NZ award winners in tune on sustainable wood design

COVER STORY P15
The anecdotal evidence suggests that, at least over the past few weeks and despite the coronavirus, the timber industry and construction and building sectors have been busy.

The general manager of the Australian Timber Importers Federation John Halkett says that in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic it is easy to forget that timber and forestry industries are still coming to terms with supply realities in the aftermath of the devastating summer bushfires.

“While construction and building activity did take an appreciable dip towards the end of 2019 and into 2020, current reports suggest that activity has picked up, with some timber wholesalers and resellers telling us they are busy handling significant orders,” he said.

Mr Halkett said ATIF continued to operate during the angst over COVID-19, notwithstanding the requirements for social distancing and isolation. Discussions with federal government officials were ongoing in relation to various matters, he said. However, a meeting scheduled with the Assistant Minister for Forestry Senator Jonathan Duniam to discuss some key issues had been postponed. The ATIF board meeting scheduled for May had also been deferred.

“Routine construction and building activity, and the need for rebuilding of the more than 5000 structures destroyed during the bushfires, indicates that the demand for timber products in the second half of the year, assuming the coronavirus is brought under control, should be buoyant,” Mr Halkett said.

“Even before the bushfires, demand for imported timber products was strong, as domestic production continues to be constrained by resource availability,” he said.

It is acknowledged that with...
The united voice for Australia's forest industries

THE number of loans to owner-occupiers for the purchase or construction of a new home increased by 5.8% in the three months to February compared to the previous three months, providing further evidence that the housing market is heading into 2020 looking up.

The ABS this week released monthly data tracking lending activity including lending within the residential property market for both new and existing homes purchased by owner occupiers, investors and businesses.

“These results, along with other leading indicators such as new home sales and building approvals data, continue to confirm that the housing market reached a turning point mid-way through 2019,” Housing Industry Association economist Angela Lillicrap said.

“The total number of loans to owner occupiers in the three months to February was up by 5.4% compared to the previous quarter to be up by 12.3% compared to the same period last year. This was driven by lending for new homes which was 12.7% higher than this time last year, versus established dwellings which were 1.3%.”

First home buyers remained active in the market, with the largest number of loans issued to first-home buyers during the month in over a decade.

Ms Lillicrap said investor lending was also improving, up by 3.4% in the quarter to be 6.3% higher than the same time last year.

“These results show that at least until the end of February, we were looking at solid home building activity across most regions in 2020,” she said.

Across the states, the number of loans to owner-occupiers for the purchase and construction of dwellings in the three months to February 2020 was higher than a year earlier in Victoria (25%), Queensland (20.7%), South Australia (18%), Western Australia (12.1%) and New South Wales (6.6%). Lending declined over this period by 6.8% in Tasmania.

From P 2

The situation in relation to hardwoods will also be challenging, with past pressure on forest resources in Indonesia and Malaysia possibly limiting the capacity of these countries to expand on current supply levels.”

More broadly, Mr Halkett said some confusion continued to exist regarding the status of forest-based industries as parts of the economy shut shop in an endeavour to deal with the coronavirus threat. Recently, Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Minister David Littleproud said that forestry activity was regarded as part of the agriculture and primary industry.

“There hasn’t been anything singling us [forestry] out as separate from others in terms of ‘essential’ as yet, but also nothing saying we’re not. Ambiguous I know but that’s what we have,” Mr Halkett said.

“So, by default, the timber industry is considered ‘essential’ simply because no one has said otherwise. Clearly, forestry is not on the list of non-essential businesses and is reasonably considered essential – at least until further notice.

On the up and up… greater spending on housing.

Angela Lillicrap… turning point mid-way through 2019.
Bushfire recovery must be priority for new NSW government regional office

THE Australian Forest Products Association has commended the NSW Government for creating a new Department of Regional NSW.

Deputy Premier John Barilaro said the department would be a voice for regional people who are were already trying to recover from drought and bushfires, but now had the added burden of the COVID-19 crisis.

The CEO of AFPA Ross Hampton said: “COVID-19 is an issue we’re all dealing with, but I think many in our cities forget that as well, regional Australia is still dealing with a long running drought and recovering from the ‘black summer’ bushfires.

He said the decision by NSW to bring together a number of state government agencies under one roof to grapple with regional issues was to be commended.

Appointed secretary Gary Barnes understood regional NSW and had done a great job representing it in his current role as coordinator-general for regional NSW in the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment.

“Mr Barnes is committed to regional NSW,” Mr Hampton said.

“However, we do urge the new department to set bushfire recovery as a major priority,” he said.

“Forest industries are dealing with COVID-19, and will continue to do their part to support federal and state government efforts to bring it under control,” he said.

“Bushfire recovery is a major priority,” Mr Hampton said.

“The forest product industries are dealing with COVID-19, and will continue to do their part to support federal and state government efforts to bring it under control,” he said.

“Bushfire recovery is a major priority,” Mr Hampton said.

Meanwhile NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian has announced the establishment of Resilience NSW, an agency devoted to “world-leading disaster preparedness and recovery”.

“We know NSW has had a tough couple of months,” the Premier said. “The fire season was horrific, and one of the true heroes of NSW remains Shane Fitzsimmons.”

Mr Fitzsimmons, 51, has been widely praised for his leadership during the horror bushfire season just ended. His new role comes with the announcement that he will be standing down from the Rural Fire Service after 35 years of service. He joined the RFS in 1985 and held a number of senior roles until his appointment as commissioner in 2008.

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Will NZ Forest Minister’s log exports bombshell ignite further open conflict?

DENNIS NEILSON

THE COVID-19 lockdown in New Zealand seems to be the catalyst to ignite the long-simmering tension between New Zealand forest owners, the leaders of the NZ Wood Processing and Manufacturing Association and the Minister of Forests over the right of tree owners to sell their produce on the free market.

Shane Jones, who is also infrastructure minister, has talked up a ban on log exports “so wood could be used as a priority in New Zealand”.

The Amalgamated Workers Union NZ has called for help to introduce forestry quotas and regulation to prevent “foreign-driven forest obliteration” after the lockdown.

Talking on radio Newstalk on Monday, the minister said he wanted to “help Kiwis first”.

“How are we going to generate jobs in the Bay of Plenty and the East Coast and Northland if we don’t have guaranteed access to raw material and a certain supply of logs,” he said.

Soon after gaining office in 2017, the newly appointed Minister of Forests reportedly attempted to have log exports banned or restricted. But he was informed that this would breach World Trade Organisation rules.

He then backed off, and in fact enthusiastically supported the forest-owning sector by announcing a ‘billion tree’ planting program, and also by rewriting overseas investment rules to loosen the need for foreign investors to be required to sell logs to domestic processors – which most forest owners do anyway.

Mr Jones said to get regional New Zealand re-booted after the lockdown was lifted would be to introduce “a forest policy that favours domestic production, domestic manufacturing and domestic employment, and not too much of a diversion of sending all our logs overseas and not having enough raw materials to create jobs in New Zealand”.

The statement and timing is unfortunate.

Firstly, the minister is wrong on two counts. NZ forest owners do not send all their logs overseas, and there are plenty of logs to go around.

Secondly, his statement comes hard on the heels of...
Timber & Forestry E-News

Issue 603
April 9, 2020

Tracing wood from forests to the shelf

A NEW partnership will enable companies to understand the journey of wood products through the supply chain from forest to store shelf.

Combining best-in-class traceability, verification and visualisation, the timber traceability platform introduced by DoubleHelix in partnership with Sourcemap and Bluenumber makes critical supply-chain information available to different stakeholders:

Compliance and procurement officers can organise huge volumes of supply chain data and due diligence evidence; company leaders can quickly understand supply chain risk; ESG investors or regulatory authorities can evaluate sustainability metrics; and consumers can explore where their wood products originate.

“The partnership has a common objective to help leaders in the industry be confident in the products they bring to market,” DoubleHelix CEO Darren Thomas said.

“This is achieved through better visibility, understanding and control of their supply chain practices,” he said.

The three companies are leaders in their respective fields: DoubleHelix provides supply chain discovery, risk assessment, mitigation, and verification services to buyers of wood products. On-the-ground experts check supply chain practices, supported by a suite of scientific tools such as DNA and isotope testing to independently verify data. Bluenumber brings technical expertise to digitise, analyse and ensure confidentiality of supply chain data through blockchain, machine learning, and other emerging technologies. Sourcemap provides the platform to present, visualise and communicate complex supply chain data in a simple, accessible and attractive format.

From P 5

the final sad chapter coming down on the failed experiment by the minister – and others – to encourage the move from log exports to wood processing.

The minister reportedly encouraged a company called Spectrum to move from its (then) profitable forest owning, log harvesting, transport and log trading business in Northland into sawmilling.

As it result it bought not one but three sawmills – Prime sawmill in Gisborne, Tregoweth sawmill in Te Kuiti and the (then closed – and which will never reopen) Waverley sawmill in Waverley.

All three ‘investments’ failed, even after the NZ government and a major trust poured many millions of dollars of subsidy money into propping up this doomed “wood processing” experiment.

With two sawmills already failed, last week Spectrum announced it had “sold” its last remaining (pre-lockdown operating) Prime sawmill back to the previous owners, the Gisborne ratepayer-owned Trust Tairawhiti.

The trust had already ‘invested’ $17 million of Gisborne ratepayers’ money into this jinxed sawmill before this latest transaction.

There are very few instances in New Zealand where there is a case to open a sawmill, and there is a reason why almost 55 sawmills have failed since 2003 with most/all not related to log prices.

Unlike timber-deficit Australia, New Zealand would be the worst country in the world (other than perhaps Uruguay) to build a new sawmill, or even to buy an existing one, apart from the three major structural mills cutting timber for the domestic construction market.

We hope that Mr Jones was just politicking on the radio yesterday.
CALENDAR OF EVENTS 2020/2021 AUSTRALASIA & GLOBAL

JUNE
11: Innovation in Action Conference – Wellington, NZ. Showcasing latest trends and innovations in the offsite sector in New Zealand and internationally, covering residential, commercial and infrastructure. Speakers will present an overview of the economic, regulatory, skills and sustainability landscape shaping the sector. Contact Jessica on jessica@prefabnz.com

SEPTEMBER
1-3: DANA New Zealand Forest Industry Status and Outlook Conference and field trip – Emerald Hotel, Gisborne, New Zealand. For further information see: https://danaevents.co.nz/2020gisborne/ or contact Julie Bell admin@dana.co.nz

OCTOBER
21st Australian Timber Design Awards – Sydney, NSW, Australia (date and venue to be advised). Entries close June 1. Voting for the People’s Choice Award is open from August to September. Visit the new awards website for information and registration instructions. www.timberdesignawards.com.au

MARCH 2021

EVENTS LISTS MAY HAVE BEEN, OR ARE LIKELY TO BE CANCELLED OR POSTPONED DUE TO CORONAVIRUS TRAVEL, SOCIAL DISTANCING AND OTHER RESTRICTIONS. PLEASE CHECK THE RELEVANT WEBSITES.

MAY
13-14: Quebec Forest Industry Council 2018 Convention – Quebec City, Canada. Covering the interests of softwood and hardwood sawing, peeling, pulp, paper, cardboard and panels and manufacturers of engineered wood products. For additional information visit www.cifq.qc.ca

19-20: FastMarkets – RISI-DANA 7th annual Forest Investment Conference – Convene Conference Centre, New York City. Register at www.risiinfo.com/events/ or contact conferences@risi.com

AUGUST

SEPTEMBER
27-30: Council on Forest Engineering Annual Meeting – Corvallis, Oregon, USA. Following a successful 2019 meeting in Hungary and Austria, this conference will be the second part of the two-year joint annual meeting collaboration. For additional information see: www.cofe.org

OCTOBER
21-23: Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) Annual Conference – Vancouver, BC, Canada. The 2020 SFI Annual Conference will be focused on how forests can make a difference when it comes to so many of the most important sustainability challenges faced in the forest sector and communities. For additional information see: sfcconference.org

NOVEMBER
1-5: 3rd DANA African Forest Industry Investment Conference and field trip – Durban, South Africa. Planning under way. Two day optional field trip (November 19-20). Register interest with Julie Bell admin@dana.co.nz

DECEMBER
1-3: International Forest Business Conference and Tour – Sopot, Poland. A two-day conference on megatrends that shape forest and wood industry sectors. The event will highlight the transformation of forest-related businesses towards a low-carbon bioeconomy, discuss tensions between sustainability and cost competitiveness, and call attention to new green innovations. Field trip on December 7 to IKEA and Egger mills. The event will welcome institutional investors from across the globe to discuss investment opportunities in timber to diversify their portfolios and achieve healthy returns. Register at www.fba-events.com or contact karolina@forest-analytics.com

• Please send any events listings to John Halkett via email: johnh@timberandforestrynews.com

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YOUR PARTNER FOR THE PERFECT CUT
Construction allies call for answers after ‘partial win’ on credit insurance

FOUR key timber industry allies, the Frames and Truss Manufacturers Association, Timber Merchants Australia, Timber and Building Materials Association and the Timber Trade Industrial Association, have welcomed the move by QBE to partially reverse its decision earlier this week to unilaterally cut trade credit insurance coverage to construction supply chain companies.

“What we saw earlier this week was an extraordinary decision, made without consultation, to remove a basic commercial protection from policy holders, many with years of insurance payments under their belts,” FTMA CEO Kersten Gentle said.

“Even though we are pleased that QBE has made the call to reinstate 7000 of 9000 policies, albeit at 50% of the original coverage, we believe they haven’t gone far enough,” she said.

“With all other insurers looking to QBE as a leader in relation to credit insurance, we need to ensure there are stronger processes in place for accountability,” TABMA CEO David Little said.

“Otherwise, what guarantees do we have that this won’t happen in the future with QBE or any other insurer?”

“Even with limits reinstated to 50%, this is still a problem with many of our members who have had this decision imposed on them having paid hundreds of thousands, even millions of dollars in premiums, over extended periods of time, without ever having made a claim,” Timber Trade Industrial Association CEO Brian Beecroft said.

Ann Sanfey of MGA-TMA added: “These policies should continue to receive 100% coverage. Now we have members who need to spend additional time appealing the decision by QBE, while still trying to run their businesses without any help from an insurer that should really be their partner and continuing to support economic activity during these difficult times.”

The four industry representative associations are now calling for governments to consider establishing some form of authority by which insurers like QBE can be held accountable for unilaterally undermining the viability of a whole supply chain, which is continuing to support manufacturing, construction and employment through the difficult economic conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the end of the day, knowing that QBE was not accountable to any authority and could “blacklist” firms and whole sectors with zero justification, made the whole sector feel extremely uneasy moving forward, the associations said.

Social distancing campaign targets construction, building sites

A NATIONAL advertising campaign has been launched to promote social distancing and strict hygiene on the nation’s building sites.

Running for the next four weeks, the campaign is targeted to everyone working in the building and construction sector.

"Business owners, employers, construction workers, subcontractors, site managers – everyone must be accountable for social distancing and strict hygiene not only on building sites but also off site when on breaks and before and after shifts,” the Master Builders Australia said.

Building and construction work provides the livelihoods of one in 10 Australians and supports the viability of nearly 400,000 small businesses.

“It’s important that the health and wellbeing of everyone in our industry and community remains our top priority which is why the industry is continuing to embed social distancing and strict hygiene practices on site,” MBA said.

“It’s also why we have joined forces with the CFMEU and the AWU to promote an even stronger safety culture as our industry and our community faces the Covid-19 crisis.”
FWPA program increases innovative online learning for children at home

FOREST and Wood Products Australia’s ForestLearning program focuses on providing free quality resources for teachers, parents and students.

The goal is to successfully integrate forestry and sustainable wood product information into young people’s learning, while aligning with Australian curriculum outcomes.

With much of this innovative content designed for online delivery, the program is strongly placed to offer an expanding number of learning opportunities to students during this current unprecedented time, with an ever-increasing demand for options that can be accessed from home.

The activities of the ForestLearning program are designed to educate children about the sustainable forest and wood product industry, as they grow up to become leaders, policy makers and consumers. At the same time, we hope to inspire young people to consider career options in the sector.

Last year, more than 150 Australian students spoke in real-time to forest workers out in the field – all without leaving their classroom!

The ‘Forester Time’ initiative was run by ForestLearning and the Primary Industries Education Foundation Australia (PIEFA), and allowed students to learn more about the daily work of foresters.

Following this successful pilot stage, ‘Forester Time’ will be back during term two of 2020, connecting teachers, parents and students with workers via Zoom. If you’re a forester, or work in the timber industry and are keen to be involved, contact info@forestlearning.edu.au

We are also converting more of our existing multimedia video clips and associated worksheets into online quizzes. They’re fun, informative and user-friendly for both parents and kids.

Since launching last September, our ForestVR™ initiative has allowed students to experience forest and mill environments first-hand through virtual reality. This immersive technology provides teachers and parents with novel ways to engage at-home learners, by allowing them to visit places they wouldn’t otherwise have access to.

Phase two of ForestVR™ is currently under development, and is being made possible by funding from the federal government. It will focus on themes including the unique nature of Australian forests, their management, agroforestry, and career options. Delays in production due to lockdowns mean a 2021 launch date is looking most likely.

As an online one-stop-shop for forest education, www.forestlearning.edu.au is in a strategic position to respond quickly to the emerging online requirements of Australia’s schools, and to equip young people with an appreciation of the sustainable nature of our forest and wood products.

• Beth Welden is manager, ForestLearning, a program run by Forest and Wood Products Australia.
NOW the fire season has subsided, we should have a national conversation that recognises some core elements.

The first is that Australia should adopt a leadership role internationally, and substantive actions domestically, to address climate change. The drought and fires in southern Australia are among the climate change impacts that climate models predict, and only a foretaste of what will follow as temperatures rise. Without climate action, we’re consigning future generations to many more summers like the one just passed.

The second is that we should not foreclose options for managing our forests better in the face of these new challenges. In the short term, we should certainly take measures to protect wildlife populations. In the longer term, protecting wildlife and other forest values is more complicated than just creating national parks; this season’s fires, as well as others previously, demonstrate that.

We should explore a range of measures in different parts of our forests, reflecting the different ecosystems, values and risks. In some places, this will mean no intervention, as at present; in others, it might mean trialling forest thinning (as American forest managers have been doing), or quite different fire management practices informed and enabled by the Aboriginal custodians of the country.

The third is that we need to invest more in the day-to-day management of our forests, and in the restoration of forests we’ve lost. Public expenditure on forest management other than firefighting has decreased significantly over the past decades as governments slim budgets and staff and redirect priorities to urban Australia.

Governments have similarly disinvested in supporting farmers, other private landowners and indigenous communities to manage their land and forests sustainably.

We must invest more in the daily management of forests.

The damages from the summer fire season and the implications for future forest management must not be ‘put on the back burner’ while the nation comes to grips with COVID-19. PETER KANOWSKI, in the second of two articles, focuses on some core elements for national conversation. (The first part of this article appeared in issue 601, March 26).

Neither research nor operational capacity are now adequate for the forest management challenges we face on public, private and Indigenous land. Australia has an enormously competent workforce of professional and volunteer firefighters, and an increasingly sophisticated array of firefighting technology and assets. But, as this season’s fires are reminding us, what firefighters can do in extreme conditions is limited. We’re going to need to make their task less difficult and dangerous by better addressing the management of our fire-prone forests.

• Peter Kanowski is Professor of Forestry in the Fenner School of Environment and Society at ANU. He was a member of the 2003-4 COAG National Bushfire Inquiry, and of the 2011 Australia State of Environment Committee.

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2020 Wood-Resene design awards point way to a sustainable recovery

Taking the use of renewable construction materials to new levels

MICHAEL SMITH

THE planned gala evening to announce the winners (and highly commended entries) of the 2020 NZ Wood-Resene Timber Design Awards was, regrettably, cancelled – in line with public-gathering recommendations from the Ministry of Health. Nevertheless, interest remained high in all sectors of the wider industry – from forestry to architectural and engineering practices – ahead of the recent online announcements.

Debbie Fergie, promotions manager for the Wood Processors and Manufacturers Association, says entrants submitted an especially exciting range of designs across the 11 categories.

“Timber design has been formally celebrated through these awards for 45 years now, and each time our judges see new and increasingly innovative ways to employ timber,” Ms Fergie said.

The Resene Supreme Award (and the Residential Design Award) went to the Tuarangi Road, Auckland home ‘Outaspace’, by TOA Architects. According to the judges, the project’s prominent use of CLT construction confirms timber’s ability to provide structural strength and thermal mass – while also integrating sympathetically with other structural elements on a sloping site with significant access issues.

Craig Wilson, associate director of TOA Architects, says: “We speak about TOA being Maori for strength, bravery and cutting new ground, and it took those attributes in spades to be able to craft this project. We wanted to be honest to the properties of timber and this design could not have been achieved in any other material.”

St Patrick’s Church in Lincoln, Canterbury, by WSP Opus, was the deserved winner of the new Public Design Award. The panel noted how the sensitive design made reference to traditional church architecture, and enthused about the build’s exemplary use of wood (the 3D roof, column support system, and repurposed timber altar and pews).

Strengthen, Bravery and Cutting New Ground

Tuarangi Rd, ‘Outaspace’, Auckland… winner of the Resene Supreme Award. Photo: David Straight

Continued on p 13

New Zealand Innovation

Is the NZ forest sector internationally competitive?

Taking the use of renewable construction materials to new levels

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This year’s other new award (Sustainable Development) went to the Boat Shed, Lyttelton, by Christchurch City Council, which achieved a NZ Green Building Council 9 Homestar rating. The judges noted that the project “pioneers the use of wood fibre insulation in New Zealand, which has been applied to the exterior of the CLT structure for an optimised hygrothermal (heat and moisture flow) performance”.

Meanwhile, the NZ Specialty Timber category was awarded to the Ron Ball Studio, CSO Centre, Christchurch Town Hall, by Warren & Mahoney. The panel made particular reference to the rich warmth of the building material (southland beech) – and how the design “merges acoustic engineering and architecture to create an intimate shrine to music”.

Among the other award winners (previously featured in Timber & Forestry e-news) were Lindis Lodge, Omarama (Engineering Innovation), Saltwater Creek Cycleway Bridge, Nelson (Exterior Structure Design), and the National Library Auditorium, Wellington (Interior Design).

Brian Stanley, chair of the WPMA, says the projects highlight how those individuals and companies who work in wood “are taking the use of this renewable construction material to new levels”.

He adds that the awards celebrate the use of the country’s “renewable natural resource base (forests) and its manufacturing ingenuity (wood processing firms) to deliver construction material with the lowest carbon profile”.

In a nod to our fight against the pandemic and subsequent push to recover, Mr Stanley says the economy must be reset “to support and integrate local innovation, manufacturing and construction.”

He says it’s vital to ensure the New Zealand wood industry is not undermined by unfair overseas competition, the construction sector is incentivised to work with domestically produced wood, and the design community is supplied with the knowledge and tools to use New Zealand wood to best effect.

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Ron Eddy retires after 40 years in industry

RESPECTED leader in wood protection on both sides of the Tasman, Ron Eddy is stepping down as managing director of TimTechChem International New Zealand after more than 40 years in the industry.

“The resignation doesn’t mean I have resigned my lifelong interest in the timber preservation industry and its contribution to the durability of wood,” Mr Eddy said.

Ron Eddy joined Hickson Timber South Africa in 1977 as marketing assistant and a year later was promoted to retail sales manager, and then marketing director and export manager, before being appointed general manager of the hardwood division employing more than 400 staff.

In 1989, Mr Eddy played a big part in the formation of the Koppers Hickson joint venture and was appointed managing director for New Zealand, Fiji and Japan. He was instrumental in having a new manufacturing facility built in Otahuhu, Auckland. Koppers Hickson became the best performing company in the Koppers Group when measured on a ‘balanced scorecard’.

Mr Eddy resigned in 1997 to take over as CEO of the New Zealand Institute of Management and at the same time returned to Auckland University part time to complete a Master of Management degree (Strategy).

In 2001, he returned to wood protection by forming TimTech Chemicals Ltd with Mike Brown, former general manager of Chemicca Ltd.

Mr Eddy was a seasoned traveller studying, promoting and presenting on wood preservation in many countries, including South Africa (his birthplace), the US, Canada, UK and the Asia-Pacific. He was a regular delegate to world conferences of the International Research Group on Wood Protection (IRG).

He says he is looking forward to spending more time with his family and four grandchildren.

Global chemical company Azels acquired Chemcolour in 2017, then the largest shareholder in TimTechChem in New Zealand and Australia. Azels has significantly grown in the Asia-Pacific region during the last five years, establishing presence in 11 countries and opening more than 25 laboratories.

– JIM BOWDEN
China softwoods timber imports lowest in four years as coronavirus slows ports

The value of imported forest products to China dropped by $750 million year-on-year during January and February, with the biggest falls on the values of wood pulp and softwood lumber, reports the Wood Resource Quarterly.

The coronavirus epidemic in China has resulted in sharply reduced importation of forest products in early 2020. During January and February, the import value of logs, lumber, pulp and woodchips totaled $4.6 billion – down 26% and 14% respectively, from the same periods in 2018 and 2019.

From 2019 to 2020, the biggest percentage declines were seen in softwood lumber (-26% y-o-y) and softwood logs (-20%). The import value for wood pulp fell the most, just over $300 million, followed by softwood lumber, which was down $190 million.

Importation of softwood lumber to China by volume was estimated at 1.2 million cu m in February, the lowest monthly volume in four years. The two largest lumber suppliers, Russia and Canada, continued to be the major sources for lumber.

While Russian volumes were down 16% the first two months of 2020, they increased market share from 57% in early 2019 to 59% in early 2020. Canada’s share fell substantially, from 24% to 10% during the same period.

Another noteworthy change the past two years has been the expanded presence of lumber coming from Europe into the Chinese market, which accounted for about 18% of total imports in early 2020, up from 8% in 2018.

During January and February, China imported 5.1 million cu m of softwood logs, down from almost 5.7 million cu m in the same period last year. Total import value fell from $800 million to $640 million.

Record high log inventories (over 7 million cu m) at Chinese ports reduced demand for forest products as a consequence of the coronavirus and labor shortages at ports and wood processing facilities.

All log-supplying countries reduced shipments dramatically with the exception of New Zealand (only down 1% y-o-y) and Central Europe (Germany and the Czech Republic were up 200% and 320%).

Total import volumes to China in February 2020 were the lowest since February 2016.

The only major product that showed increases in import volume from early 2019 to early 2020 was hardwood chips, with a gain of 11% y-o-y. This was driven by higher production of predominantly hygiene paper products in January and February, and the expectation that this sector would continue to be strong into the second quarter.

Shipments from Vietnam and Chile jumped about 20%, while Australia shipped 3% less the first two months of 2020 as compared to the same period in 2019.

The import volume of wood pulp increased by almost 20% during the first two months of 2020 with noteworthy rises in shipments from Indonesia, Canada, Finland and Sweden.

We’ve been a leading force in air flow design for almost 3 decades, with 4-, 6-, 8-, and 12-bladed propellers, designed and manufactured exclusively for the lumber industry. Now, they are even more capable with higher- temperature capacity for certain applications. We combine this technology with unsurpassed customer service, design consultation and technical expertise, so whatever your air flow need, you can trust SmithCo to deliver.
Tall, straight and slender, the lodgepole is mainstay of Canada’s timber industry

LODGEPOLE Pine is a coniferous linchpin of forest ecosystems across a vast area that encompasses the western Canadian province of British Columbia and runs down the Rocky Mountains into the USA.

It is highly adaptable and can grow in all sorts of environments, from water-logged bogs to dry sandy soils.

Tall, straight and slender, it takes its name from the use of Canada’s First Peoples for tepees, and by subsequent settlers for the construction of buildings. Also, in the spring, indigenous Canadians would strip off long ribbons or ‘noodles’ of the sweet succulent inner bark. It would be eaten fresh or stored.

Lodgepole pine timber is a mainstay of British Colombia’s forest industry. It is likely that increasing volumes of lodgepole pine timber will be exported to Australia to support building and construction activity.

A special characteristic of the wood is that the tangential surface (the wide face of a flatsawn piece of lumber) has a multitude of dimples. These show up especially when the lighting is at a low angle or when the wood is stained.

Historically, lodgepole pine (Pinus contorta) has been used for railroad ties, mine timber, log cabins, furniture and cabinets, and a myriad of local uses.

Lodgepole pine cones can remain on trees for a decade, tightly closed and secured with resin, waiting for a forest fire to melt the seal. Once a fire has safely passed the parent tree, stored seeds are showered over fertile ash and a blanket of new seedlings shoots up ahead of any competition.

Unfortunately, lodgepole pine is the main host of the mountain pine beetle, which shares its territory and constantly attack trees. In summer, female beetles bore holes in the trunk and lay their eggs in galleries evacuated in the inner bark.

The beetles have a symbiotic partnership with blue stain fungus, which they carry in special sacs in their mouthparts. As beetles chew, the fungus colonises cells in the inner bark interfering with the tree’s flow of fluids, and disrupting its normal defence by producing a toxic resin.

The beetles get an easy ride and so does the fungus inside the insects’ chambers creating spores, ready to be spread the next summer by the beetles that emerge and go off to find another host tree.

‘Traditional’ extreme winters kill almost all beetle larvae, and healthy trees are able to live with, or fend off routine attacks by the remaining insects.

However, global warming has made the last few decades anything but routine. Mild winters have allowed beetle populations to explode, and the lodgepole pine’s defences have been overwhelmed. Infected wood turns a grim blue-grey, needles turn brown and healthy trees have died in huge numbers.

A staggering 18 million ha of forest has been affected, and Canadian authorities have spent or committed $2 billion to fight the beetle which is spreading dramatically beyond its normal range.
IFA/AFG position paper lists benefits and fells myths on native forest sector

The peak organisation representing some 1000 professional and scientific forest land managers and growers has released a position paper outlining the raft of socio-economic and environmental values active native forest management provides to Australia.

Institute of Foresters of Australia and Australian Forest Growers president Bob Gordon said the IFA/AFG had developed the position paper to ensure there was informed debate regarding timber harvesting in native forests.

“For too long groups which oppose native forest harvesting have tainted public discourse with sustained but often misinformed campaigning,” Mr Gordon said.

“These misleading arguments have placed the preservation of native forests on a pedestal, ignoring the multiple environmental, social and economic benefits sustainably and actively managed native forestry can provide.

Mr Gordon said the position paper focused on five key categories of benefit native forestry provided to Australia – socio-economic, biodiversity, climate change, water and fire.

“From a socio-economic perspective, utilising just a small portion of Australia’s large areas of native forest can meet domestic demand for high-quality hardwood timber products, reducing reliance on timber sourced from developing countries whose forests are not managed to the high environmental standards held in Australia.

“Importing more wood rather than harvesting in native forest is morally questionable given that Australia is among the world’s top five in per capita consumption of wood products.

“The sustainable management of native forests for timber production also provides a broad suite of flow-on socio-economic benefits, including road access for recreation, fire control, ecotourism and production of non-timber products such as honey,” Mr Gordon said.

“Native forest management has a vital role to play in addressing climate change, with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change recognising sustainable forest management as a viable strategy to maintain and enhance forest carbon stocks.

“The carbon storage potential of native forests is maximised in actively growing forests, with carbon transferred to wood products for long-term storage after harvesting, before the cycle begins again as new forests grow.”

Mr Gordon said this process enabled society to obtain timber and other wood products from a renewable, carbon neutral source, rather than relying entirely on fossil fuel intensive alternatives such as aluminium, concrete and steel, and coal or petroleum based fuels.

“Maintaining a strong native forest timber industry is also integral to reducing the risk of catastrophic bushfire events, which is more important than ever as Australia faces hotter and drier conditions as a result of climate change,” he said.

“This fire benefit is two-pronged. Firstly, active forest management significantly reduces potential fuel loads of fires and secondly, having experienced forest managers and timber crews on the ground and equipped with the skills and resources to mount rapid attacks is an ideal first response to any fire outbreaks.”

Going strong since 1935, the Institute of Foresters of Australia is a professional body with divisions in each state and the ACT, headed by divisional chairs and coordinated through volunteer committees.
Now in its 12th year, Timber & Forestry eNews has grown to be the Number 1 online weekly news journal for the forest and forest products industries – across Australia, New Zealand and internationally.

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