

The Australian

Green group campaign 'threatening timber jobs'

- John Ferguson, Victorian political reporter
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THOUSANDS of timber industry jobs are under threat from a green campaign demanding consumers dump products made from threatened native Australian forests.

Furniture Australia has warned the campaign could lead to severe job cuts in the local industry, which employs 100,000 people, if the bid to cut native timber harvesting starts to bite, and says consumers will need to source more furniture from China and markets without controls on harvesting.

Markets for Change is a new green pressure group set up to investigate companies and products it claims are leading to environmental destruction.

The group wants an end to the sale of Australian wood and paper products made from native forest.

But Furniture Australia, the peak industry group, has warned that the net effect of the campaign will be job losses.

FA's general manager (Victoria and Tasmania) Rohan Wright also yesterday accused Markets for Change of using inaccurate statistics.

"The guys are willing to say things that are patently untrue," he said.

He accused the group of claiming that logging was still permitted in 76 per cent of Australian native forests and that there was enough plantation timber available to replace all native forest products.

Mr Wright said the group was wrong on both counts, with just 6.4 per cent of Australia's native forest available for timber production.

The plantation timber, he said, could not be used for making quality furniture.

"Markets for Change are running a destructive and ill-informed smear campaign against Australian furniture retailers, one that puts thousands of Australian jobs at risk," he said. The group would ultimately prefer to see Australia source timber products from overseas, where environmental standards were poor.

Peta Cooper, a spokeswoman for Markets for Change, said the Bureau of Rural Sciences reported that of the nearly 150 million hectares of native forest, 113 million hectares were in tenures in which timber harvesting

was allowed.

She said a leading academic had claimed the nation's plantation estates could meet nearly all Australia's wood needs.

Mr Wright said timber practices in Australia were among the world's best and much of the imported furniture was made from timber harvested from illegal logging. "There are a lot of jobs at risk," he said.

"Their argument is based on a number of wholly false premises."

Senior staff at Markets for Change have long associations with groups including Greenpeace, The Wilderness Society and Friends of the Earth.

The anti-logging group is planning to highlight the activities of prominent retailers involved in the timber industry.

It already has named a series of key furniture retailers and hardware chains as well as outlets that stock paper from native forest woodchips.

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