



Australian  
Forest  
Products  
Association

## AUSTRALIAN FOREST PRODUCTS ASSOCIATION

Submission to Jobs and Skills Australia re:  
Draft Core Skills Occupations List (CSOL) for  
Consultation

**May 2024**





27 May 2024

To whom it may concern

**RE: Draft Core Skills Occupations List (CSOL) for Consultation**

Thank you for providing the Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA) with the opportunity to submit this response to the Draft Core Skills Occupation List (CSOL).

AFPA is pleased to provide this submission to Jobs and Skills Australia and supports Jobs and Skills Australia to define Australia's skills needs.

AFPA recognises the new Australian migration system and policy commitments and areas for future reform and understands that the Models proposed support the Migration Strategy.

AFPA is the peak national industry body representing the Australian forest, wood and paper products industry's interests to governments, the general public and other stakeholders on matters relating to the sustainable development and use of Australia's forests and associated manufacturing and marketing of wood and paper products in Australia.

Australia's sustainable forest industries contribute more than \$24 billion p.a. directly employing over 80,000 Australians and indirectly employing another 100,000 Australians with most of these jobs based in rural and regional Australia.

If you have any questions regarding this submission, please contact Amanda Bell, Forest Industry Safety Manager via email [amanda.bell@ausfpa.com.au](mailto:amanda.bell@ausfpa.com.au)

## **Executive Summary**

Australia's forest and wood products industries supply the nation with products for building and construction, packaging and many essential household products and require a specialised workforce to produce these products.

In recent years the Australian forest, wood and paper products industry have found it increasingly difficult to attract staff in a tight labour market. Staff sourced through skilled migration visas have formed a critical part of meeting our industries requirements to provide the products Australians need. Everyone remembers the toilet paper shortage through COVID and the shortage of timber through the COVID construction boom. Many of our members are often located in the regions adding to the difficulty in attracting staff.

AFPA has gathered both qualitative and quantitative data from its members, to enable us to form a position and make recommendations on the proposed draft CSOL list. It is clear from the responses that my members have an ongoing and structural shortage of critical skills and as a result we support the addition of all the relevant critical skills relating to forestry from the list.

We therefore make the following recommendations:

**RECOMMENDATION 1: That the confident on list be amended to include 234113 Forester / Forest Science and 323315 Saw Maker and Repairer.**

**RECOMMENDATION 2: That 323305 Saw Technician, and 394213 Wood Machinist (which is currently not on any list) be added to the confident on list.**

**RECOMMENDATION 3: Support the position that the confident on list include 133511 Production Manager (Forestry).**

**RECOMMENDATION 4 Support the position that the confident on list include 232214 Other Spatial Scientist.**

**RECOMMENDATION 5: That the confident on list be amended to include 363113 Forestry Operations Supervisor.**

**RECOMMENDATION 6 That the confident on list be amended to include 363199 Senior Aquaculture, Crop and Forestry Workers.**

## Introduction

The forest and wood products sector is a fundamental element of much of Australia's regional identity. It brings economic strength and stable employment to many regional communities, playing a key role in Australia's housing supply chain, and importantly, serving as a critical pillar in our commitment to combating climate change and our carbon footprint.

The industry's regional profile demonstrates the economic and social interconnectedness, connecting rural and urban environments and illustrating its significant impact on driving regional economies. By offering jobs across the sector of tree planting, managing, and caring for the trees, harvest and haulage of timber, timber processing, and paper and cardboard manufacturing, the industry provides income and stability for millions of people, while also contributing to regional employment.

The forestry industry is a significant employer in rural and regional Australia directly and indirectly employing more than 150,000 Australians, however due to the remote location, aging workforce, and other contributing factors (such as availability of rental accommodation) many employers struggle to find suitably skilled individuals to fill their advertised positions.

Issue 1: Southern Cross University has ceased its undergraduate forestry course. Commencing 2025, no undergraduate Forester course will be offered at any university, anywhere in Australia. Currently forestry organisations look to similar streams of study (e.g. Bachelor of Environmental Science) to fill these positions or are reliant on bringing in overseas candidates.

AFPA along with the University of Tasmania and another seven (7) universities have been working on re-establishing post-graduate tertiary education for Forestry, however until there is a steady stream of graduates, Australia is likely to have a shortage of qualified Foresters and will need to continue to look overseas to fill the skills gap. Therefore, it is vital we have a streamlined visa process which includes Foresters.

Issue 2: Saw Technicians (previously called Saw Doctors) are critical to the operation of the industry and their job is to ensure that the saws in the facility are maximising recovery and working effectively to produce timber to the high-quality standards required. There may be only one or two in a sawmill of 50 staff, but they ensure that sawmilling machinery is running efficiently, effectively and with exact precision. Specialist equipment – the advancement in technology in the sawmilling, wood processing and engineered wood products sector often is operationalised by the introduction of extremely large pieces of equipment such as saws, CNC equipment and other machinery and manufacturing systems. Training for this machinery is normally provided by the equipment supplier, often an overseas based worldwide company, by trainers that will fly in to provide training, or via virtual modes.

## Supporting Position

AFPA has gathered both qualitative and quantitative data from its members, in order to form a position and make recommendations on the proposed draft CSOL list. AFPA represents 90% of the plantation growers and native forestry operators across Australia as well as hardwood processors and softwood manufacturers.

The survey sought input from members regarding their current and future labour demands, current workforce trends and the number of current employees employed under an existing visa arrangement.

The forest industry predicts that in the next 5- or 10-years' time, due to expansion, turn over, retirements and resignations that the future demand for these roles will increase, with an inability to source incumbents domestically.

Based on the responses to our survey, where AFPA do not agree with the proposed classification, further information supporting this position has been provided in the 'Supporting Position' section below.

<b>ANZCO</b>	<b>ANZSCO Description</b>	<b>AFPA Position</b>
<b>Confident Off List</b>		
234 113	Forester / Forest Science	Do not agree – There is a labour shortage

1. AFPA members indicate that over the next 5 years, an average of 20 new Foresters (ANZSCO 234113) and Other spatial scientists (232214) per year will be needed for some of our larger forest growers and land managers.
2. In the last 3 years, AFPA members have employed Foresters from:
  - United Kingdom
  - Canada
  - Hong Kong
  - China
  - Bangladesh
  - New Zealand
  - Peru
  - Philippines
  - South Africa
  - Fiji
3. For ANZSCO code 234113, looking at the nationality of hires over the last 3 years, approximately 25-40% are Australian Citizens.
4. The average age of Foresters in Australia is 51, however one member indicated that almost 20% of their Forest Product division will retire in the next 5 years.

ANZCO	ANZSCO Description	AFPA Position
<b>Confident Off List</b>		
323315	Saw Maker and Repairer	Do not agree – There is a labour shortage

1. AFPA members note that ANZSCO 323305 (Saw Technician) is currently not on any list, and should be added to the Confident On list.
2. AFPA members note that ANZSCO 394213 (Wood Machinist) is currently not on any list, and should be added to the Confident On list.
3. Saw Technicians and saw sharpeners / repairers are highly skilled but low in numbers (usually only 1 or 2 per sawmill) making access to RTO accredited training courses difficult.
4. AFPA members report difficulties in filling open positions constantly in both trade and apprentice positions. This is an industry wide shortfall in these niches trades.
5. One of AFPA largest members - a softwood sawmilling business employs over 1000 staff, across 6 sawmills. Of those staff, they employ 27 Wood Machinists and 38 Saw Doctors (including apprentices and trade qualified).  
Over the next 5-years they plan to have an intake of:
  - a. 4-6 new first year Saw Technician apprentices per year.
  - b. 5-6 new first year Wood Machinist apprentices per year.
6. One company currently has four (4) vacancies in these trades, however, would employ 8-10 people in these trades if apprentices, or suitable qualified tradespeople were available.
7. In the past companies have successfully recruited from New Zealand. However more recently, one member went to considerable time and expense to try and acquire a Saw Technician from South Africa (which eventually fell through).
8. Without these niche trades there will be a real flow- on effect to wider industry, (both upstream and downstream) due to decreased recovery rates. not just the sawmilling portion





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AFPA is the peak national industry body representing the resources, processing, and pulp and paper industries covering the forest products value chain.

AFPA represents all elements of the value chain from the sustainable harvesting of plantations and multiple use natural forest resource including forest establishment and management, harvesting and haulage, processing of timber resources and manufacture of pulp and paper.