

Timber harvesting jobs lost in SA and Tasmania as China widens ban on Australian forest products

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Hundreds of jobs have been lost as China's uncompromising bans on Australia's timber exports get tougher, according to industry leaders.

Up to 150 contractors — timber workers and haulage-truck operators — are now out of work in South Australia's Green Triangle, one of the nation's major timber-producing areas, and 100 jobs have been lost in Tasmania.



The timber industry says 150 contractors have lost their jobs in the Green Triangle region in South Australia. (Supplied: OneFortyOne)

Confirmation of the job losses comes as China extended its Australian timber bans, with products from New South Wales and Western Australia being added to the list.

Chinese authorities first imposed a ban on pulp logs coming out of Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania after finding a pest called bark beetle in a shipment.

And it fired its first shots at Australia's export market back in May, by introducing a massive 80 per cent tariff on Australian barley imports.

Since then Australian coal, copper ore and concentrate, sugar, wine and lobster industries have suffered a similar fate.

Ross Hampton, from the Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA), said 150 contractors had been thrown out of work in South Australia, and he warned that if the timber-ban issue was not resolved thousands of jobs would be at risk across the nation.

"It's a \$24 billion industry and much of it could be put at risk if this isn't resolved," Mr Hampton said.

The Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) has also previously warned of heavy job losses.

The industry fears up to 1,000 forestry jobs in the Green Triangle, which incorporates Western Victoria and South East South Australia, will be lost in that region alone by March 2021 if the bans continue.

Mr Hampton said timber harvesting crews had stockpiled large volumes of pulp wood, but because none of it was moving it was hampering the entire operation of harvest and export.

"They physically won't be able to get around it [the stockpiles] and they'll eventually have to slow down and potentially even stop operations," Mr Hampton said.

Wendy Fennell, from the Green Triangle Forest Contractors Group, estimates that the 150 jobs lost so far come from harvest and haulage sector.

100 jobs cut in Tasmania

The Tasmanian timber industry is also heavily reliant on the Chinese market and is also feeling the pressure of China's tough stance on Australian timber.

Bryan Hayes, from the Tasmanian Forest Products Association, said up to 100 jobs had been lost in Tasmania.



Most of Australia's low-value pulp logs exported from Australia go to China, much of it from Portland in Victoria.(Supplied: SA Timber Processors Association)

"The stoppage is currently affecting about 100 jobs across the [Tasmanian] industry," he said.

Pulp wood is low-grade timber exported as logs. It is generally used in China to produce bio-energy, kitchen panels and to make paper and pulp.

China had been taking 95 per cent of Australia's exports, much of it through Portland in south-west Victoria, but about 20 per cent of that timber could be processed in Australia if changes to processing equipment were made here.

Source: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2020-12-28/china-ban-causes-job-losses/13017450>