

# More than \$11m in funding for projects to grow research portfolio for Australia's forest industry

## Grower committee's wide vision to double the value of commercial forests by 2040

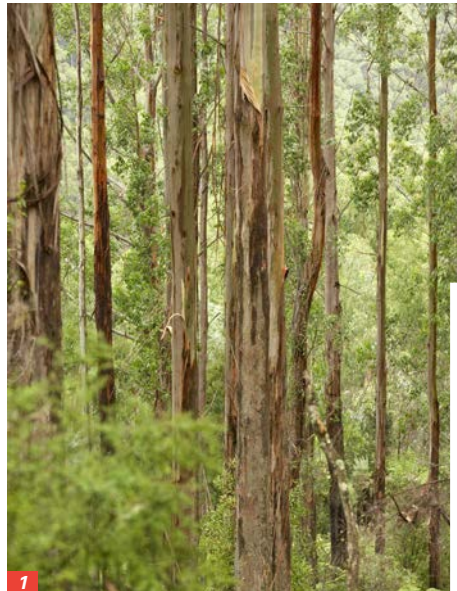
AUSTRALIAN forestry research is about to get another boost, thanks to the announcement of funding for 10 exciting new projects.

The research will be funded following recommendations made by the Grower Research Advisory Committee (GRAC). It will cover everything from mitigating the risks posed by pests and diseases to improving geospatial accuracy, drought-proofing plantations, genomics and much more.

The 10 successful projects were selected following the submission of proposals submitted from an open call last November. Guided by recommendations of a governance working group made up of GRAC members, the GRAC executive committee undertook a robust evaluation of all submissions, with the assistance of a scientific advisory panel, before making its final recommendations to the FWPA board.

These recommendations included that a total investment of \$11.2 million be made in support of the 10 successful projects, which

**RESEARCH PRIORITIES ACROSS NINE KEY THEMES**



**1/ Maximising opportunities around new technologies and innovations that will fortify Australian forestry into the future.**  
**2/ Jodie Mason... ensuring projects represent a balance of investment across different forest types.**



were selected based on their potential to best advance the priority topics identified in FWPA's forestry research investment plans.

The investment plans established a portfolio of research priorities across nine key themes that were considered likely to help realise GRAC's vision, "to double the value of Australia's commercial forests by 2040, by fostering an innovation culture in our enterprises, applying world's best practices, collaborating and investing into research and development as appropriate."

The committee also worked to ensure chosen projects represented a balance of investment across different forest types and

research manager Jodie Mason said.

"A key part of the evaluation process this year was a review by a scientific advisory panel made up of two external members and two grower members, all with appropriate research and subject matter expertise," Jodie said.

"The panel assessed the scientific merit of each proposal and provided advice to the GRAC executive Committee.

"We are very pleased with the value added by the panel this year, and FWPA and growers are supportive of using a similar model next time.

"Investment in these sorts of research projects is crucial, not only for protecting and optimising the Australian forestry resource as it stands today, but also to make sure we are ready to maximise opportunities around the new technologies and innovations that will fortify Australian forestry into the future.

"I thank all applicants for submitting proposals and advise that we plan to announce a further call for proposals in the coming months."

The 10 projects selected by the committee for investment are:

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 Head of marketing and communications and head of WoodSolutions program

geographical regions.

"We were delighted with the positive response to the open call for submissions, and the effort made to understand the research needs of the growers," FWPA's forest

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# France battles worst fires as foresters push for new plantings of more resilient tree species across region

THE loss of more than 20,000 ha of pine forest in the Gironde department of southwest France is a disaster for the region and its population, but it could be a wake-up call on the need to adapt Europe's largest artificial forest to the challenges of climate change.

Like the majority of wildfires in Gironde, they were caused by humans.

The reasons why they spread so rapidly are also well-known – ongoing drought, temperatures of up to 42°C, strong erratic winds and dense vegetation which has complicated the job of firefighters.

France's situation is a far cry from the 24 million ha lost in Australia's 'Black Summer' bushfires of 2019-2020, but

the extent of this summer's wildfire is worrying.

"Two fires of this magnitude and virulence at the same time in a department is a first in Gironde, and even in France," said local prefect Fabienne Buccio.

There's thankfully been no loss of life, but the local economy and tourism industry has taken a hit.

Visiting the region, President Emmanuel Macron promised to launch a major tree-planting program to replace the burnt forest. The government has earmarked \$1.3 billion to upgrade its fleet of fire-fighting



Local authorities in La Teste-de-Buche fell healthy trees to create firewalls to help firefighters.

and the increase in unmanaged forest will contribute to greater fire risk.

While fires can break out in any woodland, the 1 million-ha Landes forest, which includes La Teste-de-Buch and Landiras, is particularly vulnerable – 87% is covered in maritime

planes and other machinery.

But surveillance and fire-fighting alone, even reinforced, will not suffice.

"Sending planes to intervene in the minutes following the start of a wildfire, like in the south-east, will not be possible if the areas concerned are very large," Dominique Morvan, an expert in wildfires at Aix-Marseille University, said.

A report by France's National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment found that a combination of urban sprawl

pinus (*Pinus pinaster*), a hard, fast-growing tree which has been used for decades by the paper, chemical and carpentry industry, and the energy sector for the development of biomass.

Foresters say the homogenous monocultures are the weak point of this kind of system because they're not very resilient. By planting different varieties of trees there's a chance the fire will spread more slowly because there's always a species that's less inflammable than another.

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- Forest Pest Management (FPM) Research Consortium.
- Managing *Teratosphaeria* through resistance breeding.
- Microbiome management: leveraging advances in microbiome research to deliver cost-effective tools to boost resilience and productivity of pines throughout their production lifecycle.
- Forest supply chain value optimisation.
- Geospatial positioning and fusion: is real-time sub-metre accuracy operationally feasible in forestry environments?
- Enhancing biological

control of invasive eucalyptus weevils in Australia's eucalypt plantations.

- Increased and sustained productivity gains in national tree improvement programs for softwood and hardwood plantations.
- Using genomics to double the rate of genetic gain in Australian forest tree improvement programs.
- Drought proofing the plantation estate: improved methods to efficiently manage water stress and productivity in a drying climate.
- Enhancing the knowledge base for hardwood plantation management.

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