TFPA lobbying to close technical loopholes

New body wants political leadership to balance economic, environmental and social outcomes

MY VIEW

Bryan Hayes
Chair, Tasmanian Forest Products Association

THE TFPA was formed in June 2020 and is a Committee of the Board of AFPA under a special delegation. We have 14 founding members whom are leading forest growers and processors in Tasmania and I am proud to be appointed as the inaugural Chair of the Governing Committee of TFPA.

Despite the restrictions imposed by COVID-19 measures we have recruited an impressive CEO in Nick Steel who joined us on 24 August having previously held senior roles at the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association. Nick has hit the ground running with the able support of Terry Edwards whom is progressing the winding up of FIAT.

TFPA is fundamentally a policy development, lobbying and advocacy organisation for our members interests. We will collaborate strongly with other industry bodies to ensure the best outcomes for the industry generally and our members more specifically. Our Charter provides autonomy to manage State issues and we cooperate with AFPA on any issue that transcends State borders and has National implications.

We have established a subcommittee structure to ensure the range of issues affecting the industry in Tasmania are actively managed and that the workload is shared across the membership.

Our most pressing current issue is the green lawfare being conducted by the Bob Brown Foundation to challenge the Tasmanian RFA and which is an existential threat to any natural forest harvesting – State and privately owned - in Tasmania.

The RFA was entered into between the State and Commonwealth in 1997 and provides a framework underpinned by Tasmania's world class Forest Practices Act and Code which prescribes forest management practices that ensure best practice environmental outcomes, including the conservation of endemic species and habitat. This system was developed expressly to be more specific, locally relevant and to a higher standard than provisions of the Commonwealth EPBC Act because it applied only to the forest industry.

TFPA is lobbying our State Minister to urgently work with the Commonwealth to close the technical loopholes and to strengthen the RFA Act and, if necessary, to also amend the EPBC Act to clarify that any forestry conducted in a region that has a current RFA is exempt from the provisions of the EPBC Act.

We are calling for strong political leadership to implement legislative solutions that appropriately balance economic, environmental and social outcomes as intended by the RFA Act. The jobs of many thousands of Tasmanian forest industry workers and hundreds of millions of dollars worth of investment are too important to our small economy to lose.

As usual local media, led by your ABC, is promoting the legal manouevre as some sort of strategic genius that will cause the industry to transition to a plantation raw material base.

Ironically the industry has been quietly doing that for more than 3 decades and the transition has been market led rather than imposed by political process. Today, more than 80% of our wood fibre is sourced from plantations and that is highly appropriate for softwood sawn timber and fibre and for hardwood fibre.

Plantations cannot provide mature hardwoods and special species timbers that are sourced from natural forests and which are used to produce high quality flooring and appearance joinery, furniture and specialty veneers. We know from experience that if these products are not sourced and manufactured from our own natural forests then they will be imported from regions where environmental and social outcomes are very poor compared to what we do in Tasmania.

Ultimately it seems our politicians or the Courts, or both, will resolve this latest challenge to our natural forests sector.

We will be doing all we can to achieve a positive outcome in the best interests of our members, our rural and regional employees and their communities and our State.

STT's forest management backed by TFPA

TASMANIA'S Forest Products Association has backed Sustainable Timber Tasmania's sustainable forest management practices following the public release of its Forest Stewardship Council Australia audit report, which found STT met almost all FSC indicators applicable to it.

The Chairman of the TFPA, Bryan Hayes said STT was already accredited by the world's largest forest certification scheme, PEFC (known in Australia as Responsible Wood), and TFPA supported STT's significant progress towards attaining FSC as well.

"STT's forestry operations are regulated to very high environmental standards and underpin a vibrant, world-class timber industry that employs thousands of people across the state and is vital to Tasmania's economy," Mr Hayes said.

"The audit report confirmed that Sustainable Timber Tasmania has a high degree of compliance with the newly created FSC National Forest Stewardship Standard of Australia, meeting 93% of the indicators applicable to it, and STT has committed to working through the remaining indicators needed to secure FSC certification.

"It is pleasing to note that STT have already commenced the process of improving their management practices through the execution of the Swift Parrot Public Authority Management Agreement which sets aside an additional 10,000 hectares of public native forest as breeding habitat for the swift parrot."

Mr Hayes said the audit report clearly demonstrated where work was required for compliance to be achieved and STT would now be able to clearly see what they need to do before going to a future audit.

"We commend STT and the Tasmanian Government for their openness and transparency in releasing the audit report and for their persistence in pursuit of the additional certification in order to ensure the fullest range of markets are open to the Tasmanian forest industry," Mr Hayes said.

● Centre for Forest Value PHD candidates, Rose Brinkhoff, and below, Vilius Gendvilas.

Research centre leading timber industry in forestry and wood research

THE Australian Research Council's (ARC) Centre for Forest Value has become a leader in Tasmania's timber industry through forestry and wood research, thanks to its high calibre of higher-degree-by-research students and postdoctoral fellows.

Established in 2015, the Centre is celebrating outcomes of recently graduated students as they embark on the next step in their careers and continue to contribute to the development of the forest industry both in Australia and internationally.

The Centre has three broad themes operating across the College of Science and Engineering at the University of Tasmania: forest production, restoration and certification (Biological Sciences), product development (Architecture and Design), and supply chain and information management (Information and Communication Technology).

Centre Director Associate Professor Julianne O'Reilly-Wapstra said in the past five years the Centre achieved what it was designed for, to provide opportunities for candidates and fellows to pursue industrial training, build research capacity within the forest industries and wood products sector and provide evidence-based solutions to industry identified problems.

Associate Professor O'Reilly-Wapstra said the Centre has been made possible through $3.6 million funding from the Australian Research Council, with additional funding from our industry partners and the University of Tasmania.

"It's been an exciting time for everyone at the Centre, as we focussed on one of our main aims to produce industry-ready higher degree by research graduates and post-doctoral fellows with broad perspectives of the forest industry," Associate Professor O'Reilly-Wapstra said.

UNIVERSITY of TASMANIA

"The Centre combines a diverse set of partners from forest growers, to restoration managers to wood producers. Our PhD candidates and post-doctoral fellows work closely with industry and other stakeholders across the forest management landscape and vertically along the forest products supply chain. Such experiences and skills are in demand in the sector.

"Our valued industry collaborators have been committed to supporting our candidates and fellows for the past 4-5 years, to help drive the Centre's research activity. Outcomes will enhance productivity, profitably and sustainability along the forest industries supply chain and drive innovation in forest restoration and environmental planting activities."

Centre for Forest Value PhD candidate highlights:

Rose Brinkhoff is passionate about finding better ways to use our natural resources more sustainably and her PhD research is helping her do that.

While her research is a small piece of a much larger puzzle, Rose believes it's an important one as the Centre for Forest Value student's thesis looks at the determinants of optimal leaf area in eucalypt plantations.

"We know that fertiliser makes trees grow faster, but we don't know a lot about the mechanisms behind that response. Untangling these mechanisms will help in tailoring fertiliser regimes to specific sites or conditions, and therefore allow us to use fertiliser more efficiently and effectively," Rose said.

"My project is a good mix of the things I like most about research. It aims to address some interesting theoretical questions, while also having important practical applications. It's a nice mix of ecology and physiology, and it is also the perfect balance of field and lab-based work for me."

One interesting and unexpected outcome of her PhD is the development of a new method for taking the hemispherical canopy photos used to estimate leaf area.

"Normally, this requires carrying around a camera and a tripod, packing it away and setting it up and levelling it between each plot," Rose said.

"We have discovered that by using a 360-degree camera with an 'invisible selfie stick', we can walk through the plots while taking photos and then select the relevant part of the photo later. This new method means each photo takes about five seconds rather than five minutes."

Centre for Forest Value PhD Candidate Vilius Gendvilas' project aims to examine silvicultural effects on plantation grown Eucalyptus nitens wood properties and product quantity.

The PhD project consist of four parts: Drilling resistance (IML Resi) technique improvement to measure wood density, thinning effects on wood properties of standing trees, thinning effects on log wood properties and longitudinal and radial variation in wood density and stiffness, and competition and dominance class effects on wood properties of standing trees.

"It's been an exciting journey as UTAS continues to be leaders in improving current and developing new technologies, which can be used in the forestry industry; it's also about creating new products which can be competitive in market," Vilius said.

Industry collaboration has been a key driver in the PhD candidates being able to access research trials and conduct industry applicable and useful research.

"Industry collaboration is so important as it allows us to gain the material for study and also gain up-to-date technical advice. I have access to novel technologies to test wood properties at SCION's facility in Rotorua, New Zealand," Vilius said.

Timberlink on a mission in Tasmania

TIMBERLINK is on a mission to do things better, and if that means spending money then that is what the company will do.

In Tasmania alone it has invested $32m alone in upgrading its Bell Bay facility.

Timberlink has the only large scale, forest integrated plantation softwood sawmilling company located in Tasmania.

It directly employ 200 people at Bell Bay as well as using local contractors and businesses wherever possible. Last year Timberlink estimated the indirect economic impact of its Bell Bay mill on the local economy to be $150M.

At Bell Bay sawmill Timberlink produces the company's widest range of products with a mix of structural framing, outdoor structural framing, fencing, landscaping, decorative and industrial products.

● Timbelink's Bell Bay facility in Tasmania.

"We have had a very clear focus on upgrading our two mills – Bell Bay and Tarpeena in South Australia - from when we acquired them," Timberlink's David Oliver said.

"When Bell Bay was acquired we invested $1m just on safety upgrades.

"It has been an ongoing focus to build world-class facilities."

The upgrades at Bell Bay are largely completed with one last scanner to go into place in this phase up upgrades.

As part of the upgrades Timberlink has installed new crossflow kilns which reduces electricity usage by about 30 per cent, a new Lucidyne scanner – the only one in Australia with artificial intelligence – which learns from every scan that it takes, and new strapping and packing equipment with robotic automation.

"It has been a very exciting transformation to a business that produces timber to make our planet more sustainable and liveable," Mr Oliver said.

"In time it is likely there will be more investment in Tasmania."

He believes that one of the challenges in the industry across Australia has been periods of significant investments and then long periods of no investments, which have ultimately led to decline.

"Our view is that we want to keep our facilities operating at peak performance using the latest technology.

"It is a technology business now.

"In a lot of cases we are creating a lot of jobs that didn't exist before."

And the future for Bell Bay?

Mr Oliver said there wasn't a specific project he could point to.

"But we do have some irons in the fire," he said.

BRIEFS

New Hub head

MOUNT Gambier-based mill owner Ian McDonnell is the new chair of the Green Triangle Forest Industries Hub.

The NF McDonnell and Sons director was elevated from his role as deputy chair, nominated at last week's board meeting following the resignation of inaugural chair Linda Sewell, due to her departure as CEO at OneFortyOne.

OneFortyOne executive general manager Cameron MacDonald has assumed the role of deputy chair, joining the board as the company's representative.

KI port contract

A CONTRACT for the construction of the Kangaroo Island Seaport at Smith Bay has been signed.

The contract partners in the Early Contractor Involvement Agreement (ECI), led by Maritime Constructions (MC) from Port Adelaide, include KBR and WGA, two global leaders in the field of civil and marine construction.

The ECI Agreement establishes an innovative Alliance Agreement model, under which the Contractor will build a deep-water wharf at Smith Bay, Kangaroo Island. The Alliance Agreement itself will now be prepared under the ECI Agreement terms and conditions.

Inquiry recommendations

THE NSW Government has agreed that the summer's devastating bushfires in the south east of the state were caused by mix of climate change, drought and high fuel loads on the ground.

In doing so, it has accepted all 76 recommendations of the independent NSW Bushfire Inquiry, which examined the causes, preparation and response to the bushfires.

Any issues not covered in the report that are still relevant to the protection of property and life will also be further examined.

Firewood shortage

EAST Gippsland firewood merchants and timber harvesters are warning this winter's firewood shortage is likely just a foretaste of a permanent shortage should the government proceed with its plans to

Continued on Page 24

● Robert, Kevin, Nicholas (Tiny) and Geoffrey Muskett.

Creating a logging legacy

Muskett family part of Tassie timber for over 70 years

THE Muskett family has been part of the Tassie timber industry for more than 70 years now.

From crosscut saws and bullock teams, to Kenworths, Tigercat and Komatsu equipment, the family has built one of the most professional forest operations in the country.

When Brian Muskett started the company which became BR & KF Muskett & Sons Pty Ltd he started out logging the southern Tassie forests.

Days in the bush were long, back-breaking and, more often than not, wet and bitterly cold. Anything that promised to make the job faster, easier or both was solid gold.

Brian embraced mechanisation, new harvesting ideas and innovative forest management to improve his business and industry.

From pulling logs with horses and bullocks, Brian and wife, Kathleen were the first contractors to use a skidder in southern Tasmania, the first to use a tree shear and feller buncher and first to use a feller buncher in cable logging.

He and Kathleen were partners in a venture that came to include sons, Kevin, Geoffrey and Robert, and daughter, Helen. As well Kevin's two sons, Matthew and Andrew, and Geoffrey's two sons, Nicholas and Cassidy are now part of the Muskett logging family enterprise.

In all the company now employees 55 staff including family supplying timber to Norske Skog Boyer as the principal customer and Forico.

Key Points

- **BR & KF Muskett & Sons Pty Ltd were the first contractors to use a skidder in southern Tasmania.**
- **The company now employees 55 staff supplying timber to Norske Skog Boyer and Forico.**
- **The company runs 14 trucks, with 12 of them on a 24-hour five days a week rotation, carting 360,000 tonnes of softwood.**

BR & KF Muskett & Sons Pty Ltd first truck was a second-hand 1941 'Flathead' Ford, which they set to work in 1950. The V8-petrol engine put together around 35 hp on a good day and towed a pole jinker loaded up with 14 tonne of logs.

Now the company runs 14 trucks, with 12 of them on a 24-hour five days a week rotation, carting 360,000 tonnes of softwood.

Kevin said the company also harvests 175,000 tonnes annually for Norske with surplus logs exported to Asia and Europe.

Harvesting is mainly done using Tigercat equipment, but he also has some Komatsu and John Deere gear.

Geoffrey routinely deals with some highly challenging working conditions in the Florentine Valley in south-west Tasmania where limestone sinkholes litter the 30-year-old pine plantations.

He works closely with the Forestry Practices Authority and Norske Skog who map and mark every sinkhole. Muskett & Sons was recognized in 2015 with an award for exemplary performance related to the sinkholes and shovel logging on steep slopes.

A major challenge of the pine operations is that the wood can't stand at roadside for more than two weeks.

According to Kevin, the ability to meet just in time harvesting and delivery requirements is highly dependent on machine availability.

"Reliability of the gear and planning is very important," he said.

"The buncher can't get very far ahead of the rest of the system or the wood will sit on the ground too long and we can't stockpile at roadside for too long, so everything has to be working with a very high availability rate."

CoVid19 has naturally thrown a totally unexpected curveball at the industry as a whole.

Kevin says he has seen a 40 per cent drop in transport for Forico because sales are down.

"We've just got to deal with the challenges as they come along and adjust as we go," he said. "It is difficult to plan."

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Tasmania's timber industry is unique in so many ways

UNLIKE the industry in other States, privately-owned forests play a huge part in its makeup.

Tasmania's forests cover about 50 per cent of the total area of the State, with private forests making up about 33 per cent of the forest area – the highest proportion of any state in Australia.

In total Tasmania's private forests cover more than one million hectares and more than 200,000 hectares is plantation estate and the balance is native forest on private land.

Of the total volume of timber coming out of Tasmania 75 percent is generated by the private estate, and of that 97 per cent is coming off plantations.

And it has been increasing, jumping from less than 50 per cent eight years ago to its current levels.

Hardly surprising that in 1994 Private Forests Tasmania (PFT) was established as a statutory authority under the Private Forests Act (1994).

Figures for last financial year indicate over four million tonnes of timber – both native and softwood - coming off private forests.

And that also makes Private Forests Tasmania unique.

"We are not aware of another organization that is the same as us," PFT CEO Penny Wells said.

"We are not aware of any other State having an independent statutory authority dedicated to facilitating growth in the private forestry sector."

The PFT Board oversees strategic direction, and a staff of permanent and fixed-term officers undertakes the functions of the authority. Staff are located in Burnie, Hobart and Launceston.

Its legislated role is to facilitate and expand the development of the State's private forest resource in a manner which is consistent with sound forest and land management practices.

It seems to be Tasmania's way; there are lot of things done in Tasmania that are done well and that are not done anywhere else.

"Sometimes we can do things a bit differently, yes," Ms. Well said.

"I'm sure there are many factors that contribute to Tasmanians doing what Tasmanians do."

Ms Wells is ideally suited for the job. She has more than thirty years' experience in the forestry sector in Tasmania, having been involved in forest planning, policy and management with both the Tasmanian Government and forest industry since the late 1980's.

During this time she has been joint owner of a small family sawmill (processing special species timbers), has worked with land management and development agencies within the Tasmanian Government, and worked with Forestry Tasmania as a forest planner.

She concedes being an island industry, has both challenges as well as opportunities.

"We have challenges getting material to market at the same price as other states," she said.

"But there are positives as well in terms of biosecurity."

And in the current pandemic situation it has been relatively easy to isolate the state from the mainland.

But the key issues relate to maintaining scale.

"We've already got a global undersupply of timber and there is a projected global demand that is likely to quadruple by 2050," Ms Wells said.

"So to meet our domestic needs and to be able to participate in meeting global needs we have an issue of maintaining our own scale and expanding the resource.

"Private Forests Tasmania has a very specific legislated role to play in facilitating that growth and expansion."

Ms Wells said that that the private forests sector had not seen expansion in the state since late 1990s and early 2000s.

"In fact the plantation estate has actually shrunk since then as the less productive plantations have not been replanted."

As well there has been the legacy of the MIS era, and some landholders have been reluctant to replant or get involved in planting.

"Landowners tell us that their greatest hurdles in making a decision to plant trees are the perceived costs and complexities of establishment".

"There are lots of positives in terms of integrating trees within agricultural properties. There are considerable productivity gains through the sheltering effect alongside the economic gains at harvest.

Advances in the carbon market are also seeing some opportunities for payments for storing carbon during the life cycle of the forest crop, while that same crop can act as a form of superannuation.

"We certainly are working with landowners on providing better information around the financial and other benefits of planting trees over the longer term."

Forging a new industry culture

TFFPN helping set a collaborative agenda

WHEN Therese Taylor arrived as the convenor of the newly formed Timber Forests & Forest Product Network, she found an industry fragmented.

"Until that time the forest industry in Tasmania I think had worked well within its own sectors but there hadn't really been a culture of that whole-of-sector collaboration and cohesion," Ms Taylor said.

The Timber Forests & Forest Product Network arose out of the State forest strategic plan - A Strategic Growth Plan for the Tasmanian Forests, Fine Timber and Wood Fibre Industry - that there should be an umbrella organisation over the forests and forest products industry.

● Timber Forests & Forest Product Network convenor Therese Taylor.

"Some stakeholder consultation was undertaken around what an umbrella organisation could look like and there was an appetite for it across the industry," Ms Taylor said.

She was brought in as the convenor a little over two years ago to put a framework together about how that may operate.

Previously, Ms Taylor had worked across government, private and community sectors and had held a number of senior executive roles in Government.

TFFPN was created as a company limited by guarantee with a constitution and a number of directors.

The current directors Steve Whiteley (Chair), Bryan Hayes (Treasurer), Andrew Morgan, Tony Stonjek, Julianne O'Reilly-Wapstra, Tim Bates and Brodie Frost.

Membership is open to anyone who has a genuine interest in the continued future development of a sustainable and profitable forest and forest products industry.

Membership of the TFFPN is free and gives member access, as part of the mailing list, to the website, social media, newsletters, notice of events and networking functions.

"We want to be an inclusive organisation across the supply chain," Ms Taylor said.

That includes nursery growers through to architects and people who work in design. To help foster that, membership is free and open to anyone who has a genuine interest in the continued future development of a sustainable and profitable forest and forest products industry.

It is very much a bottom-up organisation rather than a top-down set-up.

"We made a conscious decision to work towards increasing profitability, sustainability, and social licence of the Tasmanian forests industry," Ms Taylor said.

The Tasmanian Government – which made it clear the TFFPN was not to be an instrument of government - provided seed funding.

The sustainability of the organisation has been through partnering with companies across Tasmania which have seen the benefits of being associated with the network to build the financial capability of the network.

This has included Forico, Sustainable Timber Tasmania, Timberlink, Private Forests Tasmania, TasPorts, SFM, AKS Forest Solutions, Artec, Reliance Forest Fibre, CapitalCorp and Neville Smith Forest Products (NSFP).

"In the two years that the network has been established we've built cohesion, we've got 650 members, we are a self-sustaining organisation and we work on projects and strategies to bring together the whole of the industry," Ms Taylor said.

"There was a whole range of industry issues which needed to be discussed but there was no way of bringing the players together in a neutral space, and the network provided that."

Issues included skill development, bushfire response, communications, involvement in AgFest in Tasmania, and last year hosting the inaugural Tasmanian Timber Awards.

And then in March last year when the Federal Government announced the creation of nine forestry hubs across Australia, Tasmania and the TFFPN became, Ms Taylor believes, the only vehicle which could host that project.

The TFFPN does not get political.

Key Points

- The Timber Forests & Forest Product Network arose out of the State forest strategic plan.
- Membership of the TFFPN is free.
- The TFFPN does not get political.

"The board and the strategy of the organisation is very clear on that," Ms Taylor said.

"We are a communication hub and we are about bringing people together in a cohesive and collaborative way.

"Now that the Tasmanian Forest Products Association has been formed we will dovetail our activities in with them, but it will undertake industrial relations and policy responses."

For now, and into the future the TFFPN will continue to work across the value chain to build pride within the forest industry, building pride about the industry and have people work together in a way they haven't before about the community attitude towards forestry in Tasmania.

First timber hub setting the pace

CORPORATE lawyer Monika Winston has made the ultimate tree change.

The trained lawyer who now runs Tasmania's Northern Tasmania Regional Forestry Hub worked in corporate law in Melbourne for a number of years before moving into corporate strategy, business growth and development. She worked for Mars Incorporated, both in Melbourne and in London and more recently, Monika worked in corporate strategy in the wine industry.

Now it's the Tasmanian timber industry that she has set her sights on. In the last six months Monika has extensively consulted with industry and government stakeholders to establish key areas of focus for the Hub.

The Hub is the result of a grant agreement between the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture and Water Resources and the Tasmanian Forests & Forests Products Network in April 2019 last year.

The agreement established the Regional Forestry Hub

● Monika Winston

Pilot in North-northwest Tasmania under the National Forestry Industry Plan.

The objective of the three-year Agreement is to support the capacity of the forest industry in north and north-west Tasmania to meet long term increases in demand for timber, by consulting extensively with stakeholders across the forest value chain to identify and progress industry and regional priorities to meet that demand.

"Tasmania's sustainable forestry industry contributes around $1.2 billion to the Tasmanian economy and more than 5,700 direct and indirect jobs," Ms Winston said. "It is a really significant contributor to the Tasmanian economy."

"The Australian Government recognised the importance of the forestry industry to Tasmania and that is why it was chosen as the pilot."

Ms Winston said there was very good collaboration within the forestry industry in Tasmania.

"What I have noticed is that it is a very cohesive group with everyone working together towards the same goals," she said.

"That has really enabled us to move quickly in terms of what we are trying to achieve."

The Hub is currently undertaking strategic assessments into priority themes for the industry.

The first assessment is around access to land and land use policy for plantation forest investment. The second is around supply chain and infrastructure, the third covers climate change and carbon policy and the fourth culture, skills and training.

"The objective for us is to strategically assess the priority themes and provide recommendations and opportunities to improve and grow the sector," Ms Winston said.

"For us success would be having those opportunities and recommendations put into action and continued stakeholder engagement."

The Hub has appointed both Tasmanian and National experts in each of these fields and they are currently working through each of these strategic assessments with the aim of producing recommendations by the end of the year.

"The assessments will enable us to understand the key drivers of growth in the industry and to prepare for the future. We are pleased to be partnering with leading Australian industry experts to drive this impactful work," Ms Winston said.

Northern Tasmiania Regional Forestry Hub Steering Committee

Penny Wells, CEO, Private Forests Tasmania (Chair)

Steve Whiteley, CEO, Sustainable Timber Tasmania

Darren Davis, COO, Forico

Philip Lloyd, General Manager Resource, Timberlink

Owen Hoffman, General Manager, Reliance Forest Fibre

Shawn Britton, General Manager, Britton Timbers

Therese Taylor, Convener, Tasmanian Forests and Forest Products Network (Observer)

Alastair Morton, Director Resources Policy, Department of State Growth (Observer)

Andrew Wilson, Director Plantations and Innovation, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (Observer)

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Tasmania's vital role in national conversation

THE timber industry in Tasmania is very different the rest of the industry across Australia. It is a huge employer, an important producer and is almost solely reliant on privately grown timber. It is also the home of some amazing research being undertaken into timber, from silviculture to furniture.

And that is just the tip of the iceberg; Tasmania's timber industry is unique in so many ways. In this Round Table three experts in the field discuss the role Tasmania's timber industry can have in the future management of the environment as a whole both now and into the future.

Q&A Panel

Andrew Morgan
Managing Director
SFM Environmental Solutions Pty Ltd

Bryan Hayes
CEO
Forico Pty Ltd

Penny Wells
CEO
Private Forests Tasmania

Q Why will forestry be important to the community — both on a state and national level — in the future?

A

Andrew Morgan

I think broadly that forestry will continue to provide stability to regional economies across the country into the future which is particularly important to communities during the uncertain times we are facing.

I think climate related aspects, demand for sustainable, renewable, biophilic products and maximising land capabilities to its highest and best use will all drive forestry within the state and federal narratives.

Climate change will likely continue to increase the frequency and intensity of bushfires, on a local level well managed forests around towns and cities will help mitigate fire risk, lower fuel loads resulting in lower intensity fires. We may see the amalgamation of fire and production forest management in some regions, thinning materials being utilised for fibre or potentially a "bio" product.

The 21st century will likely continue as the century of wood as demand for renewable, sustainable products with a high level of embodied carbon is specified in residential, commercial and government buildings across the nation - the competition for the world's tallest wooden build will continue! Wood First or Wood Encouragement policies will continue to be rolled out across the country as the benefits of wood are better understood and utilised.

Maximising utilisation of land for plantation development will be need to be considered and I think we will see more integration of plantation forestry into the agricultural landscape which will be driven by a mix of planting for production, carbon offsets and biodiversity/conservation management.

Bryan Hayes

Forestry as an industry has a very important role in the future at both State and National levels.

From a traditional perspective forestry will continue to provide essential products such as timber for housing, building and construction; wood fibre for pulp, paper and hygiene products; and biomass for fuel such as domestic firewood and industrial boilers. Forestry provides many jobs and economic activity in rural and regional economies where there are often few alternatives. The industry makes a positive contribution to our first world standard of living and delivery of sensible, science-based environmental outcomes.

In future forestry has the potential to attract significant new investment into growing commercial tree crops which will be essential in the global objective of reducing carbon emissions and ameliorating the impacts of climate change. This will require adoption of best available technology to support cost efficiency and optimal productivity and the recruitment, training and retention of a highly skilled, contemporary workforce that is valued by our communities.

Penny Wells

By 2050 the human population is forecast to expand from 7.5 to 9.6 billion people. We will require 70% more food (United Nations), 50% more fuel (International Energy Agency), and 50% more water (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development). We also need to reduce CO2 emissions by over 80% (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change). All of these will have to be achieved to ensure economic, social, political, climate, food, water and fuel security (Institute for Molecular Bioscience 2019).

One common element that can assist with all of these challenges is trees. Trees, integrated in our agricultural landscapes and managed under sustainable forestry systems, can deliver increased primary production productivity while simultaneously delivering biofuel, improving water quality and efficiency, and improving the carbon balance.

Tasmanian case studies conducted by Private Forests Tasmania, UTAS and the CSIRO have found that farm systems that included trees were more productive and profitable than agriculture only enterprises with internal rates of return typically around 8%.

Growing trees under sustainable forestry regimes can improve the carbon balance. The 2019 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on Climate Change and Land indicates that:

"Sustainable forest management can maintain or enhance forest carbon stocks, and can maintain forest carbon sinks, including by transferring carbon to wood products", and

"Where wood carbon is transferred to harvested wood products, these can store carbon over the long-term and can substitute for emissions-intensive materials reducing emissions in other sectors."

The IPCC also advocates for the use of tree residues as bioenergy feedstock. Utilising tree residues for bioenergy can displace the use of fossil fuels such as coal, LPG and LNG.

In Tasmania we are seeing projects to develop new industrial 'green' chemicals, such as solvents made from renewable product created from wood biomass. Solvents such as Cyrene are highly sought after by international customers who are in need of non-toxic 'green' chemicals.

Tasmania, and indeed Australia as a whole, is fortunate to have significant forest resources, both native and planted, currently managed under sustainable forestry systems. This provides local wood and fibre product for our nation's domestic needs, benefits our local economy and minimises our dependence on imported products with a higher carbon footprint and often produced in less rigorous regulatory systems.

Q How will the forestry industry meet predicted increasing demand for wood and fibre over the next generation (20-30 years)?

A

Andrew Morgan

That's a very good question. We need to be planting more trees now!

Over the next 20/30 years I think we will see better utilisation of existing forest resource through new developments with engineered wood products and possibly the crystallisation of ideas centred around biomass and cellulosic products as government policy allows it to be economically competitive against mainstream products such as coal and plastics.

Plantation management will focus around precision forestry supplying more data than ever before which will yield more fibre per hectare and the optimisation of which species should be planted where, something we have got wrong in some areas in the past.

With increasing frequency and intensity of bushfires, fire protection is going to be needed to be amplified in order to protect the country's growing stock, sensor technology and drones are two areas I see as being critical in this performing this task into the future.

Bryan Hayes

In order to increase production the forest industry must grow more commercial trees in plantations. That can be in partnership with agricultural enterprises where tree plantations are integrated into farming activity, or it may be by conversion of sub-optimal cleared agricultural land into plantations in designated wood production zones. Plantation productivity and yield must also be improved through advanced tree breeding and genetics, better silvicultural practices and next generation harvesting technology that enables log and forest product optimisation.

The value of plantation tree crops as an investment opportunity would be greatly enhanced if Australia were to adopt a carbon trading scheme and the current ownership of carbon stored in existing plantations was repatriated from the National Accounts back to the tree owner.

It is essential to also maintain access to existing multiple-use natural forests where harvesting of wood fibre is permitted under sustainable environmental practices that are accepted in the broader community.

The positive impact of the above measures can only be realised with strong Government and legislative support and the forest industry presenting a unified and collaborative approach on industry policy and research and development initiatives.

Penny Wells

The global demand for timber is expected to quadruple by 2050 (The World Bank, 2016). In Tasmania, and Australia generally, demand is being driven through the construction industry (particularly the home building market) along with the community's desire to replace carbon intensive materials and plastics (derived from non-renewable fossil fuels) with natural, recyclable and renewable products.

Australia's National Forest Industries Plan (Australian Government 2018) sets out strategies for growing a billion more plantation trees, focussing on planting the right trees at the right scale in the right places. The strategies include greater integration of forestry and farming, improving use of forests on indigenous and privately owned lands, driving innovation, research and development across the native and plantation forest sectors and creating regional forestry hubs to drive continuous improvement in the supply chain, infrastructure, and underpinning regulatory and policy frameworks.

In Tasmania there is unlikely to be any major increase in area of industrial scale plantations or public land managed for production native forestry. However improvements in growing systems and enhanced productivity will deliver some additional supply of wood and fibre from these estates in the future. In terms of area, farm forestry provides a key to securing a wood bank to meet projected future demand. However this cannot be achieved with forestry directly competing against other productive agricultural pursuits. Integration of forestry with agriculture provides material opportunities for growing the wood and fibre resource.

Q What will forestry look like over the next 10-20 years? Across areas such as supply chain, planning, harvesting, transporting, processing, and product diversity.

A

Andrew Morgan

Technology and innovation will continue to drive supply chain developments in the across the forest sector. Precision forestry will be driven by big data collected by technology such as LIDAR on drones and satellite-based platforms.

I think drone platforms will continue to develop with offering a suite of options to a forest manager from aerial applications of fertiliser or weed control, fire fighting through to under-canopy drone producing incredibly accurate 3D models of forest areas.

Autonomous harvesting and even driverless trucks will start to permeate into the sector particularly in the plantation sector where ground conditions are relatively benign, large flat forestry regions where there is a good road network. As these vehicles and machines become more prevalent, supply chain workers will increasingly be required to understand and operate advanced computer systems, with onboard software likely to provide real time data to operators and foresters related to everything from operator efficiency to value recovery against pre-loaded, inventory driven expectations

Bryan Hayes

Technological advances and artificial intelligence applications will proliferate and underpin improvements in productivity, safety, efficiency and quality control. Satellite imagery, drones, LIDAR, 3 dimensional imaging and in-field electronic sensors will be commonly deployed into forest management systems. Autonomous harvesting and haulage vehicles will complement next generation harvesting and haulage equipment utilising on-board computers for log optimisation, machine operating efficiency, GPS tracking and boundary definition and central scheduling for truck fleet optimisation.

Log drying and volumetric measurement by laser scanners will substitute for green tonne weighing over weighbridges and processing facilities will become more automated , bigger in scale and produce more diverse engineered wood products that the community prefers over other non-renewable alternatives such as concrete and steel.

Small to medium bio-refineries will emerge to utilise the vast hardwood plantation fibre resource and capitalise on the bio-economy that will shift consumers to renewables and cellulose fibre products.

Penny Wells

Forestry in Australia is an ever-changing sector. The industry is founded on principles of sustainable forest management, which in turn are underpinned by the principle of continuous improvement. There is a long history of forestry science, research and development in Australia which drives this continuous improvement. In Tasmania there is a strong forestry R&D capacity with the University of Tasmania's ARC Centre for Forest Value and Centre for Sustainable Architecture with Wood, the CSIRO's Land and Water Unit, the National Institute for Forest Products Innovation, and research programs embedded within private forest management companies, the Forest Practices Authority, Sustainable Timber Tasmania, Private Forests Tasmania and various government entities.

Through these continuous improvement mechanisms the forestry sector will continue to build its productive capacity over both plantation and native grown forest estates, maximise supply chain efficiencies, stimulate regional economies, and minimise environmental footprint. This includes being a significant player in minimising the nation's carbon footprint - through carbon sequestration, storing carbon in solid wood products and replacement of emissions-intensive materials and activities.

Forestry will become more integrated within our traditional farming systems, with trees returning a valuable and diversified income for landowners and enhancing the productive capacity of associated cropping and grazing regimes. More sophisticated planning, e-logistics and remote sensing technologies will enable a more integrated matrix of forestry systems to develop across public and private land tenures. This will in turn improve regional scale and inter-operability between small farm forestry operations and larger commercial estates and also deliver improvements for on-ground forest management, particularly capacity for forest fire management across all forest land tenures.