



\$2b trade deficit in wood products a source of national shame

Australia is the seventh most forested country in the world^[1] and Australians have more forest per person than most other countries except for the Canadians and the Russians.

Rob de Fégely, National President of the Australian Institute of Foresters presented a grim picture of Australia's contribution to managing renewable forest and plantation resources to the 19th Commonwealth Forestry Conference in India this month.

Rob said, 'It is a source of some national shame that Australia has a significant trade deficit in forest products of more than \$2 billion each year. This is not an economic argument but a moral and social one. We have the space, skills, wealth and knowledge to do more.

'Using wood is good – it is a carbon-positive, renewable resource - and it is almost impossible to live a day without using wood products in some form. Wood is a timeless product and we should encourage its use.

'Most of Australia's 125 million hectares of forest are either privately owned or on leasehold land yet the bulk of the production from natural forests come from public multiple use forests. In addition, most of our planted forest estate was either established by public forest agencies or with some form of government assistance.

'Private forest owners and Indigenous Australians, particularly in natural forests are conspicuous by their absence in the long-term supply of wood products. We can change this if we have the community support and political will to do so!

'Indigenous Australians own, manage or have an interest in around 30 per cent of Australia's forests and many are wanting greater autonomy in the management of their land and forests.

'Effectively managing forests for environmental outcomes is also not the pretty picture we are often led to believe. Australia has considerable areas of conservation forests which have no effective monitoring making it challenging to make informed decisions about forest management particularly in a landscape context. Are these forests achieving what we think they are?

'We need to investigate whether there is market failure in the domestic forest products market and whether incentives are needed to continue to develop new forest resources. Although I am often reminded that one of the best incentives is a simple one called profit!

'Australia has a proud history of forest management and has the ability to improve conservation outcomes from its forests while meeting demand for renewable resources like wood,' said Rob.

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[1] <http://www.fao.org/3/a-az156e.pdf>

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