

Australian foresters look to boost opportunity in renewable energy sector

ABC Rural By Bridget Fitzgerald

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The Australian forestry industry will promote the use of biomass for energy production to diversify the sector and increase profitability.

Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources Anne Ruston chaired the sixth annual Forest Industry Advisory Council meeting last week.

She said the industry recognised a need to take a "less traditional approach" to forestry into the future.

Ms Ruston said foresters would seek to develop markets for timber and biomass products to be used as renewable energy resources.

"The industry is very keen to pursue a bio-based economy for forestry to make sure that we are maximising the opportunity for all of the parts of the tree," she said.

"The industry is very keen to move into this renewable energy space."

Ms Ruston said using timber as fuel for energy production would make forestry "sustainable into the future".

WA Plantation Resources (WAPRES) chief executive officer Ian Telfer said foresters were already on the hunt for new markets that would import timber for energy production.

But Mr Telfer said creating new markets for biomass energy production would help the industry cut down on waste.

He said operators always aim to use "as much of the tree as possible".

But Mr Telfer said small trees and fine woodchips, known as the tree residue, were difficult to make use of, particularly from Jarrah forests.

"In the Karri forest we have the opportunity to use [residue] for woodchips to make paper," he said.

"But in the Jarrah forests, a lot of the residue is left behind."

Mr Telfer said Jarrah residue has a lot of potential as a biomass product.

He said there was an increasing global demand for timber residue for energy production.

"In Europe and in Asia, there's increasing focus on looking to use wood waste and wood residues as a fuel source," Mr Telfer said.

"Particularly as opposed to nuclear, coal and gas energy."

Mr Telfer said Japan would be a potentially significant market as it attempted to reduce its reliance on nuclear power.

Topics: forestry, alternative-energy, electricity-energy-and-utilities, bunbury-6230



PHOTO: Native Jarrah forest in Western Australia.
(Supplied: Forest Products Commission)

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AUDIO: Foresters look to future demand for biomass renewable energy (ABC Rural)