

Media Release

22 June 2009

INCREASING WOOD USAGE IN RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION COULD REDUCE GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

As the Rudd Government examines ways to meet climate change targets, new research indicates doubling the amount of wood used in residential construction in Australia could offset the carbon dioxide emissions of more than half a million motor cars each year by 2050.

The findings could benefit both the environment and regional employment in the wood and timber industry by increasing wood and timber usage in residential property, thereby boosting its market share.

University of Melbourne researchers set out to improve existing estimates of carbon stocks in Australian housing, where more than 70 percent of harvested sawn wood products are used.

The study, co-funded by Forest & Wood Products Australia and the Department of Climate Change, was based on the analysis of existing literature, published industry surveys, questionnaires sent to builders, architects and demolition companies across all States (except the Northern Territory) and interviews with estimators from large building companies.

Researcher Professor Rod Keenan, who has extensive experience in analysis of carbon sequestration and greenhouse accounting, said: "Provided the timber is coming from forests where carbon stocks are being maintained, carbon in timber used in housing is a potentially important contribution to Australia's effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

"Our study indicates there is significant capacity for increasing the rate of addition to carbon stocks in housing. This would require a reversal of the trend for reduced wood use in housing, for example by increasing the use of timber sub-floor systems and timber wall cladding."

For example, doubling the volume of wood currently used in Australian homes would result in 2.5 times as much annual carbon storage in Australian houses in 2050 - equivalent to the carbon dioxide emissions of more than half a million motor cars or about 0.7% of Australia's greenhouse gas emissions in 2006.

The study also looked at which policies governments (State and Federal) and industry could introduce to promote increased use of wood products in residential construction: 86 percent of building practitioners suggested that reducing the price of wood products compared to competing products would have the greatest impact; 76 percent indicated better training and education for building practitioners on wood products' carbon storage benefits; 62 percent thought changes to government building regulations would result in the greatest impact on the choice of wood as a building material.

It is recommended that the survey is repeated every five years to detect trends in wood usage.

For more information or for the full research report visit www.fwpa.com.au (Project number PN07_1058).

Forest & Wood Products Australia (FWPA)

FWPA is an industry services company whose work within the forest and wood industries includes investment in innovative research and development with the main aim of improving the competitiveness and sustainability of the industry. The organisation undertakes industry activities where its collective approach delivers more effective outcomes than individual action.