

MediaRelease

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Taller timber buildings Code change set to increase sales volumes for forest and wood products industry

From May 1st 2016, Australia's timber industry merchants and manufacturers will have new sales opportunities in taller structures – up to 8 storeys - for buildings including apartments, offices and hotels. This is the result of a successful proposal to change the National Construction Code (NCC), submitted and managed by Forest and Wood Products Australia Limited (FWPA), the industry services body.

The Australian mid-rise building industry, which has not seen significant changes in decades, is set to experience exciting new developments that will not only create new opportunities for designers, builders, developers and purchasers, but will also drive greater demand for both lightweight and heavy timber building systems.

For the past 2 years, on behalf of the timber industry, FWPA has been consulting with representatives from the timber, building and insurance industries, regulatory bodies and fire and emergency authorities to develop a Proposal for Change to the National Construction Code Volume 1 (NCC).

Essentially, the new code means that it will be easier to use timber building systems in Class 2, Class 3 and Class 5 buildings up to 25 metres in effective height, which is approximately 8 storeys. The use of timber construction in these buildings was formerly restricted to 3 storeys, unless an 'alternative solution' was designed and documented to gain approval. This is practical on some larger projects but generally too costly for smaller developments.

New building options will include both traditional timber framing and innovative massive timber systems, such as cross laminated timber (CLT) and Glulam, and require the use of appropriate layers of fire resistant materials, specified design detailing and sprinkler systems.

Preliminary economic modelling indicates potential savings in the order of 10-15% in multi-residential and commercial build costs, primarily due to shorter construction times. The modelling also suggests net benefits to the Australian economy over 10 years of approximately \$103 million; comprising \$98.2 million in direct construction cost savings, \$3.8 million in reduced compliance costs; and \$1 million in environmental benefits. Benefits to the timber industry, while dependent on the rate of uptake, are expected to be substantial, however it is anticipated that it will take 18 months to 2 years to achieve significant uptake.

Ric Sinclair, managing director of FWPA said the Code change was the biggest market opportunity for timber for the last 30 years, and comparable to the change from green hardwood framing to kiln dried

About Forest and Wood Products Australia

FWPA aims to improve the competitiveness and sustainability of the Australian forest and wood products industry through innovation by investing in effective and relevant R&D and promotion of the industry's products, services and values. FWPA undertakes industry-level activities where a collective approach delivers more effective and valuable commercial outcomes than individual action. We deliver services that support the industry's capacity as a major exporter and mainstay of regional communities in many parts of Australia.

softwood. The increased use of both lightweight and massive timber building systems was poised to generate increased awareness and uptake of wood and wood products, with a halo effect that could extend beyond the buildings immediately involved.

“The changes to the Code not only bring Australia up to pace with much of the rest of the world, but will also deliver a wide range of benefits to local residents, property buyers, the design and construction sector and the timber industry,” Ric said.

He explained that the benefits of taller timber buildings not only include lower costs but also increased opportunities for innovative design and construction, faster build times leading to reduced truck movements and local disruption as well as improved environmental outcomes and increased volumes for the timber industry.

“It is an exciting time for the forest and wood products industry,” Mr Sinclair concluded, “this is effectively an opportunity to explore and develop a new market – selling to a new audience of architects, designers, engineers and property developers who have been accustomed to using alternative materials in these mid-rise projects – and they may well expand beyond them as they become more familiar with the use of timber building systems.”

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