and secure, and promote renewable energy options. Bioenergy sourced from renewable biomass has the potential to help realise these goals,”

“The forest products industry could make a significant contribution to delivering lower emissions and affordable renewable energy security, while also providing much needed investment and jobs in forestry, wood and paper product manufacturing,” said Mr Hampton.

Tasmania and South Australia’s recent energy issues have led to suggestions that energy policy, including the Renewable Energy Target, should prioritise investment in those sources of renewable energy that can better substitute for base-load non-renewable power. This approach would result in a focus on bioenergy.

Other countries are adopting ambitious climate targets by incentivising their businesses to transfer from coal, oil and gas heating to heating from renewable biomass sources (i.e. from forestry residues or other sources, such as sugarcane bagasse and slash).

Globally, bioenergy sourced from biomass accounts for around 77% of renewable energy, which represents 13% of the world’s primary energy mix. However, despite having the highest area of forest per capita of the developed nations, Australia uses bioenergy in less than 1% of the electricity production. In contrast, bioenergy contributes up to 16% of renewable power in Finland, 15% in Denmark and more than 7% in Sweden. Ambitious emissions reduction targets and significant new investment could be achieved by supporting bioenergy sourced from renewable biomass including the recognition of the industrial heat component.

AFPA urges COAG Energy Council members to recognise and embrace the potential of bioenergy sourced from renewable biomass in their deliberations on lowering emissions and energy policy reform.

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

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