

The Institute of Foresters of Australia

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Foresters call for strategic review for forestry WA

The Institute of Foresters of Australia WA Division today called upon the government to undertake a strategic review of forestry for Western Australia. There should be wider recognition of the essential material supplies, environmental and social benefits provided by growing forests and using forest products.

As the State Cabinet met in Katanning this week it is appropriate to reflect upon where we are going in terms of land use and essential material resources.

The Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA) is the professional body for foresters and promotes science based sustainable forest management. IFA Chairman, David Wettenhall said the State has “dramatically stopped investment in plantation development” including the Great Southern region. This follows the extensive cuts to harvesting in native forests.

There has been no strategic planning to counter the adverse impacts of the decision to cut plantation investment which will reduce long term timber supplies, employment and environmental services from growing plantations in rural landscapes. “The government has abruptly withdrawn from the sector but has not considered any replacement or alternative approach to forestry” Mr Wettenhall said. Farm forestry extension officers and regional plantation development groups are no longer supported. This has undermined confidence in farm forestry which was developing under the Forest Products Commission Strategic Tree Farming initiative. Government assurances that the private sector would step into the void have not eventuated.

Timber from sustainably managed forests and plantations will compare favourably with non-renewable building materials. Steel framing, bricks and concrete flooring require huge amounts of energy and consequent carbon emissions in their manufacture. Timber requires trees to be grown.

Western Australia imports almost half of the timber consumed in WA. In the future, as global forest supplies decline and demand for timber in Asia increases, it will be more important to control our own destiny in terms of raw materials supplies for building. Timber imports will be less available and more expensive.

Farm forestry offers opportunities for farmers to diversify their enterprises while creating a better environment on the farm. Well planned plantations can provide wildlife habitat and protect soil and catchment values.

“We need to be expanding the plantation resource today to ensure a sustainable supply of forest products in the future. The government must undertake a strategic review of future forest product resources to identify the best options for plantation development and investment.” Mr Wettenhall said.

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