

Biorefinery business could put the South Australian forest industry back on the growth track

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Logs waiting to be exported in the Portland dock.

VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland, at the request of the South Australian State Government, studied the condition of the forest sector industries in the Green Triangle region and examined the added value that may be achievable through high technology production.

VTT proposed seven pathways to raise short-term local production value and establish specialised biorefinery business in the longer term.

The South Australian government invited VTT to identify ways of increasing the productivity of the region's forest and sawmill industry, and to promote co-operation among the region's businesses. After a year of research, VTT has now published its report, recommending seven future pathways for the region. Three have a time horizon of around 3-5 years, the remainder extending beyond 10 years.

The means proposed for raising short-term productivity are more efficient use of timber resources, increased production value for the construction industry, and tapping into opportunities offered by fibre raw material and industrial side streams. According to VTT, the X-ray scanning of timber could increase yield volume by 5 per cent, equivalent to extra annual sales revenue of AUD 70 million for large sawmills. Scanning is used to analyse the inner structure of the timber and identify optimal use.

Implementation of VTT's long-term recommendations requires the construction of new biorefineries for manufacturing highly refined products, such as absorbing materials and membranes, cellulose-based textiles, bio-based chemicals and polymers, as well as nanocellulose.

Tom Kenyon, South Australia's Minister for Manufacturing, Innovation and Trade, commended VTT's contribution: "VTT Technical Research Centre is a world leader in translating research into tangible business opportunities and I thank them for their detailed work which provides a report setting an agenda for the next 5—10 years and beyond."

The two-stage study was co-funded by the State Government and Federal Government.

South Australia boasts remarkable forestry resources: more than 340,000 hectares of plantation forest. These consist primarily of pine and eucalyptus. The sawmill industry provides work for around 35 per cent

of the population in South Australia's Green Triangle region.

Provided by VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland

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