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Forestry significant regional contributor but challenges ahead

A socio-economic report completed by the University of Canberra clearly demonstrates the significant economic and employment contribution of the forestry and wood processing industry to the Murray Region, but the industry is not out of the woods yet with a looming resource constraint ahead, Softwoods Working Group (SWG) chair Peter Crowe OAM, said.

“The industry continues to be a valuable contributor to the region, directly and indirectly employing more than 11,000 locals in the financial year 2021. That’s income straight into the household of the Murray Region community,” he said.

SWG executive officer Carlie Porteous, commended the Murray Region Forestry Hub, its committee, and the University of Canberra for their thorough study.

“The study is a world first. The industry has not previously examined the socio-economic impacts of a successful post-bushfire recovery process,” she said.

“The industry should be truly congratulated for its efforts to salvage more than 98 per cent of recoverable aged timber during such a difficult time.

“The report unequivocally demonstrates the positive impacts of the collaboration of the industry and its community during this salvage period. It was so successful that wood fibre was being recovered up to two years after the devastating 2019/2020 bushfires.”

The report calls out the significant contribution of the NSW, Victorian and Federal governments for their quick response to the needs of the industry, through a number of grants that enabled better wood storage outcomes and further processing efficiencies to deal with the challenges ahead.

“The industry could not have achieved what it did and continues to do so, without the significant contribution of the NSW, Victorian and Federal governments,” Ms Porteous said.

But Ms Porteous cautioned becoming too blasé about the industry’s future, indicating the fires have had a significant impact on future resource availability, and further support may be required.

Looking ahead, Ms Porteous emphasised the need for preventative measures, reforms, and deeper engagement with government entities to protect the remaining plantation estate.

She warned of potential industry closures if these measures are not implemented, particularly considering the anticipated pressure on the industry and the region from the financial year 2025 through to the financial year 2033.

“A number of preventative measures and reforms are required to protect what is left of the estate and a deeper level of engagement with the Government will be necessary to avoid industry closures,” Ms Porteous said.

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Link to University of Canberra socio-economic report [HERE](#)