

Media Release

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Skyrocketing hardwood imports and Victoria, WA industry closures should sound alarm bells for Federal Government on sovereign capability

Federal Cabinet must discuss Australia's increasing reliance on overseas timber and wood fibre imports along with our shrinking locally based forest plantation estate – as an issue which reduces our sovereign capability as a nation. The Australian Forest Products Association's (AFPA's) call follows Victoria's decision to bring forward the closure of the state's native forestry industry by the end of 2023, which will only further tighten much needed timber and wood fibre supply, Acting Chief Executive Officer of AFPA Natasa Sikman said today.

“As the world seeks to decarbonise and phase out plastics, the demand for timber products in Australia and internationally is growing rapidly. Australia is among the world's best when it comes to sustainable management of the forest sector, including native and plantation forestry. Alarming, at a time when the state governments in Victoria and Western Australia are shutting down sustainable native timber industries, imports of hardwood products are skyrocketing. It's unconscionable that we are closing down our world leading sustainable industries here while we import products, often from places with lesser environmental controls than Australia,” Natasa Sikman said.

Recent Forest and Wood Products Australia (FWPA) statistics show:

- The volume of hardwood imports into Victoria has increased by nearly 40 per cent since 2019, when the Andrews Government announced the 2030 closure of native forestry
- By volume the majority of Australia's hardwood imports are coming from Brazil Indonesia, Malaysia, China and the USA
- 86 per cent of imports are coming from countries with a worse environmental index than Australia (the Yale Environmental Index)
- Sawnwood and mouldings make up the vast majority of the increasing hardwood imports

“It makes no sense that we are closing down our own sustainably managed state-based native forestry industries while imports of the products they produce are growing steeply. Furthermore our national forestry plantation estate is also declining when we know national and global demand for the products they produce is growing sharply,” Natasa Sikman said.

“We need to keep our sustainable native forestry sector open and get more new plantation trees planted to meet the future national and global demand for timber and wood fibre products. Doing this also helps Australia fight climate change, because more trees means more carbon out of the atmosphere locked away in the products those trees create, and

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the fact is properly managed sustainable native forests store more carbon, as identified by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

“Australia’s forest sector is good for the climate, good for jobs and good for Australia’s sovereign capability in essential products, like timber house frames, cardboard boxes and paper products that Australians love,” Natasa Sikman concluded.

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