



## MEDIA RELEASE

### **Tasmanian expertise supporting Laos forests - a local initiative with global benefits**

(27/10/2011)

As part of the International Year of Forests, representatives of the Government of Lao PDR are participating in an upcoming Australia-Laos forestry capacity building project which will commence in Tasmania on 31 October and end in Queensland on 19 November 2011.

President of The Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA) Dr Peter Volker, said the project, which his organisation was funding in collaboration with the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) and the Crawford Fund, (CF) aimed to strengthen professional links between Australian and Lao PDR foresters through a capacity building exchange, and in doing so help reduce illegal logging in the region.

"The project will focus on three major areas: improving approaches to sustainable forest management practices, strengthening compliance and governance approaches and processes and improving supply chain efficiencies for both state and private forest resources," Dr Volker said.

"Lao representatives will be given opportunities to participate in direct, field based supply and value chain operations and assessments in Tasmania and Queensland."

Dr Volker said that Lao PDR was one of the world's poorest and least developed countries.

"Regionally, Lao is a forest-rich but asset poor nation, so forest management and utilisation is an important part of the Government's development policies and a vital source of wealth."

"The project is a commitment that reflects the goals of the International Year of Forests and has received strong support from the forest industry in Tasmania and Queensland".

"Locally, Mr Aidan Flanagan, GM of the Forests and Forest Industry Council of Tasmania, and the Chairman of the IFA Tasmania Division has been working as a volunteer in Laos. "Aidan has been instrumental in organising this visit, which demonstrates his commitment to using his professional skills to build capacity in a developing country. He follows a long history of Australian foresters dedicated to improving forest management in the region."

During the Tasmanian component of the project, presentations and field based learning will be provided by practicing experts with strategic training in sustainable forest management and policy development. Topics will include Australian forest management, certification and chain-of-custody, research and development, market development, regulations, law enforcement and governance.

The Lao PRD delegation will be welcomed at a dinner hosted by the IFA in Hobart on 31 October in Hobart.

Delegates will be available for interview during their visit. If interested, contact: Mr Aidan Flanagan Mob: 0438 386 108 or Dr Peter Volker Mob: 0418 125 319.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### Participants

The following representatives of the Government of Lao PDR will be participating:

Mr Khamphout PHANDANOUVONG, Deputy Director General (DDG) of the Department of Forest Inspection (DOFI) and national representative for the EU Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) project.

Mr Bounthanh PHILACHANH, Director Investigation Division, Wildlife and Aquatic life Inspection Division of DOFI and has responsibility for the Laos Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (*CITES*) Program for Implementing *CITES* Listings of Tropical Timber Species.

Mr Phomma PATHOUMMAVONG, Coordinator of Forest Certification, Division for Forest Production, Department of Forests and has primary responsibility for developing and achieving Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification program for Lao forests.

Mr Thavisack CHITTAKOUN from the Faculty of Forestry, National University of Laos will also attend. Mr Chittakoun is a leader in forestry and natural resource law and governance.

### Lao PDR

Lao PDR is one of the world's poorest and least developed countries. It has a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of less than US\$850, making it the 148<sup>th</sup> poorest nation from a list of 181. It is an underdeveloped country which is still heavily dependent on subsistence agriculture which contributes around 30% of GDP and 80% of total employment. Further background information is attached.

Regionally, Lao is a forest rich nation and therefore forest management and utilisation is an important part of the Governments development policies and a vital source of wealth in an asset poor nation. Sixty-eight percent of the country's 26.68 million hectares is classified as forest. The majority are classified as 'natural, modified' (89%), with only 9% classified as 'natural, primary'. About 42% is considered commercially viable.

Forests and forest products are an integral part of Lao society and economy. Fifty percent of GDP is derived from agriculture, forestry, livestock and fisheries, 73% of the rural population is reliant on agriculture and forests for its livelihood, and up to 80% of the Lao population are dependent on forests and forest products, albeit at various levels.

Wood accounts for 80% of the country's energy consumption, and 99% of households use wood for cooking and heating, consuming about 3.9 million cubic metres annually.

The central challenge faced by the GoL is how best to develop their forest resources to manage risk and balance the economic, social, environmental and global expectations of both domestic and international stakeholders in order to meet their obligations to current and future generations.

While there is extensive technical and professional forest ecosystem and biodiversity knowledge in DOFI and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), this is often poorly communicated or actioned in the region due to capacity restraints. This has contributed to unsustainable forest practices and management in some areas.

The Department of Forest Inspection (DOFI) was established in 2008 and has primary responsibility under the *Forestry Law* and the *Wildlife and Aquatic Law* for legal enforcement of forest policies, regulations and legislation in Lao PDR.

Expertise and approaches outside Lao are also being examined by DOFI and MAF to build capacity to address deficiencies in law enforcement capacity, to review existing approaches, and develop and deliver training modules to improve the skills of its staff.

## **IFA**

The Institute of Foresters of Australia was established in 1935. The IFA is a professional body with over 1200 members engaged in all branches of forest management and conservation in Australia.

The Institute is strongly committed to the principles of sustainable forest management and the processes and practices which translate these principles into outcomes.

The membership represents all segments of the forestry profession, including public and private practitioners engaged in many aspects of forestry, nature conservation, resource and land management, research, administration and education. Membership is not restricted to professional Foresters. Other forestry professionals are welcome to join IFA.

## **ACIAR**

The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) has been investing in international forestry research since 1982, predominantly in the Asia-Pacific region. ACIAR's forestry program facilitates research by Australian organisations in partnership with developing country organisations to build capacity and enhance the contribution made by sustainable forestry to livelihoods and economic development in partner countries.

ACIAR's forestry research program contributes to poverty alleviation and to sustainable forest management, providing social, economic and environmental benefits to partner countries and Australia. Specifically, the forestry program aims to:

- Enhance the role of tree growing and forest management in improving subsistence lifestyles, smallholder and community livelihoods and sustainable land management;
- Enhance the contribution of legal, sustainable and value-adding forest industries to economic development in partner countries; and
- Contribute to the Australian Government's development assistance and international forest policy priorities, specifically reducing poverty, combating illegal logging and reducing deforestation and forest degradation.

In more recent years, ACIAR's forestry projects have been located in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Vietnam, Laos and the Pacific Islands.

## **Crawford Fund**

Established in 1987 by The Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering, it is named in honour of the late Sir John Crawford, who played a prominent role in shaping post-war Australia and was a fervent supporter of international agricultural research. The Fund depends on grants and donations from governments, private companies, corporations, charitable trusts and individual Australians. It also welcomes partnerships with agencies and organisations in Australia and overseas.

The Crawford Fund's purpose is to encourage investment in international agricultural research by governments and the private sector, in the belief that it is an essential, high priority, international activity.

The Fund also has a training program that fills a niche by offering practical, highly focused non-degree instruction to men and women engaged in agricultural research and management in developing countries.