



Media Release

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SOUTHERN WOOD INDUSTRY LAUNCHES SOUTHERN WOOD COUNCIL

The southern wood industry has formed the Southern Wood Council (SWC) to develop strategies to enhance the economic opportunities for the entire industry in the Otago and Southland region.

SWC Chairman Matt Hitchings said local forestry companies, wood manufacturing and processing companies, port companies and councils decided the industry would be best served by a body that represented all sector interests.

“It is recognized that nationally, the industry lacks cohesion so the southerners decided to lead the way by forming the council to collectively represent the interests of the entire sector.

“The council has already made some significant progress in fostering training strategies by piloting an industry based on-the-job training scheme.

Council members are committing \$750,000 to the project over the next five years.

“This training initiative can be a stepping stone to diploma and degree courses – giving participants a real head start to an exciting career.

“Our wood products are being exported throughout the world. To keep our competitive edge our goal is to develop an enduring workforce with the skills and the passion to enhance our reputation in the global market place and the training programme is the first step to achieving that,” Mr Hitchings said.

The Council, which formally operated under the less formal umbrella of the Otago Southland Wood Products Group, has led the industry in a number of other areas as well.

“We formulated consistent alcohol and drug free workplace policies for the region, have led the way in electricity and energy saving initiatives and co-ordinate some National forestry initiatives.

The Council is committed to fostering public support and understanding of the industry and has held a number of Forestry Open Days to allow the public to see the industry first hand.

“We have also invested in some base line data on wood flows so that the industry can make some strategic decisions about future development.

Mr Hitchings said the Council has also commissioned an Economic Impact Assessment of the Southern wood industry.

“The council needs to know what shape the industry is in and what opportunities are out there and what are the impediments to growth. We will be releasing the findings of the assessment early next year. “

“The southern wood industry believes the new council will help develop and foster economic opportunities. It will also act as the industry voice on issues that are seen as impediments to economic growth. “

“The wood industry plays a big part in the southern economy and the Southern Wood Council will provide us with the strategic direction to make the most of the future opportunities.” Mr Hitchings said.

Key Facts

- The Southern Wood council members include all major forestry companies, saw mills and wood processors and local body council representatives and port authorities.
- The industry employs 2443 people in the southern region (Southland, Otago, and South Canterbury)
- There is an estimated 242,341 ha of planted production forests in the southern region.

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