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ANU report shows how much region depends on timber jobs

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A REPORT prepared by a school at the Australian National University has illustrated exactly how important the forest industry is to several south-west towns.

The report, prepared in 2010 by the Fenner School of Environment and Society, looked at the economic significance of both hardwood and softwood plantations, and analysed the education levels and incomes of the workforce in Portland, Heywood, Casterton and Dartmoor.

Data came from results of the Forest Industry Survey, an examination of employment and expenditure by the plantation and native forest industry in Victoria. It provided an up-to-date snapshot of the forestry industry, its workers, and its dependent communities.

Dartmoor, Heywood and Casterton all had more than 10 per cent of their overall workforce employed in the forest industry. More than 50 per cent of forest industry employment is dependent on the softwood plantation sector in Portland.

Towns with high employment in the industry and greater than 40 per cent of forest industry workers dependent on the hardwood plantation sector were Hamilton, Casterton and Penola. These towns act as centres of employment for this growing sector of the industry, the ANU said.

Among the report's key findings for south-west communities:

- **Casterton** has experienced a population decline and has an older median age and higher proportion of people aged over

65, lower household income, and higher unemployment than average. Also, fewer adults had completed high school than the regional average, and school enrolments declined over 2001 to 2006. When the socio-economic characteristics of Casterton's forest industry workers were compared to the industry average, they were less likely to have completed high school, with only 15 per cent having completed high school; were more likely to be employed as labourers or production and transport workers, and less likely to work as managers/administrators than the industry average; had lower than average housing loan repayments, likely reflecting low housing costs in Casterton; were more likely to work part-time than the industry average, and there was greater male participation in the forest industry workforce than average, with 85 per cent participation.

- **Heywood** had lower population growth, an older median age and higher proportion of people aged over 65, lower household income, and higher unemployment than average. Also, fewer adults had completed high school than the regional average. When the socio-economic characteristics of Heywood's forest industry workers were compared to the industry average, they were younger, with 43 per cent of workers aged under 35; were much less likely than other forest industry workers to have completed high school; were more likely to be employed as production and transport workers or labourers, and less likely to work as managers/administrators or professionals; earned lower

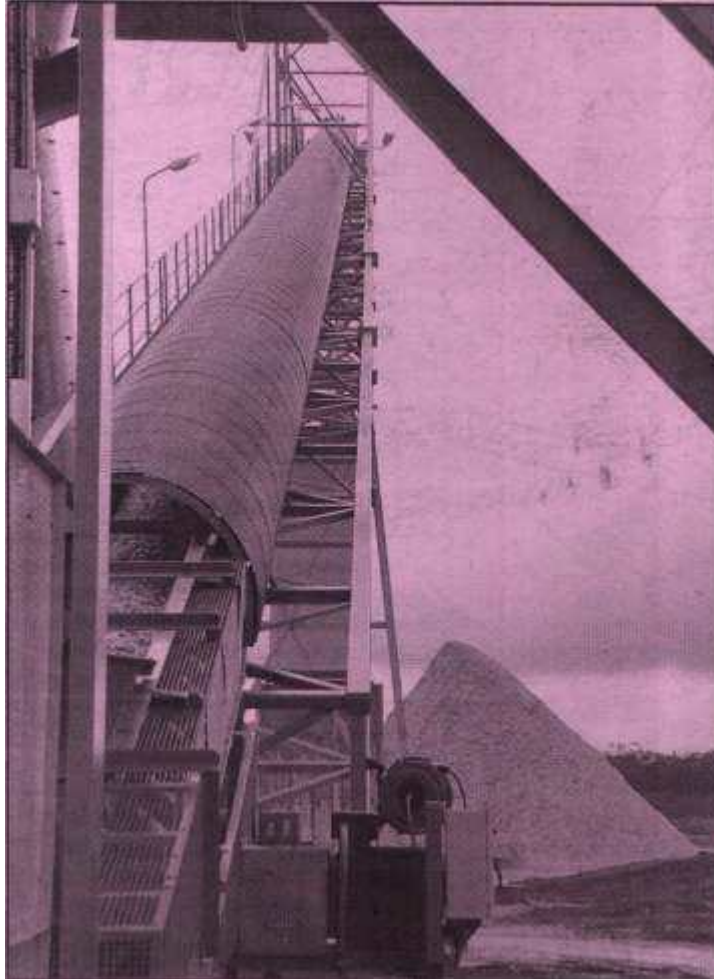
income; were more likely to work part-time.

- **Dartmoor** experienced rapid population decline and had a slightly high median age, lower household income, and higher unemployment rate than the regional average, with fewer adults having completed high school than the regional average and school enrolments declining rapidly. When characteristics of Dartmoor's forest industry workers were compared to the industry average, they were older, with 20 per cent of workers aged 55 and over; were more likely to be employed as labourers or production and transport workers, and less likely to work as managers/administrators or tradespersons, than average; and had lower than average housing repayments, likely reflecting low housing costs in Dartmoor.

- **Portland** has characteristics similar to the average for the Western District as a whole, but with higher unemployment and lower labour force participation. When characteristics of Portland's forest industry workers were compared to the industry average, they were more likely to have completed high school, with 40 per cent having completed high school; were more likely to be employed as production and transport workers, and less likely to be employed as professionals or tradespersons, than the industry average; had lower than average household income. There was greater female participation in the forest industry workforce than average, with 30 per cent participation.



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CHIPS fly at South West Fibre's woodchip mill at Myamyn ... the mill is just one of the region's many forestry industry-related employers.

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