

Premier Gordon Campbell
B.C. Market Outreach Network Announcement, North Vancouver
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Check Against Delivery

Today I want you to look at one of the most important exports we have in this province – forest products.

There is nothing more valuable in British Columbia than the forest industry. It has been and will continue to be the cornerstone of our economic well-being in the years ahead. Forty-six per cent of all British Columbia's exports are forest products.

I'm joined here today by Lorne Mayencourt, who is the MLA for Vancouver-Burrard; Ralph Sultan, the MLA for West Vancouver-Capilano; and Katherine Whittred, the MLA for North Vancouver-Lonsdale.

They will tell you – as will any MLA in this province – there's not a constituency, town or service in the province that does not depend on a healthy and vital forest industry.

Two hundred and ten thousand jobs are directly and indirectly affected by the forest industry in our province. Three-quarters of our rural communities depend on forestry for anywhere from 10 to 46 per cent of their economic activity.

The world in which we are competing has changed, which creates an enormous challenge. For generations British Columbians took their forest industry for granted. They took the productivity of their forest workers for granted. They took their international markets for granted.

We all know today we can no longer do that. We are in a global competition, and as in any competition – whether it's an Olympic competition or a forest industry competition – British Columbia deserves to come first, and that's what we expect to do.

We have all been affected by the softwood lumber concerns imposed on us by the United States. Those protectionist measures have reinforced the fact that it's important for us to expand our markets – to look beyond our largest customer to building new markets, to maintaining and enhancing our share of market activity in other jurisdictions around the world.

We know that over the last decade our market share has shrunk, in Japan, for example. That is not satisfactory. Our responsibility to the people of our province, to the people who work in this industry and to the people who invest in this industry is to create an environment in which our market share can expand.

To do that we have to pursue our customers actively and aggressively. We cannot take them for granted any more than we can take our industry for granted.

Mike de Jong, our Minister of Forests, is going to be revisiting China this year. I visited last year with a delegation from the forest industry, and there are enormous opportunities there. China has entered the World Trade Organization, and they are looking at an economic growth rate of about seven per cent a year.

You can drive from Shanghai, where we were, out to the airport and see a lot of housing units built not out of wood but out of concrete. It would be more cost-effective, more flexible and less expensive for the Chinese marketplace to adopt wood products as one of their primary building products.

So this year Mike de Jong will be going to Beijing to work on convincing the Chinese that for the 2008 Summer Olympic Games it would be a great idea to use B.C. forest products to build their athletes' village.

We also see what is taking place in India, which has the fastest-growing middle class in the world. They are expecting economic growth of between five and six per cent. We believe that economic growth presents enormous opportunities for our forest industry, and we want to take advantage of that.

As we work to obtain free and open access to our American markets –our primary customers – we have to build and expand our markets in Japan, in China and in India.

We have to be sure our customers in Europe understand this one thing: There is no better product than B.C. forest products. There is no better industry than the B.C. forest industry to deliver to them and to their customers to meet their needs.

We undertook as a government to promote our forest industries on behalf of all of the people of British Columbia. So today I'm pleased to announce that part of that program will be a \$3-million B.C. Market Outreach Network to promote B.C.'s leadership in sustainable forest management.

We will allow no mistruth to go unanswered. We intend to provide our customers with the facts about how B.C. manages its forests, about how B.C. workers work in our forests and about the quality of the products we present to our customers.

We are also announcing a \$3.8-million promotion of B.C. forest products in key Asian markets. We are going to market our coastal forest products particularly, in existing and emerging markets, because we believe there is enormous opportunity for our communities, for our workers and for our province.

I'm now going to ask Mike de Jong to introduce those who will be sitting on the advisory board for the outreach network. We will accomplish far more when we work together.

To all the people of British Columbia I say this: If you ever hear that our forest industry and our forest workers are not performing to the maximum, are not caring about the

future of our forests, or are not leading in terms of sustainable management, you're not getting the facts.

British Columbia forest workers and forest companies are in fact leading globally in their management of our forest land base. We intend to take that message across the province, across the continent and around the world. We will work together so everyone will know that British Columbia is number 1 in forest products around the world. Thank you very much.