



Australian Government
Department of Agriculture,
Fisheries and Forestry

AFWI 
Australian Forest and Wood Innovations

Expression of interest guidelines for establishing Australian Forest and Wood Innovations research centres



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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Australia and their continuing connection to land and sea, waters, environment and community. We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands we live and work on, their culture, and their Elders past and present.

Contents

1	Program overview	1
1.1	AFWI aims and objectives	1
2	Expression of interest overview	3
2.1	Overview.....	3
2.2	Key dates	3
3	Starting an EOI for a research centre	4
3.1	General	4
3.2	Considerations.....	4
3.3	Funding	5
3.4	Ineligible costs	6
3.5	Joint (consortium) applications	7
4	Assessment criteria	8
4.1	Mandatory criteria	8
4.2	Selection criteria.....	8
5	Anticipated research themes	10
5.1	Climate change solutions	10
5.2	Sustainable forests for our future	10
5.3	Making the most of our available wood fibre	10
6	Application process	12
6.1	Required documents	12
6.2	Questions during EOI application process.....	13
7	Assessment and selection process	14
7.1	Who will approve the preferred EOI applications?	14
7.2	Notification of application outcomes.....	14
7.3	Feedback on EOI applications.....	15
8	Probity	16
8.1	Conflicts of interest	16
8.2	Confidential information	16

Tables

Table 1	Funding allocations for each research centre, by financial year	5
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1 Program overview

The Australian Government has awarded \$101.5 million in funding over 5 years to expand the forest and wood products industries' capacity to conduct research, deliver innovation and provide Australian made solutions to national challenges.

This is being delivered through the establishment of an Australia-wide National Institute for Forest Products Innovation, under the operational name of Australian Forest and Wood Innovations (AFWI) based at the University of Tasmania (UTAS) in Launceston. AFWI will fund forest and wood products research, innovation, development. AFWI will also undertake engagement activities to share the results of its research with stakeholders.

The AFWI management group will oversee the administration of AFWI and be headquartered in Launceston at the AFWI Headquarters.

AFWI will support 3 research centres. The first will be located at UTAS in Launceston and will be operationally separate to the AFWI Headquarters. The Australian Government will, through this expression of interest process, identify and recommend to AFWI 2 organisations that AFWI (through UTAS) can contract with to establish the other 2 research centres.

Each research centre will have specialised research themes and will work collaboratively with other centres. AFWI Headquarters will engage with industry and with the research centres to refine the research that will be progressed under these specialised research themes.

Research centres will be required to work under the AFWI board and with the AFWI board's research advisory committee to ensure national coordination and collaboration. The AFWI board will oversee all activities and expenditure and will be supported by a research advisory committee.

The AFWI's research advisory committee will manage research prioritisation, review all research proposals and make recommendations to the AFWI board.

All research supported by AFWI will be required to be supported by industry. The majority of research will also require matching co-contributions (direct financial support or in-kind).

In addition to the research funding allocated to the research centres, AFWI will have \$5 million per year (over 4 years) available for a national open call for research projects, which will be the subject of a process conducted by AFWI at the appropriate time. These calls will be open to applications from Australian-based researchers supporting the forest industries and will not be limited to the research centres established by AFWI.

1.1 AFWI aims and objectives

The aim of AFWI is to undertake applied research that supports the commercialisation of new knowledge in the forestry and wood products industries. Some research may be fundamental in nature but must have an end-user focus.

The primary objectives are to:

- undertake applied research to support innovation in the forest and wood products sectors in consultation with industry
- train researchers to support industry into the future.

2 Expression of interest overview

2.1 Overview

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is seeking expressions of interest (EOI) from organisations to establish 2 AFWI research centres.

This EOI will not result in a preferred applicant being awarded a contract with the department. The purpose of this EOI is for the department to identify and recommend applicants to UTAS for the establishment of 2 AFWI research centres. UTAS (as grantee and host of AFWI) will work with preferred applicants to enter into an agreement to establish the research centres.

Being identified by the department as a preferred applicant to this EOI process does not guarantee that the organisation will be contracted by AFWI (through UTAS) to establish the organisation's proposed research centre, as it will depend on negotiations between the preferred applicant and UTAS.

This EOI has been published on the department's [Australian Forest and Wood Innovations webpage](#) and is open and available to all interested organisations. The department is not responsible for any failure by a potential applicant to become aware of this opportunity.

The EOI process is open from **11 OCTOBER 2023 — 6 DECEMBER 2023**.

Submissions close at **6pm** on **6 DECEMBER 2023 (Canberra time)**.

Applicants should use these guidelines and the EOI application form to prepare their EOI.

The process to be followed to submit an EOI is described in [section 6](#).

These EOI guidelines may be changed from time-to-time by the department. When this happens, the revised guidelines will be published on the department's [Australian forest and Wood Innovations webpage](#). Applicants that have already submitted their EOI application will be given the opportunity to revise their application and resubmit it prior to the closing date and time.

Learn more about AFWI via the following link: <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/agriculture-land/forestry/national/australian-forest-and-wood-innovations>

2.2 Key dates

Applications open	11 October 2023
Question period closes	5 pm on 29 November 2023 (Canberra time), being 7 weeks after EOI opens
Applications close	6 pm on 6 December 2023 (Canberra time), being 8 weeks after EOI opens
Acknowledgement of application receipt	Within 2 business days of receipt of EOI application

3 Starting an EOI for a research centre

3.1 General

Before commencing an EOI, applicants should read, understand and follow these guidelines, including the mandatory criteria and selection criteria. The Assessment Panel will assess EOIs based on the [assessment criteria](#).

3.2 Considerations

Each research centre to be established by AFWI (through UTAS) will:

- undertake applied research that supports the commercialisation of new knowledge in the forestry and wood products industries, and will build capacity and capability in researchers, including the training of new researchers to support the forest and wood products industries
- deliver research projects against research themes for the forest and wood products industries
 - [Section 5](#) provides examples of potential research themes. The AFWI will undertake industry engagement and develop a strategic plan, further refining research priorities.

Each EOI submitted should provide high-level information on the proposed research focus but should not include a detailed research plan outlining specific research projects.

To prevent duplication in research focus by the research centres, the department will also receive information from UTAS during the EOI process to understand AFWI's research focus.

UTAS will be provided with copies of the preferred applications and UTAS will deal directly with preferred applicants for the purpose of entering into an agreement for the organisation's research centre.

Research projects

- Once established under an agreement with UTAS, research centres will be required to submit their proposed research projects to the AFWI board's research advisory committee. The research advisory committee will then provide recommendations to the AFWI board.
 - The AFWI board will oversee all AFWI activities and expenditure, and the research advisory committee will advise the board on research priorities and recommend projects for support.
 - The AFWI management group will support the operation of the AFWI Headquarters and oversee management of the research centres, in conjunction with research centre management and administration staff.
- All AFWI research projects must have a contract or project-specific agreement with UTAS (as the host of AFWI), which outlines the project's budget, delivery time frames, milestones and expectations.
- The lead organisation of each research centre will be responsible for their own project subcontract agreements with their research centre collaborators and industry partners.

- All research projects will have a final milestone payment of 20% of AFWI funding on delivery and website publication of the final report (excluding commercial-in-confidence material) and a 2-page summary of the research project.
 - Contracted research projects may go beyond 2026–27 but must be completed by no later than 30 June 2030, with agreement from the AFWI board and research advisory committee.
 - No research projects will be contracted after 30 June 2027.
- Research centres must ensure their proposed research projects have the required industry support and matching funding (cash or in-kind) commitments if required.
- Research centres will be required to report quarterly to the AFWI Headquarters on progress with their research projects and centre administration.
- AFWI will be audited annually and research centres will also be audited as part of these audits.
- There is an expectation that all final reports produced by the research centres will be publicly available, subject to the confidentiality provisions in the agreement(s) between UTAS and the preferred applicants.
- An AFWI Intellectual Property Framework will be developed for the management of intellectual property and activities, which all research centres must comply with.

3.3 Funding

Each research centre will be able to access funding from UTAS as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1 Funding allocations for each research centre, by financial year

Funding splits	2023–24 (\$)	2024–25 (\$)	2025–26 (\$)	2026–27 (\$)	Total (\$) ^a
Administration	643,500	643,500	643,500	643,500	2,574,000
Core research	2,874,666	2,310,000	2,310,000	2,310,000	9,804,666
Conditional research	3,391,666	3,758,333	3,758,333	3,758,333	14,666,664
Total	6,909,832	6,711,833	6,711,833	6,711,833	27,045,330

^a Totals may be affected by rounding.

Note: Figures are GST inclusive.

Funding allocation conditions

Each funding allocation will have funding conditions associated with each category described below. These conditions will be reflected in any agreement entered into between a research centre and UTAS.

All research funding will be paid by UTAS (as the host of AFWI) to research centres on the achievement of agreed milestones.

Administration funds

- do not require matching funding
- must be used to appoint a centre leader and appropriate administration and operational support for the proposed centre

- may be used for other essential research centre establishment requirements (including recruitment costs)
- can include a maximum of 10% indirect costs – indirect costs are those not directly attributable to a research project but are incurred by the organisation in carrying out its business.

Core research funds

- do not require matching funding
- can include a maximum of 10% indirect costs
 - indirect costs can only be applied once by the research centre through core funding processes
- can only support research activities that are supported by industry, via a letter of support
- projects have to be submitted to the research advisory committee for recommendation to the AFWI board, which will provide approval to proceed.

Conditional research funds

- require matching co-contributions (cash or in-kind) from industry or other organisations
- can include indirect costs requested on a project-by-project basis
 - indirect costs requested as part of the project application will be evaluated by the research advisory committee and the board for value for money
- projects have to be submitted to the research advisory committee for recommendation to the AFWI board, which will provide approval to proceed.

3.4 Ineligible costs

Funding provided to the research centres through AFWI must not be used for:

- costs incurred prior to an agreement being signed with UTAS (as the host of AFWI), including costs incurred in the preparation of an EOI under this EOI process or related documentation
- activities that are unrelated to AFWI and/or are already funded on an ongoing basis by the applicant (this does not exclude academic salaries directly attributable to AFWI)
- purchase or acquisition of land or buildings
- construction costs in excess of \$100,000 (GST incl.)
- capital expenditure, unless for hardware where
 - both of the following apply
 - the predominant use is for a AFWI research project
 - the value is less than \$100,000 (GST incl.), or
 - the expenditure has been approved by the AFWI board
- utilities and rent
- purchase of vehicles and long-term vehicle leasing

- activities funded by other Commonwealth bodies
- activities funded by state, territory or local government bodies, except where that funding forms part of a matched funding contribution
- political or lobbying activities
- litigation
- any other activities or costs that are not directly related to the performance of the research centre in accordance with the research centre's agreement with UTAS (as the host of AFWI).

These conditions will be reflected in any agreement entered into between a research centre and UTAS.

3.5 Joint (consortium) applications

Research centres may be formed from a consortium of universities or research organisations. The research centre may include industry consortium members but this is not a requirement of this EOI process. Industry support will be required for all research projects.

Where proposals are received from a consortium, the consortium must appoint a lead organisation. Only the lead organisation can submit the application form and lead discussions with UTAS (as the host of AFWI) to enter into an appropriate agreement with UTAS, as the grantee, to host a research centre.

The lead organisation must:

- meet the mandatory criteria (see [section 4.1](#))
- identify all members of the consortium in its application
- be authorised to negotiate, act on behalf of, and bind all members of the consortium in relation to any potential agreement with UTAS
- submit letters of support from each consortium member, detailing their contribution to the proposed research centre, including any in-kind and/or financial support.

4 Assessment criteria

EOI applicants must address all mandatory criteria and selection criteria in their application.

The Assessment Panel will assess all applications that meet the mandatory criteria, against the selection criteria.

The application form includes word limits for each response to an assessment criterion. Additional evidence, such as letters of support and other referenced attachments, will not be counted toward the word limit for selection criterion response statements.

4.1 Mandatory criteria

The department will exclude an applicant from further consideration in the EOI process if the department considers that the applicant does not comply with any one or more of the following mandatory criteria:

- 1) holds a valid Australian Business Number (ABN) or Australian Company Number (ACN)
- 2) has an account with an Australian financial institution
- 3) is willing to work in good faith with UTAS to negotiate an appropriate agreement with UTAS, as host of AFWI, to deliver a research centre under AFWI
- 4) propose a research centre that is based in Australia
- 5) propose a research centre that has a regional presence (outside of capital cities), through either the proposed location of the research centre, a regional research presence, or partnerships with regional organisations.

Applicants will respond to these mandatory criteria via questions in the application form.

Notwithstanding the use of 'must', 'shall', 'will' or other mandatory language, no other requirements in this EOI are to be treated as a 'mandatory criterion' or other mandatory requirement.

4.2 Selection criteria

EOI applications must address all selection criteria. Applicants are strongly encouraged to support their claims with supporting documentation, including via letters of support.

Criterion 1: Intended research focus (20%)

Provide a statement of up to 1,500 words outlining:

- the applicant's (and individual consortium members if appropriate) proposed high level research focus (including subareas of research) and how this aligns with the [research themes in section 5](#)
- how the applicant's proposed research focus will provide benefits for the forest and wood products industries
- how the applicant's proposal aligns with the [aims and objectives of AFWI set out in section 1.1](#).

Criterion 2: Research capacity (20% weighting)

Provide a statement of up to 1,500 words outlining:

- evidence of delivering applied research for forest and wood products industries
- information about the applicant organisation's or consortium's relevant applied research capacity and how the proposed personnel will contribute to the research centre, including the names of the proposed lead researchers and their
 - positions and roles
 - research areas of focus
 - primary area of expertise
 - relevant citations.

Criterion 3: Funding and administration (20% weighting)

Provide a statement of up to 1,500 words outlining:

- additional funding and resources that the applicant's organisation or consortium will commit to the AFWI research centre, if successful
- the applicant's proposed indirect costs for administration and core funding (noting the maximum cap of 10% of indirect costs which applies to these categories of funding)
- evidence of implementing similar sized entities, including managing financial, risk and administration processes, and approaches to monitoring and reporting.

Criterion 4: Training to build researcher capacity (20% weighting)

Provide a statement of up to 1,500 words outlining:

- how the applicant intends to build future research capacity and capability for forest and wood products industries, including specific commitments
- how the applicant would use AFWI funding to identify and train the next generation of researchers (including higher degree and research fellows) and provide opportunities for further development or qualifications.

Criterion 5: Capability to form partnerships with industry (20% weighting)

Provide a statement of up to 1,500 words outlining:

- evidence of the applicant organisation's or consortium's experience working collaboratively with forest and wood products industries to undertake research, including
 - details on any previous projects and funding supported by industry and whether that research led to industry adoption and outcomes.

5 Anticipated research themes

The anticipated research themes should be considered when drafting EOI applications. Applicants should demonstrate their ability to deliver against a particular research theme and its subthemes, or across multiple themes.

These themes are to provide guidance for the EOI process. AFWI may also consider other themes. AFWI's research focus will also be informed by the AFWI strategic plan and industry engagement.

5.1 Climate change solutions

Forestry and forest products have the potential to support the goal of a net zero emissions economy by 2050. There are opportunities to add value to the industry through innovation focusing on:

- reducing industry emissions
- the role of forestry in carbon capture and sequestration
- assisting in the substitution of emissions intense materials with low-carbon forest product alternatives
- carbon capture by wood products.

5.2 Sustainable forests for our future

Opportunities to advance research into our unique forests for a sustainable future include:

- tree breeding and genetics
- digital technology for forest management, monitoring and inventory
- improved silvicultural management
- First Nations peoples' participation in production forest management
- natural capital accounting and maximising multiple forest benefits
- management of biodiversity, conservation and threatened species in a production landscape
- management of forest health, pests and diseases, including biosecurity
- fire management in a changing climate in the production landscape
- farm forestry in a productive landscape.

5.3 Making the most of our available wood fibre

Innovation to make the most of our wood fibre resources could focus on:

- product segregation and greater value recovery from existing resources
- wood and paper products
- innovative value adding to wood fibre
- biomaterial development

- new engineered wood solutions for construction
- improved supply chain
- transport logistics
- safety improvements, including fatigue management
- improved processing efficiency
- digital technologies, sensing machine learning and artificial intelligence applications in processing
- increasing wood fibre products contribution to the bioeconomy and circular economy
- optimising resource properties.

6 Application process

Before submitting your EOI application, you must:

- complete the EOI application form
- provide all the information requested
- address all mandatory criteria and selection criteria
- include all [required documents](#) to support your application
- submit your application to AFWI.research@aff.gov.au by 6:00 pm Canberra time on: 6 December 2023 (closing time).

EOI applications that are not submitted by the closing time will not be accepted, unless the EOI application was received after the closing time solely due to mishandling by the department.

Subject to the clarification process set out below, no additional material or information will be accepted after the closing time, unless requested in writing by the department.

If an applicant finds an error in their application or believes they need to update it with additional important information after submitting it, the applicant should contact the department immediately on AFWI.research@aff.gov.au. The department is not obliged to accept any additional information, nor requests from an applicant to correct their application after the closing date and time.

If the department finds an error in an application or information that is missing from an application, the department may ask for clarification or additional information from an applicant where that clarification or information does not change the nature of the application. However, the department can refuse to accept any additional information from an applicant that would change the application after the closing time.

Applicants should download the EOI application form from the department's [Australian Forest and Wood Innovations webpage](#) before commencing their application.

6.1 Required documents

The EOI application must include:

- the completed EOI application form
- where relevant, letters of support from each consortium member, detailing their in-kind support or cash commitments – signed by an individual with appropriate authority in the organisation
- evidence of support from other appropriate organisations
- other relevant documents, including those referenced in the EOI application form.

A letter of support from the management of any collaborating organisation is also required if the proposed research centre will make significant use of or share the collaborating organisation's resources such as staff, accommodation, equipment or space.

Additional evidence, such as letters of support and other referenced attachments, will not be counted toward the word limit for selection criterion statements.

All information provided in your application will be treated as confidential. It will not be disclosed to anyone other than those personnel who require such disclosure in order to perform their duties in connection with the assessment and selection process, or to support contracting of successful applicants by UTAS.

6.2 Questions during EOI application process

For questions during the EOI application period, email the department at AFWI.research@aff.gov.au.

The department will respond to emailed questions as soon as possible. If relevant, the same information will be published on the department's [Australian Forest and Wood Innovations webpage](#) for transparency for other applicants. Applicant confidential information contained in a question (that is expressly nominated as such by the relevant applicant and agreed to by the department) will be removed. All published questions will be anonymised.

Potential applicants should regularly check the department's [Australian forest and Wood Innovations webpage](#) for updated information about the EOI process.

The questions period will close at 5:00 pm Canberra time on 29 November 2023 (one week before the EOI application closing date). Only questions about using or submitting the application form will be answered after this date.

The department will acknowledge receipt of EOI applications by email within 2 business days of receiving the application. If you have not received acknowledgement of your EOI by 11 December 2023 (3 business days after the closing date), please contact the department immediately at AFWI.research@aff.gov.au. Applicants are responsible for ensuring the department has received their application.

7 Assessment and selection process

EOI applications will be assessed against the mandatory criteria and selection criteria in these guidelines.

The department will assess all applications for eligibility against the mandatory criteria. Any application that does not meet the mandatory criteria will be excluded from the EOI process.

The Assessment Panel will then assess eligible applications against the selection criteria. The Assessment Panel will then make recommendations to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, who will make a recommendation to UTAS identifying 2 preferred research centres.

As part of the EOI process, the department will also be receiving details from UTAS of the Launceston research centre's broad program of research and focus.

In making its recommendations of preferred applicants, the Assessment Panel may take into consideration:

- the research focus proposed by applicants and the UTAS Launceston research centre
- the extent to which the research focus proposed by applicants and the UTAS research centre cover similar research themes.

This will support diversity in the research focus across the 3 research centres supported by the AFWI.

The Assessment Panel may:

- obtain and consider additional information (whether that information is obtained through the EOI process or by other means) relevant to an application; and
- use any additional information available when assessing an application against a selection criterion.

7.1 Who will approve the preferred EOI applications?

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry will make a recommendation to UTAS on which organisations have been identified via this EOI process.

As the decision-maker for this EOI process, the Minister will recommend 2 preferred research centres to UTAS based on the recommendations of the Assessment Panel.

There is no appeal mechanism for decisions to recommend or not recommend an EOI applicant as a preferred applicant.

7.2 Notification of application outcomes

The department will advise all EOI applicants about the outcome of their application.

The preferred applicants will then work with UTAS to enter into an agreement for their research centre.

7.3 Feedback on EOI applications

The department will provide feedback to the preferred and unsuccessful EOI applications if requested in writing by the applicant.

8 Probity

The department will make sure that the EOI process is fair and incorporates appropriate safeguards against fraud, unlawful activities and other inappropriate conduct.

8.1 Conflicts of interest

A conflict of interest means any matter which could:

- prejudice the impartial conduct of the EOI process, or
- prevent an applicant from performing any resulting agreement (with UTAS) diligently and independently.

As part of the EOI application form, applicants will be asked to declare any perceived or existing conflicts of interests; or that, to the best of the applicant's knowledge, there is no conflict of interest.

If an applicant later identifies an actual, apparent, or perceived conflict of interest, the applicant must inform the department in writing immediately.

8.2 Confidential information

Subject to the below conditions, all information provided in an application will be treated as confidential. It will not be disclosed to anyone other than those personnel who require such disclosure in order to perform their duties in connection with the EOI process, or to support a preferred applicant entering into an agreement with UTAS.

The department will share with UTAS all information submitted by applicants that are recommended to UTAS as preferred applicants.

The department will not be in breach of any requirements in relation to confidentiality, if disclosure is otherwise authorised or required by law or Commonwealth policy, or the information is disclosed to:

- the Assessment Panel and other Commonwealth employees and contractors to help the department manage the EOI process effectively
- employees and contractors of the department so the department can research, assess, monitor and analyse an applicant or an application as part of the EOI process
- the Auditor-General, Ombudsman or Privacy Commissioner
- the responsible Minister or Parliamentary Secretary
- a House or a Committee of the Australian Parliament.