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Timber Communities Australia submission on the Australian Governments Discussion Paper, Bringing Down the Axe on Illegal Logging - A Practical Approach

Timber Communities Australia is the peak national grassroots community support group. Supporting and representing the rural communities that rely on timber and timber products for their viability. We are proud of our National 13,000 strong membership database, distributed across 80 branches nationally, and openly acknowledge that we not only support our membership but the wider rural community through our extensive national branch network.

Our members represent forest growers (native and plantation), millers, forest harvesting and haulage contractors, forest nurseries and most importantly their staff and families. In addition our membership represents the broader community including doctors and hospital staff, teachers and local schools, family businesses and people who are supported by the flow on effects that arise from a vibrant, healthy and wealth creating forestry sector.

Australia's forestry sector is a major employer group (over 134,00 people). We are proud that forestry is included in the top ten of Australia's manufacturing sector; indeed, when forest growers and wood procurement are factored in, forestry manufacturing is ranked second of all Australia's manufacturing sectors.

The importation of illegally harvested wood products is trade distorting, it suppresses prices and confers unfair advantage to illegal imports. Further, illegal imports are by their nature sourced from forests harvested in an unsustainable manner. TCA supports the importation of wood products that are sourced from legally harvested and certifiably sustainable sources.

The importance of this sector to the Australian economy highlights that the issue of illegal imports is not just about harvesting trees, forest conservation or wood procurement; more importantly it is about examining the social and economic impacts that the practice of importing illegally harvested wood products has on our rural communities and the industries that Australia's timber growing communities supply. It is about people, jobs, the social well being of our rural communities and downstream processing.

This submission will comment of the measures proposed by the Australian Government to address the issue of illegal logging..

Measure 1 – *Raise market and consumer awareness about illegal logging and the Australian Government's policy response.*

TCA supports the Government in this initiative and recommends that the proposed Forests and Wood Products Australia (FWPA), being the restructured Forest and Wood Products Research and Development Corporation (FWPRDC), have this task as a primary function of its charter. TCA has for many years promoted the use of timber from Australia's sustainably managed forests and the credentials of Australian forest management practices and believe that a focus of the campaign should be on the unique nature and properties of Australian native timbers. Such a measure will be supported by our members nationally.

Measure 2 – *Foster and develop the domestic industry in areas such as high-value timbers and value-added products.*

TCA applauds the Government's support for the production and manufacture of high value products and value added products from the domestic timber industry. TCA asks that the Government does not lose sight of the fact that a significant proportion of all wood produced is of a low quality and on its own will not produce a high value end product. The development of techniques and markets (especially for native forest timbers) for new engineered wood products and manufactured wood products will provide opportunities for timber based employment and the rural communities that are supported by this vital sector.

TCA believes that the FWPA and the CRC for Forestry have a role in delivering this outcome in partnership with the timber industry.

Measure 3 – *Work with industry to develop voluntary measures that help to gauge the legality of imported forest products.*

This important measure is vital to the success of the program. The development of a nationally consistent framework for timber and wood product importers is important as it will assist in the monitoring and assessment of timber imports to determine

Measure 4 - *Develop voluntary certification and product chain-of-custody schemes for Australian forest products.*

Australian importers and wood producers are currently able to access two internationally recognised forest certification schemes, namely The Australian Forestry Standard, endorsed internationally under the umbrella of the Program for Endorsement of Forestry Certification (PEFC) and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Both of these schemes offer chain of custody certification and importers of wood and wood products should be encouraged to, where possible, ensure that the products that they import meet the minimum requirements of these schemes.

TCA strongly supports the promotion of forest certification at both the importer and consumer levels. The benefits, of importing only certified sustainably produced wood products, are delivered to the environment, and to the communities that rely on the growing and procurement of timber both within Australia and abroad.

Measure 5 – *Develop purchasing guidelines for the private and public sectors.*

The development of purchasing policies for the public and private sectors can assist in ensuring that where imported timber is utilised it has come from a sustainably managed legally harvested forest. Of concern to TCA is that such guidelines MUST be developed in a transparent and inclusive manner. Fundamental to such guidelines should be the acceptance of the sustainability of Australian Forests that have been subject to a Regional Forest Agreement.

Measure 6 – *Work with other countries to improve forest management practices and increase the supply of legally sourced and certified forest products.*

Australia is well placed regionally and economically to assist our regional trading partners, where invited, improve their forest management practices and the legal framework that underpins their forestry and export activities.

TCA supports the Australian Government's aim of developing new and enhancing existing partnerships, that seek to increase the capacity of our trading partners to implement both appropriate and credible systems of forest certification.

Measure 7 – *Increase collaboration with countries in our region to help combat illegal logging.*

Increased collaboration with countries in our region as a means of combating illegal logging is an important strategy in combating illegal logging. Regionally consistent approaches are essential for the success of this measure.

Measure 8 – *Promote policies and strategies at international forums that encourage greater use of legal and sustainable forest management practices, certification and product chain-of-custody schemes.*

TCA supports the government in developing multilateral measures that encourage the use of wood and wood products derived from sustainably managed forests and that are legally harvested. The development of policies and strategies that are regionally consistent and effective is important to regional trade and the sustainability of forest management.

Conclusion

TCA is supportive of the Australian Government's approach to the issue of illegal logging. The practical measures outlined in the document "Bringing down the axe on illegal logging – a practical approach" are both sensible and achievable. The adoption of forest certification by our trading partners is to be encouraged and will act in the interest of Timber Communities, Australia's forestry sector and the down stream processors that they support.

Yours faithfully



Jill Lewis
Chief Executive Officer