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Tasmanian wood encouragement policy will benefit environment and health

State Treasurer Peter Gutwein announced yesterday that Tasmania will be the first state in Australia to develop a wood encouragement policy, the focus of which is to ensure wood is considered for the initial stages of public building projects.

The policy requires responsibly sourced wood to be considered, where feasible, as the first-choice construction material in all new-build and refurbishment projects. This follows changes recently to the National Construction Code to allow for timber products such as CLT to be utilised in more construction projects.

Paul Klymenko, CEO of Planet Ark, welcomed the announcement.

"Responsibly sourced, certified wood has significant positive environmental outcomes. It helps reduce the impacts of climate change, it's renewable, it stores carbon and it prevents the release of emissions by replacing carbon intensive materials like steel and concrete," he said. "In addition, wood has proven health and wellbeing benefits, is cost-effective and quick to construct."

More than 20% of Australia's carbon emissions come from constructing and maintaining the built environment, so making the switch to wood as a major building material is a key strategy for addressing climate change.

This announcement follows the adoption of similar wood encouragement policies by Latrobe City Council and Wellington Shire in Victoria and joins others around the world, including Rotorua in New Zealand, Hackney in London, British Columbia in Canada, Finland, France and The Netherlands.

As an example of the environmental benefits of these policies, the Library at the Dock in Melbourne is Australia's first six-star Green Star council-owned building constructed from modern engineered mass timber. It stores 500 tonnes of carbon in its cross-laminated timber structure, locking it out of the atmosphere for the life of the building.

Planet Ark's *Wood – Housing, Health, Humanity*[i] report, commissioned for the Make it Wood campaign, found exposure to wood products and interiors has positive physiological and psychological health benefits, similar those created by spending time in nature.

"Research shows that being surrounded by wood at home, work or school has positive effects on the body, the brain and the environment and can even shorten hospital stays through reduced recovery times," Mr Klymenko explained.

An increasing number of architects who design buildings for healing and learning are incorporating significant amounts of wood into their structures to capitalise on its health and wellbeing benefits.

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[i] *Wood – Housing, Health, Humanity*, Planet Ark, September 2014 http://bit.ly/1LgoRcR

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