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Cut-backs but product still flows at AKD

COVER STORY P3



Responsible
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NZ Manufacturing Alliance presents government with blueprint for recovery

A NEW report released this week by a group representing New Zealand's manufacturing industries, including the Wood Processors and Manufacturers Association, outlines a blueprint to work with government to strengthen manufacturing capability and reduce trade barriers to support the nation's post-pandemic economic recovery.

A report by the New Zealand Manufacturing Alliance includes a range of policy proposals in the areas of innovation, capital and investment, trade, skills, procurement and achieving sustainable growth in a low-carbon economy.

The proposals are designed to address challenges to the sector's future including growing trade protectionism, the importance of adding value to basic commodities, transition to zero carbon, skills shortages, and the shift to the fourth industrial revolution.

The report highlights the crucial contribution manufacturing makes to the



On the table... guideline to grow wood manufacturing and jobs in New Zealand.

economy, accounting for 10% of New Zealand's GDP and employment, more than half of exports and a third of business R&D expenditure. It also underpins the success of other key sectors.

The alliance says a strong manufacturing sector is crucial to New Zealand's future prosperity. The pandemic has highlighted the weaknesses of globalisation, the frailties of international supply chains and the

vulnerability of relying on income from tourism and international education as major sources of export revenue.

A vibrant domestic manufacturing sector is going to be critical to New Zealand's economic recovery, building resilience against future global shocks whether they be pandemics, recession or the challenges of climate change or natural disaster.

"In particular, as New Zealand moves into the recovery phase, it will be critical that as a nation we continue to work with others in ensuring international trade laws are upheld in the face

of a rising tide of protectionism and other unfair trade practices," the alliance said.

"Manufacturers are ready to work with government to develop an industry transformation strategy to support the nation's post-pandemic economic recovery."

The alliance says the invitation to the government is now on the table to implement these policy recommendations and do what many other advanced economies have done – develop a cohesive strategy to grow the role of manufacturing in the economy.

WPMA chair Brian Stanley says New Zealand needs to grow its wood manufacturing industry and create more good jobs in the regions.

"We're now inviting the government to work with us to make this happen," he said.

“ENSURING GLOBAL TRADE LAWS ARE UPHELD



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AKD joins building sector in push for urgent government stimulus package

Production changes will ensure resilience against COVID-19

AUSTRALIA'S largest sawmiller is standing on the frontline alongside industry stakeholders – timber producers and processors, builders and trade unions – calling for federal and state governments to fast-track a broad stimulus package to support the \$360 billion construction sector as COVID-19 impacts on the nation's economy.

AKD Softwoods this week announced the implementation of a series of production measures in response to the forecast impact of the pandemic.

"While demand for softwood products has been relatively robust in March and April, a forecast decline in housing starts in the second half of 2020 will directly impact demand for products produced across our sawmilling business," CEO Shane Vicary said.

"These production changes will prepare AKD for the looming decline in demand and ensure that the business is resilient and robust as it faces a period of reduced activity during and post-COVID-19," he said.

But Mr Vicary assured customers that while the changes would reduce production at Colac, Caboolture and Oberon, there would be no impact on the company's ability to maintain supply using existing inventory across the business.

"Residential building activity is hugely dependent on consumer confidence



Shane Vicary... AKD will continue to monitor housing starts. Photo: ABC

and the near-evaporation of this can be seen in the latest results," Master Builders chief economist Shane Garrett said

"In the absence of targeted government stimulus, new home building starts are likely to continue falling with detached dwellings projects also reducing. This would make next financial year one of the weakest on record for new home building,"

“NO IMPACT ON ABILITY TO SUPPLY”

At risk is the viability of nearly 400,000 building and construction businesses, the jobs of 1.2 million Australians and the industry's capacity to aid the economic recovery

Master Builders Australia recently unveiled a suite of policy proposals to stimulate residential building activity including a \$40,000 grant for new home buyers, a resilience building program and measures to reduce

the cost of delivering new housing stock."

Fast-tracking government building projects was

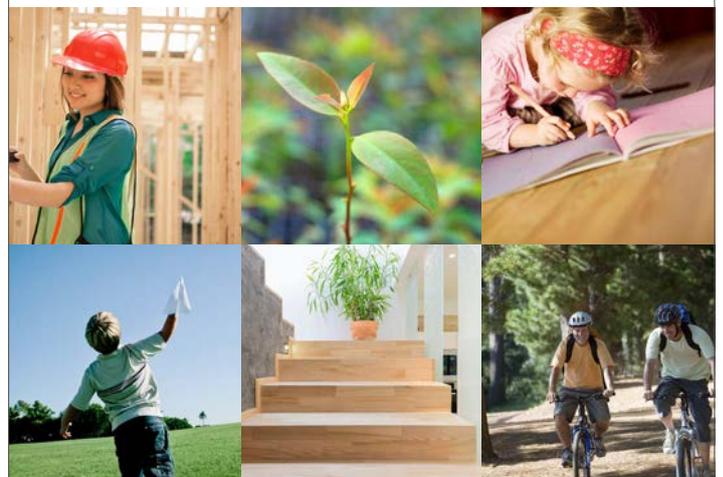
also imperative.

Mills are now expecting a 50%-plus drop-off in timber demand between July and August that may last as long as 12 months, particularly without a demand stimulus, with devastating consequences for the 45,000 regional Australians who work in the softwood timber sector.

"That's why AKD has made the changes now," Shane Vicary said. "The Prime Minister has also identified an 85% reduction in immigration due to the closure of international borders."

Cont P 4

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From P 3

AFPA CEO Ross Hampton said sawmills were the 'canary in the coalmine' when it came to new housing.

"On top of those jobs lost, we mustn't forget the 40,000 workers who use processed timber to create truss, frame and other timber building products for our builders around Australia."

Mr Hampton added: "It is very good that the federal government clearly has this coming crisis in mind. State governments will also need to partner with the federal government to address this important issue.

"Our industry will continue to advocate for a broad construction stimulus



Production measures... working through the COVID-19 crisis. Photo: AKD Softwoods

package, such as that which followed the global financial crisis."

Shane Vicary said the changes across AKD were expected to remain in place for several months.

"However, we will continue to monitor housing starts and the demand for our products and make adjustments as required," he said.

"We will work closely

with the workforce, unions, suppliers and communities during the implementation of these changes to minimise the impact to the extent possible."

Mr Vicary said AKD was incredibly grateful for the efforts of all employees to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 over the past couple of months and appreciates the patience and support of the

workforce during this challenging time.

"Unfortunately, these changes will have an impact on many of our staff, largely in the form of reduced hours, as we attempt to share the impact across the business," he said.

"There have also been those who have been made redundant.

"We will also be making changes to working hours and salaries for administration and management to reduce overhead costs and the AKD executive team will be taking salary cuts with the whole team contributing.

On the cover: Product is still flowing at AKD Softwoods. Despite cut-backs at five sawmills, supply reliability won't be a problem.



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Covid forces closure of British Columbia mills

ALMOST two dozen mills in the Canadian province of British Columbia have had to curtail or shut down operations because of COVID-19.

Forests Minister Doug Donaldson says it shows the impact the pandemic is having on an already beleaguered sector of the province's economy, which has been deemed to be essential.

"We have somewhere in the neighbourhood of 45 curtailed or closed mills at this point," he said.

"Certainly that number wasn't that high until we saw COVID-19 impacts, so I think you can draw a pretty straight line between many of those

curtailments that we saw in March and in early April and the lack of housing starts in the US."

Mr Donaldson says a decrease in global lumber prices because of COVID-19 is also to blame for the mill curtailments in the province.

He says government made sure that the sector was deemed essential to ensure that forest products would continue to be available. It includes a provision to defer up to three months of stumpage fees for forest companies in the wake of the pandemic, which is expected to equal about \$80 million in payments being put off, to help improve liquidity for forest companies.

End of rewarding era for Nick Roberts

13 years at the helm of Australia's largest plantation owner

AFTER 13 years at the helm of Australia's largest plantation owner, Nick Roberts will step aside as CEO of Forestry Corporation of NSW.

Mr Roberts said it had been a privilege to lead the business over the years taking carriage of the state's 2 million ha of forests and supplying renewable timber to a diverse customer base in NSW. With a strong focus on replanting and regrowing, more than 500 million trees would have started their lives in the NSW native and plantation forests under his leadership.

The future sustainability of the forests and a strong commercial forest and timber industry in NSW has been at the heart of his journey with Forestry Corporation.

"The safety of the forest

and timber industry has been a personal passion of mine and an area where there is always more to do," Mr Roberts said. "I believe we have made a solid collective progress."

His career has spanned all facets of the forest and timber industry with roles across the globe.

"I'm very proud of Forestry Corporation and the changes the business has embraced over the past decade," he said. "The impact of the 2019-20 bushfires on the business has been significant and as an organisation we are now entering a new re-building phase.

"It is important that the business has leadership to see it through the planning and implementation of this



Nick Roberts... safety of forest and timber industry a personal passion.

phase and so I have asked the board to consider the future leadership of the corporation as the organisation faces this next set of challenges.

Mr Roberts will remain with the corporation over the coming months to steer the business through its initial bushfire recovery, including

the substantial salvage timber operations already under way, the repair of millions of dollars of infrastructure, and the initial replanting efforts for the state's plantation assets.

Mr Roberts led the creation of the Forestry Corporation of NSW from its predecessor Forest NSW. He helped restructure the business reducing annual operating costs by \$10 million and improving operating profit from \$18 million to \$39 million, a 217% increase over three years.

Mr Roberts joined the corporation after four years with Weyerhaeuser where he was responsible for the US-based company's \$350 million Australian forest products business.

Tropical wood more resilient under certification

FOREST certification has allowed tropical wood producers globally to be more resilient and more reactive against COVID-19 because of the strong implementation of good practices already in place.

In its first analysis on the effects of the virus, the International Tropical Timber Organisation added that wood industry companies continue to work but trade is becoming "more and more difficult"; with demand

decreasing and competition very strong because of the different species present on the global market.

ITTO says the situation in China continues to improve and resumption of production has been carried out stably

and orderly with demand for imported wood rebounding gradually. However, the outbreak globally forced governments in many countries to take anti-measures like home office and border closure.



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New standards project ‘zooms’ ahead

AMID the COVID-19 pandemic, video conferencing has emerged as an important platform for businesses and communities to connect.

In Australian and New Zealand, industry is ‘zooming in’ to continue essential standard development work.

Meeting on a weekly basis, and with representatives from 26 nominating stakeholder bodies logging on to the conference call, the new format presents significant opportunities and challenges as the standards committee works towards a public comment release of the first joint trans-Tasman sustainable forest management standard in the second half of 2020.

Responsible Wood CEO



1/ The AS/NZS 4708 standards reference committee is using video conferencing facilities to connect with each other.

2/ Simon Dorries... robust discussions.

Simon Dorries is buoyed by the committee’s willingness to

adapt to changing conditions and support each other.

“With so many different stakeholders ‘dialled into’

the conference from far and wide, the risk of multiple conversations talking over each other is a potential

“MEETING AMBITIOUS DEADLINES”

challenge,” Mr Dorries said.

“And yet, the committee is practicing remarkable constraint and patience; discussion is robust as members work towards meeting our ambitious deadlines.”

The new standard will be developed as a fully recognised joint Australia and New Zealand standard and will be audited for acceptance by PEFC International. It will meet the rigorous system requirements of a fully-fledged JAS-ANZ accredited sustainable forest management system.

“As an endorsed Australia-New Zealand standard, it can be used for PEFC and/or Responsible Wood claims and meets timber legality requirements for import and export,” Mr Dorries said.

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JUNE

11: Innovation in Action Conference – Wellington, NZ. Virtual conference online. Register interest at www.colabprefabnz.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: www.danaevents.co.nz/2020gisborne/ or contact Julie Bell admin@dana.co.nz

OCTOBER

5: 2020 Queensland Timber Industry Awards Dinner – Brisbane, QLD, Australia.

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

23: 2020 TABMA National Awards Dinner – Sydney, NSW, Australia.

30: Green Triangle Timber Industry Awards POSTPONED – Barn Palais, Mount Gambier, SA, Australia. Nominations open 1 June 2020 and close

14 August 2020. For more information visit: www.gttia.com/

MARCH 2021

17-19: Doing Timber Business in Queensland – Hotel Marriott and Howard Smith Wharves, Brisbane, QLD, Australia. State conference, workshops, innovation tour and gala dinner organised by Timber Queensland. Visit www.doingtimberbusinessinql.com

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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 – POSTPONED. Visit www.risiinfo.com/events/ for update.

SEPTEMBER

27-30: Council on Forest Engineering Annual Meeting – POSTPONED. Visit www.cofe.org for update.

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: sficonference.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

7-9: 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

JANUARY 2021

11-14 : World Conference on Timber Engineering (WCTE Santiago 2020) – Santiago, Chile. Topics include Sustainable Forests for timber production; wood products, connections; timber engineering’ timber architecture; building and environmental impacts; policies, education and future trends. For further information see: www.wcte2020.com/

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



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Safety first: wood processors continue to provide essential building materials

JIM HOUGHTON

THE wood processing sector is continuing to produce essential building materials during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Maintaining a safe work place takes on a whole new meaning when combined with the requirements of social distancing and enhanced hygiene. It is great to be part of an industry where our safety leaders, among many frontline heroes, are doing so much to protect the workforce and the communities they operate in.

There has been no rule book to follow in dealing with this crisis; solutions have been developed from the ground up by working through the fundamentals of risk assessment. Some of the ideas being implemented by processors include practical



Social distancing... maintaining a safe workplace in wood manufacturing sector.

social distancing measures with split shifts and gaps between shifts to minimise the crossover of people. Similarly, staggered breaks have been implemented to reduce the number of people in lunchrooms at any one time. Visitors to sites have been reduced to the bare minimum. Where movement between sections of the plant is required diaries are being kept in the event that contact tracing may be required. The new government app COVID safe should also make this easier.

As well as social distancing, hygiene is paramount. Control panels and control rooms are cleaned down at the start and finish of shifts or with the change of operator. New procedures have been introduced to ensure fork lifts and other mobile equipment are cleaned down by the operator. Measures have been instituted to increase the availability of hand sanitiser and the number of wash stations throughout the plant.

There has also been extensive information sharing

between companies to ensure best practice ideas can be quickly adopted across the industry. Through AFPA, the growers and the processors safety groups have both been holding regular virtual meetings. This has been an excellent forum to exchange information and workshop ideas.

Paul O’Keefe, the chair of the AFPA timber processor WHS group, commented that “the regular exchange of information between companies has been invaluable in facilitating the sharing of learnings and the quick uptake of better practice ideas”.

To get the message out to the wider community, some businesses have even developed information videos with local community leaders involved. This extends the safety messages from the processing facility to the wider community.

• *Jim Houghton is statistics and economics manager at Forest and Wood Products Australia.*

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Covid cooling flags silver lining ahead for hardwood woodchip export industry

Demand increasing as China tentatively steps out of lockdown

DENNIS NEILSON

THE hardwood woodchip export industry is one of the largest sectors in the entire Australian wood products industry.

Its raw material plantation forest resources of Eucalyptus globulus (mostly mainland) and E. nitens (mostly Tasmania) cover hundreds of thousands of hectares especially in the Green Triangle, Western Australia and Tasmania – and it employs thousands of workers along its supply chain from tree to woodchip FOB at ports earns billions of dollars in foreign exchange.

Australia was the second largest hardwood woodchip supplier to North Asia at 6 million bone dry metric tonnes in 2019, after industry giant Vietnam at 11.5 million BDMT,



Partnership... Stora Enso has established a pulp and paper mill in Beihai in the south of the Guangxi province.

but well ahead of third-ranked Chile at 2.8 million BDMT.

China and Japan are by far Australia's largest woodchip markets, with 3.5 million BDMT (58%) and 1.9 million BDMT (32%) in 2019 respectively.

After a record export volume

growth and prices in 2018, the industry saw some cooling in the second half of 2019, as pulp prices plummeted following the start-up of a massive new pulp mill in Brazil, which flooded the Asian pulp market.

There were signs of a pickup in pulp prices over the New

Year but then the Covid-19 lockdown started in China in late January and continued for almost 70 days. And even after China has 'reopened', life is not going back to normal soon.

Will China's tentative steps out of lockdown into still often sparsely used shopping malls and restaurants be an indication of what will happen in Australia and New Zealand as we re-enter 'normal' life?

Japan is similarly affected but still has weeks or months of lockdown to go before it emerges from the virus crisis.

In any event, 2020 will see some softening in Asian woodchip demand and possible pricing, although a weakening exchange rate and a major reduction in shipping costs will soften the impact.

But 2019 and into 2020 has also seen a series of announcements about huge new pulp and paper projects in the southern China province of

“WEAKENING EXCHANGE RATE WILL SOFTEN THE IMPACT”

Cont P 12



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From P 10

Guangxi, and especially around the city of Beihai. There are now five huge Chinese companies with existing or planned projects in Guangxi.

Major Australian woodchip importer APRIL is planning to invest \$A4.4 billion in Beihai City to build a 900,000 tonnes per year pulp-mill as well as a 900,000 TPY paper machine and other facilities.

Australian chip importer Sun Paper has announced an even bigger \$A4.8 billion investment in a pulp and paper complex in Beihai, in two stages over five years including a huge new pulp mill. Equipment for this mill has already been ordered.

Australian chip importer Asia Pulp & Paper has announced

a big expansion at its existing Quinzhen City, Guangxi complex, including a 750,000 TPY chemi-mechanical pulp mill.

Stora Enso China, whose forestry company is run by Australian ex Gunns executive Ian Blanden, already has a pulp and paper mill in Beihai.

Last year, giant Chinese

papermaker Lee and Man Paper (Guangxi) announced a \$A2.4 billion investment plan for an integrated project including a one million TPY pulp mill in the Guangxi city of Changzhou.

Elsewhere, in Fujian



Opportunity... good outlook for Australian woodchip export sector in the next two to four years.

province, little-known Chinese paper maker Liansheng Paper has announced an investment of \$A4.4 billion in a pulp and paper complex. The first stage will include a 1.2 million TPY pulp mill.

While Guangxi has a large domestic eucalyptus resource, we expect these mills will need several million BDMT per annum of imported woodchips, starting around 2022-23.

Even if half of these mills are built (and history indicates most will be) then a silver lining may await the Australian woodchip export sector in the next 2-4 years.

• **DANA-Gingko this week announced its 2021 Global Pulp and Biomass Woodchip Trading Conference will be held in Nanning City in Guangxi Province with field trips to plantations, woodchip import ports and pulp mills. For information contact Julie Bell at admin@dana.co.nz**

“MULTI-BILLION INVESTMENTS IN CHINA'S PULP AND PAPER PROJECTS

Forest biomass ‘crowding out’ wind and solar in South Korea

THE government of South Korea is subsidising the development of biomass power so heavily that it’s hindering the adoption of renewable energy technologies like solar and wind, new research finds.

According to a report issued by Seoul-based NGO Solutions For Our Climate (SFOC), forest biomass is considered a carbon-neutral alternative to fossil fuels under Korean law, and the country’s government has so aggressively supported the growth of biomass-fuelled energy production that it has

become one of the most subsidised renewable energy sources in South Korea.

Soojin Kim, a senior researcher at SFOC and an author of the report, said biomass projects had been so overcompensated by the government that it was causing serious disruption and uncertainties in the Korean renewable energy market, including steep declines in the price of renewable energy credits. “These uncertainties, in turn, are discouraging utilities from investing in renewables such as solar and wind,” she said.

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WoodSolutions webinars and podcasts attracting a huge 'lock-down audience'

WITH architects, engineers and others in the building design industry joining the broader group of people working from home or 'lockdown', industry services company Forest and Wood Products Australia has seized the opportunity to launch a new series of free weekly webinars.

"More than 850 people attended our first three WoodSolutions webinars, which is a fantastic result," said Eileen Newbury, WoodSolutions national program manager.

"This shows there are opportunities in every environment and it also demonstrates that people are looking for information about designing and building with wood and wood products," she said. "It is also a cost-effective way of communicating with this usually hard-to-reach audience."

Held every Tuesday at 11 am AEST, the WoodSolutions webinar topics are chosen to appeal to both specialist and broad audiences and, where possible, recordings and transcripts are posted on the

**NEW SERIES
OF FREE
WEEKLY
WEBINARS**



WoodSolutions website.

FWPA has negotiated with professional associations to ensure that formal CPD points are available to people attending the live event.

Webinar topics to the end of May include: Costing mid-rise residential projects; 'parametric design; acoustic design of mid-rise timber buildings; building in BAL-rated areas; and fast-tracking CLT construction with a Latrobe University case study.

The new free weekly webinars join the WoodSolutions Timber Talk podcasts that have already

to see the range of Timber Talks podcasts. There are also links to Android and Apple subscription sites.

Created to promote the increased use of wood and wood products in the built environment, the WoodSolutions website and associated activities are aimed at property development, design and construction professionals who are involved in the process of specifying building materials. The website has nearly 30,000 registered users.

"WoodSolutions is also an opportunity for manufacturers in

our industry to reach new customers through a free supplier listing," Ms Newbury said. "It's effectively a new sales channel that can reach potential purchasers at the stage when they are looking for information about materials.

"I'd also like to invite industry members to attend the webinars. They offer an invaluable insight into the thinking, questions and concerns of building material specifiers – the people who choose and use the products our industry creates."



reached some 17,000 listeners. Follow the links on the WoodSolutions website



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Our ghost gums of the Outback made famous by Albert Namarjira paintings

THIS photograph was taken by my brother-in-law David Feitz. In his day, he was one of the country's outstanding photographers of the Australian Outback.



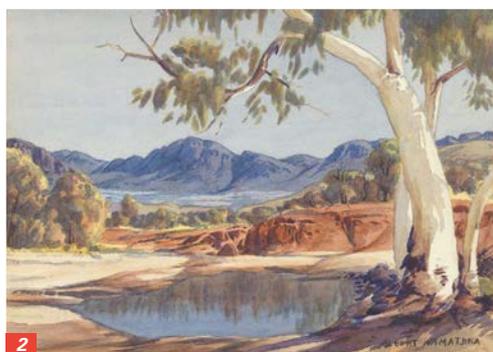
1/ *Ghost gums ... renowned for their striking white trunks and today part of the fabric of the Australian identity.*

Photo: David Feitz

2/ *Ghost gum and waterhole, Central Australia... a painting by Albert Namarjira (c. 1955).*

This Central Australian ghost gums image is emblematic of the paintings of several Australian artists. Famous among them was Aboriginal artist Albert Namarjira.

He received international acclaim as a painter, particularly for his watercolour landscapes during the 1940s and 50s.



A number of Namarjira's painting were renowned for their striking white trunk ghost gums that are today part of the fabric of the Australian identity. His paintings earned £50,000 between 1945 and 1949, and he became the first aboriginal Australian to be granted citizenship. He died in 1959.

The ghost gums (*Corymbia apparrerinja*), made famous by

“PART OF THE FABRIC OF AUSTRALIAN IDENTITY”

the artist and other Aboriginal painters, are extensive over northern Australia, especially in the Northern Territory, as well as being found in limited areas of woodland near Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea.

Although mainly a tree of the tropics, ghost gums grow in dry southern parts in the Northern Territory and also inland Queensland. In southern locations ghost gums are often the only prominent tree occurring over wide areas. It is in these localities that the tree contrasts vividly with the colourful arid landscape,

TALKING TREES



With **JOHN HALKETT**

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and has become a feature of some of Australia's most loved paintings.

Under drier, more temperate conditions, ghost gums usually occur on river flats subject to periodic flooding. Mature trees vary in size across their range, from a slender 7 m up to 25 m. In drier areas, trunks are often slender and reach 5 m or more in height before the first branches occur. The bark

is lustrous, smooth and white, and contrasts with the tree's deep green, shiny leaves.

Another distinguishing feature of inland Australia is the desert oak, one of the loveliest of all the sheoak, or casuarina trees. The desert oak is an inhabitant of dry inland areas of Central Australia where it is almost always found growing on red sandy dunes. The foliage is usually a dull green that contrasts with the background colour of the red sand. The trunk of the desert oak is dark brown, almost black and very deeply furrowed.

Usually a tree up to 10 m in height, desert oaks occasionally grows higher. The spread of its crown varies considerably, but the tree can be as broad as it is high. It has a graceful weeping habit when mature.

The sight of the desert oak on red sand near Mount Olga and Uluru, or backed by the blue Mann Ranges, is the stuff that inspires an appreciation of one of the most striking trees of dry inland Central Australia.



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\$965,000 fire tests to demonstrate the safety of CLT in large building in UK

THE British wood industry will spend \$A965,000 on a series of fire tests over the next 18 months in a bid to demonstrate the safety of cross-laminated timber, ahead of a rule change that could see the product banned for use on the walls of large buildings.

CLT has been heralded in some quarters as the future of construction because of its low embodied carbon and the capacity to produce the panels offsite.

But the government's plans to lower the ban on combustible materials in the external wall of a building from 18 m to 11 m would effectively restrict its use to low-rise projects only.

In an effort to demonstrate its safety, the three largest suppliers of CLT – KLH, Binderholz and Stora Enso – have invested in a series of fire tests to assess its performance.

The aim is to provide “a harmonised testing standard” and “enhanced understanding of fire resistance characteristics” of the product, a spokesperson for the Structural Timber Association said.

Data from the tests will be released as it becomes available, with the testing program set to last for 18 months.

The combustibles ban, introduced to ensure the safety of new buildings post-Grenfell, was the focus of lobbying from the timber industry when it was first introduced at 18 m.

As it applies to the whole of the wall construction, not just cladding, it effectively rules out using CLT in walls, although it is possible to use the building method in the internal structure only.

The Structural Timber Association is providing test-based research evidence of product performance that will enhance the understanding of fire resistance. CEO Andrew Carpenter said this extensive research would be completed within 18 months and “we intend to release the data as it



1/ UK fire tests to prove safety of CLT in large buildings.

2/ Andrew Carpenter... extensive research under way

becomes available during the testing program”.

Meanwhile, in Australia, flammable cladding needs urgent attention as the NSW government is accused of dodging the seriousness of the issue, with only a small portion of at-risk buildings made safe.

A NSW upper house committee has released its report into the regulation of building standards and disputes, following high-profile building defect issues in NSW and building fires involving

flammable cladding interstate and overseas.

“Flammable cladding has been responsible for fires spreading quickly through a number of buildings around the world and for loss of homes and lives,” the report says.

“It is only a matter of time before NSW experiences something similar.

“It should not take a building fire here for the government to act comprehensively to address this problem.”

The report said it was clear only a small minority of buildings with dangerous cladding had been

made safe – despite the state government's 10-point plan for fire safety.

Committee members and coalition MPs Trevor Khan and Natalie Ward said it was a time for “thoughtful and constructive steps” towards building confidence in the industry, rather than “political point-scoring and grandstanding through the presentation of a potpourri of thought bubbles and empty gestures”.



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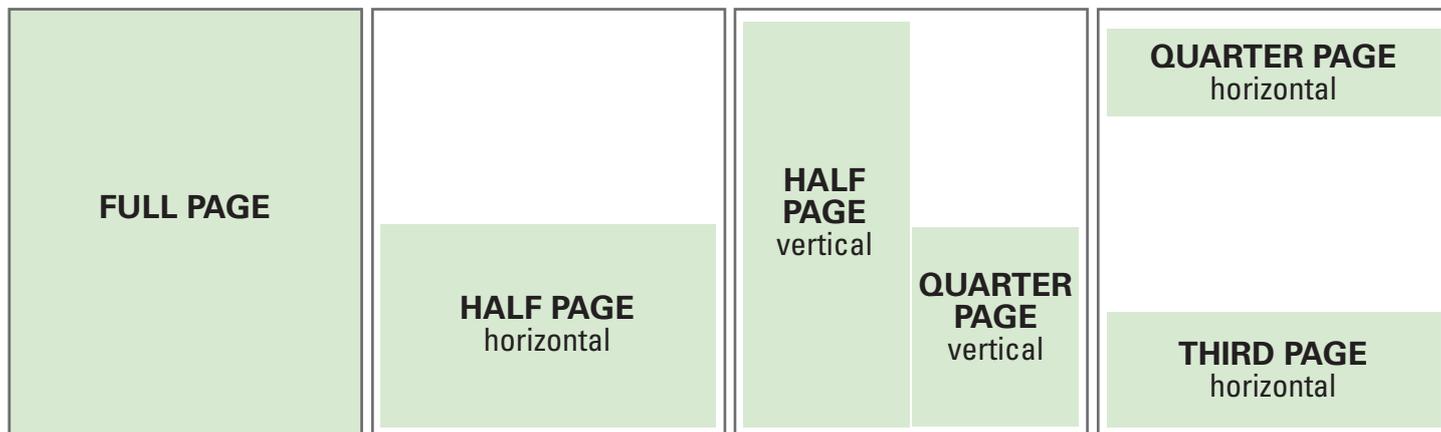
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