Australian forest and wood products statistics
September and December quarters 2014

Research by the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences

June 2015
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Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES)
Postal address GPO Box 858 Canberra ACT 2601
Switchboard +61 2 6272 2010
Email info.abares@agriculture.gov.au
Web agriculture.gov.au/abares

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Notice
The detailed statistical tables can only be viewed in Microsoft Excel and are available on the ABARES website.

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Overview

This issue of the Australian forest and wood products statistics (AFWPS) includes updated 2013–14 data for key domestic indicators of forestry sector activity, including volume and value of logs harvested, plantation establishment as well as consumption and output of wood products. This issue also provides updated quarterly data for housing commencements as well as wood products trade data for the September and December quarters of 2014. A brief overview of wood product consumption and timber plantation investment over the past decade is also discussed.

**Growth in selected forestry sector indicators in 2013–14**

Activity in Australia's forestry sector recovered strongly in 2013–14 after weak performance in 2012–13, with many key indicators exhibiting robust growth between these periods. The volume of logs harvested in Australia increased by 12 per cent in 2013–14, to reach 25.3 million cubic metres (Figure 1; Table 1). This was led by a 31 per cent increase in the volume of hardwood plantation logs harvested over the year (to 6.9 million cubic metres). Both native forest and softwood log harvest also increased (by 7.5 per cent and 6.0 per cent, respectively).

Overall, the value of logs harvested in 2013–14 reached almost $1.8 billion, the highest gross value of log production since 2010–11. In 2013–14 the values of hardwood plantation logs harvested ($464 million) and softwood (plantation and native cypress) logs harvested ($970 million) were the highest values recorded in Australia for these log types.

Some forest growers benefited from higher log prices in 2013–14. Hardwood plantation log prices (valued at milldoor; comprising stumpage, harvest and transport costs) increased by 4.4 per cent and softwood plantation log prices increased by 9.6 per cent in 2013–14. The average price of native forest logs declined slightly in 2013–14, although the price of these logs has increased relatively strongly since 2010–11, exceeding the rate of growth of plantation logs (Figure 2).

**Figure 1 Volume of logs harvested, by forest and log type, 2003–04 to 2013–14**

Note: Softwood includes native cypress pine. Log harvest includes saw and veneer logs, pulplogs and other logs such as poles, piles and fencing.
Figure 2 Log price index, by forest type, 2003–04 to 2013–14

Note: Log price valued at milldoor (which comprises stumpage, harvest and haulage costs). Prices are current (nominal) value for each year. Softwood includes native cypress pine.

Hardwood plantation log harvest volume growth was strongest in Tasmania, South Australia and Victoria. Softwood plantation harvest growth increased in all states aside from Tasmania, with strongest growth in South Australia (Table 1). Despite declines in native forest harvesting in Western Australia and New South Wales, in aggregate Australia recorded an increase in the volume and value of native forest logs harvested in 2013–14. This was led by a 43 per cent increase in the native forest volume harvested in Tasmania, to 1.1 million cubic metres in 2013–14. However, native forest log prices declined on average by 13 per cent in Tasmania in 2013–14 and the native forest volume harvested in the state is less than one-quarter of the volume harvested in 2003–04.

The strong growth in log harvest corresponded to increased activity in many of Australia’s forest-based industries. In 2013–14 sawnwood production is estimated to have increased by 4.7 per cent, wood-based panels production increased by 3.5 per cent and paper and paperboard production was 0.7 per cent higher, relative to 2012–13. The growth in sawnwood production resulted from growth in softwood (including native cypress) sawnwood production, which was up 6.3 per cent over the year, while hardwood sawnwood production (mainly using logs from native forests) fell by 3.6 per cent. Softwood sawnwood production has fluctuated over the past decade and is currently above the average volume of production recorded between 2003–04 and 2013–14. Hardwood sawnwood production has exhibited a consistent decline over the same period and production in 2013–14 was 44 per cent below that in 2003–04. This reflects both the diverging supply trends of softwood and hardwood sawlogs over the decade, as well as the different drivers of demand for these products.
Table 1 Volume of logs harvested, by state, forest type and selected years

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forest type</th>
<th>2003–04 ('000 m$^3$)</th>
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<th>2009–10 ('000 m$^3$)</th>
<th>2010–11 ('000 m$^3$)</th>
<th>2011–12 ('000 m$^3$)</th>
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<td>25 563</td>
<td>26 532</td>
<td>23 497</td>
<td>22 580</td>
<td>25 298</td>
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Note: See AFWPS Summary Table 8A for detailed notes and sources. Excludes firewood removals. Softwood includes native cypress pine. Includes logs from private and public forests. New South Wales includes Australian Capital Territory. Total for Australia includes Northern Territory.
Sources: ABARES; Australian Bureau of Statistics; forest industry associations; private industry; state and territory forest services.
Housing sector – September/December quarters 2014

As reported in the November 2014 issue of the *Australian forest and wood products statistics*, dwelling unit building commencements increased by 12 per cent in 2013–14 (to 181 600), with consistent growth in commencements of both houses and other residential buildings (including units and house conversions). This is the highest level of residential building commencements in 20 years.

The latest quarterly data showed further growth in housing sector activity. Housing commencements were 15 per cent higher in the September and December quarters 2014 than the corresponding quarters in 2013, and other residential building commencements were 22 per cent higher (Figure 3). Compared with the corresponding quarters in 2013, percentage growth in housing commencements was highest in Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and New South Wales. Tasmania, Western Australia and Victoria recorded the largest percentage gains in other residential building commencements in the September and December quarters of 2014.

Figure 3 Residential building commencements, by state and type, quarterly data from December quarter 2012 to December quarter 2014

Note: Columns represent quarterly (December, March, June, September) data, from December quarter 2012 to December quarter 2014. ‘Other’ represents other residential commencements and is calculated as total dwelling units commenced minus new houses commenced. Total residential buildings include new houses, new other residential buildings, alterations and additions and building conversion.

An important trend in the consumption of wood products in residential construction is the declining share of house commencements over the decade between 2003–04 and 2013–14. While the number of other dwelling unit commencements increased by 38 per cent over the past decade, the number of house commencements declined by 12 per cent. Since 2003–04 the share of houses in total residential commencements has declined most in Victoria, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory. Over the period 2003–04 to 2013–14, Tasmania and Western Australia had the highest proportion of houses to total residential commencements in Australia, while New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory recorded the lowest share.
Trade performance – September/December quarters 2014

As reported in the November 2014 issue of *Australian forest and wood products statistics*, Australia’s trade in wood products increased in 2013–14, with the value of both imports and exports rising over the year. Imports increased by 12 per cent in 2013–14, to $4.6 billion, and exports were up 24 per cent to $2.5 billion, relative to 2012–13.

The quarterly trade data show a general increase in wood products trade of most commodities in the September and December quarters of 2014, with the value of both exports and imports of wood products increasing compared with the corresponding quarters in 2013 (Figure 4). Value of exports increased by 7.6 per cent over this period (to $1.28 billion in the combined September–December quarters 2014), led by strong growth in woodchip exports and most wood-based panels (excluding particleboard), which more than offset declines in miscellaneous forest products (including wooden doors, mouldings and parquetry flooring) and recovered paper exports. Value of exports to the United States and Indonesia increased by around 50 per cent in the September and December quarters 2014, compared with a year earlier, although China, New Zealand and Japan remain Australia’s largest export destinations for wood products (Figure 5).

**Figure 4 Australia’s wood product imports and exports, by commodity, quarterly data from December quarter 2012 to December quarter 2014**

Note: Columns represent quarterly (December, March, June, September) data, from December quarter 2012 to December quarter 2014.

The value of wood product imports increased by 10 per cent in the September and December quarters 2014 (to $2.55 billion), compared with the corresponding quarters in 2013, based principally on growth in imports of sawnwood, miscellaneous forest products and wood-based panels (Figure 4). Value of imports from Indonesia increased by more than 30 per cent over the same period, reaching $222 million for the combined September–December quarters 2014.

China was Australia’s main source of wood product imports in the September and December quarters 2014, with the value of imports increasing by 16 per cent from the corresponding quarters in 2013, to reach $675 million (Figure 5).

6
There is significant two-way trade in wood products, particularly in paper and paperboard, which has been Australia’s largest wood product import and export across most quarters since March 2013. In 2013–14 packaging and industrial paper comprised the majority (71 per cent) of Australia’s paper and paperboard exports, while 57 per cent of paper and paperboard imports were printing and writing paper. Almost half of Australia’s exports of paper and paperboard went to three countries in 2013–14—New Zealand, the United States and China. The major sources of paper and paperboard imports in 2013–14 were China, Finland, the United States and New Zealand.

**Consumption of wood products since 2003–04**

Although the data relating to logs harvested, wood product output, housing commencements and wood product trade suggest a relatively robust domestic forestry sector in 2013–14 and the last two quarters of 2014, a number of factors indicate some continuing weakness in parts of the forestry sector.

Despite the increase in residential building commencements in 2013–14, overall consumption of wood products was relatively static in the year, and weaker for some commodities. The log-equivalent of wood product consumption (which measures the volume of logs required to manufacture wood products) increased by only 0.4 per cent, to 18.9 million cubic metres in 2013–14. This consisted of a 3.6 per cent increase in softwood log-equivalent consumption (to 14.8 million cubic metres) (Figure 6) and a 9.7 per cent decline in hardwood log-equivalent consumption (to 4.1 million cubic metres) (Figure 7). However, the rise in log-equivalent consumption did not match the increase in Australia’s population in 2013–14, leading to a slight reduction in total log-equivalent consumption per person to 0.80 cubic metres for the year, comprising 0.63 cubic metres of softwood and 0.17 cubic metres of hardwood log-equivalent consumption per person.
Overall, Australia’s log production exceeds log-equivalent consumption of wood products. Australia has a large surplus of hardwood logs, with the volume of hardwood logs harvested since 2003–04 more than double the estimated volume consumed over the same period (Figure 7). Most of these surplus logs are exported, either as raw materials such as logs or woodchips or as further processed wood products. In contrast, Australia’s softwood log harvest volume was slightly less than estimated softwood log-equivalent consumption over the decade between 2003–04 and 2013–14 (Figure 6). The additional logs required for Australia’s wood product consumption were sourced from net imports of wood products.

Wood product consumption in 2013–14 was lower for several commodities, compared with a year earlier. In particular, consumption of hardwood sawnwood declined by 14.2 per cent in
2013–14, to 668,000 cubic metres (Figure 8). Hardwood sawnwood consumption has been in persistent decline over the past decade, and is now less than half the volume consumed in 2003–04. In contrast, softwood sawnwood consumption increased by 4.9 per cent to 4.5 million cubic metres in 2013–14, and has remained above 4 million cubic metres in all years for the past decade except 2008–09. Consumption of softwood sawnwood is closely linked to housing sector activity, which explains the growth in 2013–14.

Consumption of wood-based panels declined during 2013–14 (Figure 8), with a 20 per cent decline in medium density fibreboard consumption more than offsetting rises in plywood and particleboard. Consumption of paper and paperboard was also down in 2013–14, by 3.1 per cent to 3.6 million tonnes, with only printing and writing paper exhibiting a rise. Australia’s consumption of paper and paperboard was relatively stable until 2007–08, after which consumption declined significantly. On average, each Australian now consumes 26 per cent less paper than in 2007–08, with consumption of newsprint in 2013–14 around half consumption in 2007–08, and printing and writing paper 23 per cent lower. In contrast, consumption of household and sanitary paper has increased, and is 35 per cent higher in 2013–14 compared with 2007–08.

**Figure 8 Wood product output, trade and apparent consumption, 2003–04 to 2013–14**

![Graphs showing output, trade, and apparent consumption trends](image)

Note: Apparent consumption is estimated as production less exports plus imports of wood products. Hardwood sawnwood includes railway sleepers.

**Plantation investment trends**

Australia’s plantation area declined slightly in 2013–14, by 0.6 per cent to just under 2 million hectares. This reflected a stagnant investment environment for new plantations and a reduction in some areas of existing hardwood plantations, principally in Western Australia and New South Wales, as a result of conversion to other land uses (Figure 9). There has been significant consolidation of Australia’s plantation estate in recent years, including the sale of forward rotations of public softwood plantations in South Australia, the sale of the majority of former Gunns Ltd plantations to New Forests (managed by Forico) and a proposal to privatise some public plantations in Tasmania. These transactions demonstrate that there remain opportunities for profitable forestry investments in Australia.
Conclusion

Despite improving conditions, the growth in Australia’s forestry sector in 2013–14 was from a low base, and domestic production and consumption of wood products remain below that in 2003–04. Housing commencements (a key source of demand for wood products) remain lower than in 2003–04, with most construction growth being in apartments which use less solid-wood products (such as sawnwood). Furthermore, the changing nature of wood processing, through both consolidation of the industry and technological improvements replacing labour, means that forestry sector employment is now 25 per cent lower than it was in 2003–04. Woodchip exports, once Australia’s leading wood product export (by value), remain below the levels of 10 years ago.

Nevertheless, there is potential for continued expansion of Australia’s forestry sector, as Australia’s substantial timber plantation resources will provide increased log volumes in coming decades and population and economic growth will support demand for wood products (Burns et al. 2015).
References

Appendix A: Australian forest and wood products statistics, detailed tables

AFWPS summary tables

1) Overview of the Australian forestry sector

Resource base

2) Land areas, by forest vegetation cover
3) Native forest areas, by forest type, ownership and state
4) Plantation areas, by type and state
5) Plantation establishment, by type and state

Logs

6) Logs harvested, by log type
7) Gross value of logs harvested
8a) Volume of logs harvested, by state and forest type
8b) Value of logs harvested, by state
8c) Volume of logs harvested, by state, forest and log type
9) Log price indexes, by log type
10) Gross roundwood equivalent of consumption, by wood product

Wood products

11) Production annual
12) Sawnwood production, by state
13) Sales and service income in forest product industries
14) Industry value added in forest product industries
15) Wages and salaries in forest product industries
16a) Employment in forest product industries (Labour Force survey)
16b) Employment in forest product industries (Australian Industry survey)
17) Capital expenditure in forest product industries
18) Disposal of assets in forest product industries
19) Selected price indexes
20) Apparent consumption of wood products
21) Dwelling units commenced
22) Recovered paper
23) Imports
24) Exports
25) Imports from selected countries
26) Exports to selected countries
27) Selected trade unit values
28) Imports of secondary wood products
29) Exports of secondary wood products

**AFWPS imports quarterly**

30) Imports
31) Imports selected unit values
32) Imports of sawnwood, summary
33) Imports of roughsawn softwood sawnwood
34) Imports of roughsawn hardwood sawnwood
35) Total imports of roughsawn sawnwood
36) Imports of dressed softwood sawnwood
37) Imports of dressed hardwood sawnwood
38) Total imports of dressed sawnwood
39) Imports of miscellaneous forest products
40) Imports of veneers
41) Imports of plywood, by type
42) Imports of plywood continued
43) Imports of board products, by type
44) Imports of paper and paperboard, by type
45) Total imports of paper and paperboard
46) Imports of paper manufactures
47) Imports of recovered paper
48) Imports of pulp
49) Imports of secondary wood products
## AFWPS exports quarterly

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<td>Exports of sawnwood, summary</td>
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<td>Exports of softwood sawnwood</td>
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<td>Exports of hardwood sawnwood</td>
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<td>Exports of roundwood</td>
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<td>Exports of railway sleepers</td>
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<td>Exports of miscellaneous forest products</td>
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<td>Exports of veneers</td>
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<td>Exports of board products</td>
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<td>Exports of paper and paperboard</td>
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<td>Exports of paper manufactures</td>
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<td>Exports of recovered paper</td>
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<td>Exports of pulp</td>
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<td>Exports of woodchips</td>
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<td>Exports of secondary wood products</td>
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