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NEW NATIONAL TIMBER TASKFORCE GAINS MOMENTUM

A new national body representing the interests of local government on forestry issues is set to become incorporated following a recent meeting of prospective council members.

To date, more than 40 local governments nationally have agreed to become members of the new organisation and will pay an annual membership fee to be involved. The inception of the taskforce has been assisted by funding from the Plantations 2020 Vision program which is supported by Commonwealth and State governments and industry.

The National Timber Councils Taskforce Inc. (NTCT) will become an Australian-wide incorporated local government association representing the interests of local government in relation to forestry on both public and private land. The Association's primary function is to provide a forum for local government to address the management of forests and forest industries and their impact on local communities.

A primary role of the taskforce will be to assist in the development of a sustainable forestry industry that enhances and supports local government and rural communities. Key aims of the taskforce will include:

- Providing local government across Australia the opportunity to be part of an advocacy body and to have relevant issues, including transport infrastructure and funding for forestry advanced at a national level on behalf of local government.
- Provide opportunities for networking and knowledge exchange between local governments across Australia.
- Provide local governments in which forestry is an important activity with access to information regarding forest policy development and implementation.
- Provide a means for reviewing and contributing to forest-related planning and regulatory frameworks at both state and national levels.
- Act as an organisation for formulating and promoting forest-related policy that relates to local government.

An average 74,000 ha of new plantations have been established annually since 1997, dominated by hardwood plantings in Western Australia, Victoria and NSW. In 2006, 86% of this investment was arranged by Managed Investment Schemes and the forestry industries now employ more than 83,000 people nationally. Plantations supply 66% of Australia's timber (18 million cubic metres) from just 0.2% of total land use and since 2002, over \$1.4 billion has been invested in new timber processing activities.

The taskforce will ensure the regional economic development benefits of forestry are well planned for and integrated into local economies and that issues of importance to the local community are addressed at a state and national level

For further information contact:

David Thompson, Plantations 2020 Vision Coordinator 0419 681 818, www.plantations2020.com.au

or

Timber Towns Victoria, Executive Officer, Phone 03 9667 5555, Fax 03 9667 5550, Email ttv@mav.asn.au