

The Institute of Foresters of Australia

ABN 48 083 197 586

4th June 2010



Mr D Hartley
Acting General Manager
Forest Products Commission Western Australia
Locked Bag 888, Perth Business Centre
Western Australia 6849

Dear David

Thank you for meeting with me on Monday 31st May 2010 giving me an opportunity to express my views on recent changes in the Forest Products Commission.

The plantation forest industry in Western Australia has suffered a number of critical blows in the last year or so with three major private plantation management companies going into administration and receivership, a sharp decline in demand for export woodchips with the global financial crisis and the expiry of public funding for the Strategic Treefarm Project and Private Forestry Development Committees.

The Minister for Forestry announced on 17th January 2010 that the government was looking to change FPC's role in planting trees for carbon off-sets and sharefarming plantations to a support agency providing advice, research and practical assistance to private sector projects of larger scale. This announcement effectively dispensed with Western Australia's Strategy for Plantations and Farm Forestry 2008-2012.

The IFA calls for an urgent review of the State forestry strategy. There is an opportunity to improve the previous strategy including a comprehensive review of the demands and supplies for forest products in WA, benefits and costs of various forms of forestry in the rural landscape and the appropriate actions to capture opportunities. There is an ongoing need for government leadership in developing environmentally and socially beneficial landuses and crops in rural Western Australia. In the absence of a sound forestry strategic plan we may see unfettered development of inappropriate landuse with consequent environmental damage and social disruption. Integrated taskforces including foresters will play important roles in identifying the best strategies for the future and converting these into successful enterprises. The IFA would be pleased to participate again in the development of forestry policies appropriate to Western Australia.

The IFA is concerned that there may be a reduction of the professional forestry staff contributing to the development of planted forests in Western Australia. In particular, reductions in FPC staffing should consider the important role that professional foresters will play in developing wood supplies to the forest industries and in providing advice, research and practical assistance to private sector projects. Our members have the education and experience to develop science based solutions to natural landscape challenges.

Professional foresters within the FPC provide unique advice on policy and strategic planning, commercial and technical development which cannot be provided by other disciplines. They also provide alternative insights to competing landuses such as agriculture, conservation and mining.



Through extensive multidisciplinary education, foresters have valuable capacity to innovate effective low cost solutions often overlooked by less broadly trained and experienced personnel. For example, woody biomass can provide an efficient energy source and sustainably managed regularly harvested forests have greater carbon sequestration potential than plantations not harvested. Forestry education normally covers ecology, silviculture, genetics, statistics, forest biometrics, inventory and modelling, GIS, catchment hydrology, social science, fire management, forest products and utilization, forestry economics, planning, policy and management.

It is unfortunate that specific education of foresters is unavailable in Western Australia. Young professional foresters are either trained in other regions or other disciplines and require a degree of adaptation to the Western Australian forestry circumstances. The FPC graduate programme has played an important role in developing professionals equipped for the local forests. The IFA offers scholarships to assist students entering the profession and we invite the FPC to consider support for the Forestry Education Trust Fund.

The FPC and its predecessors have also played important roles in the development of tree crops and industries suitable for Western Australia to the extent that this State leads the nation in many aspects of plantation forestry. Outstanding examples include the maritime pine estate and the processing industry, the blue gum plantation industry, the native sandalwood market, oil mallees and the emerging medium to low rainfall tree crops. We see a real danger of these developments collapsing in the event that there is a diminution of the professional base which has driven them in the past. While acknowledging the contribution that skilled agronomists have made, there is no doubt that strong and passionate leadership by foresters has been essential to past successes.

There are many opportunities for planted forests in the future of Western Australia. Tropical plantation forests have great potential as do multi-purpose trees on farms for timber and non-timber forest products, environmental services and on farm benefits. There is ongoing need to develop hardwood plantations for timber products capturing local employment opportunities and reducing demands from native forests. We need to develop strategies to expand the softwood plantation estate.

It is essential that a strong research capacity be maintained and extension capability expanded so that the Western Australian plantation sector can remain competitive in a trade exposed economy.

We look forward to working with the FPC as it transforms and urge you to consider carefully the advantages offered by professional foresters in the new organisation.

Yours sincerely

David Wettenhall, RPFTM, MIFA, MACFA
Chair, IFA WA Division

Attachment: IFA Policy on Plantations in Rural Landscapes.