

# The Institute of Foresters of Australia

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### CSIRO forestry research cuts

The disbandment of the CSIRO Forest Biosciences group announced in the CSIRO response to the government's recent budget have come as a complete surprise to the Institute of Foresters of Australia. There was no previous announcement of this by CSIRO management or the ALP during the election campaign or more recently.

IFA National President, Dr Peter Volker says that successive governments and CSIRO itself have tinkered with the Forestry Division over the past two decades to the point that the staff have been dispersed over a number of Divisions and the focus on much needed research to sustain the forest industry into the future has been lost. This follows the recent disbanding of the unsuccessful joint venture with New Zealand, called Ensis that only lasted two years.

This latest cut to CSIRO's involvement in forestry spells the death knell for a co-ordinated approach to forestry research in Australia at a time when the country is desperate to utilise forests as a means of off-setting our massive carbon emission problems and addressing a 2 billion dollar trade deficit in forest products. Dr Volker says, "It makes absolutely no sense. Just because forestry does not yield quick results, sexy science or massive financial windfalls to CSIRO it is seen as expendable. Absorbing forest researchers into other Divisions will lead to less focus on forests within those Divisions and unnecessary duplication within CSIRO. I'm yet to be convinced that reorganisation into super-sized Divisions will yield any better results for forestry."

Dr Volker also points out that State governments have also largely eliminated their role in forest research with only Tasmania supporting a substantial and fully funded research group within its peak forestry agency, Forestry Tasmania. In most States the forest research groups have been reduced and hived off into other sections of government. Dr Volker also laments the lack of substantial support from private industry for long-term research provided by these groups and this makes it easier for the government to make these types of reductions in its own contribution.

The CRC for Forestry is the only research institution left in Australia that is taking a co-ordinated approach to forestry research at a national level. It has a limited life unless industry, government and academic institutions take stock of the situation and make a commitment to a coordinated forest research program. IFA will be doing all in its power to make sure this happens.

Australia has been recognised for its contribution to forest research throughout the world. Dr Volker is concerned that disgruntled forest researchers will leave our shores to pursue greater opportunities in other countries, taking their knowledge and expertise with them, resulting in dividends for countries that compete with Australia in the global market for forest products.

For further information contact:



Dr Peter Volker, IFA President: 0418 125 319 or

Mr Adrian O'Loughlin, Executive Director - IFA: 0418 433485.