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Record amounts of forest rubbish prompt calls for action

COVER STORY P4



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OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT:



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Home sales and confidence remain low

The news is rocky for construction and worse for would-be buyers.

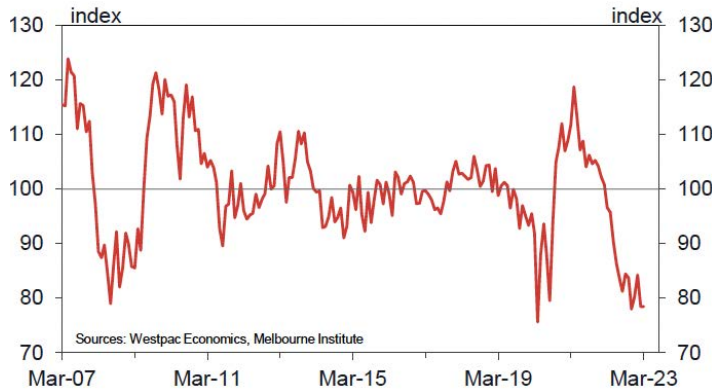
CONSUMERS aren't happy. Slapped with cost-of-living increases and still-rising interest rates, coupled with employment and inflation uncertainties, we're keeping our wallets in our pockets for most things – including homes, where even the good news of a month-on-month rise wasn't great.

"Sales in the three months to February were 46.8% lower than at the same time the previous year," said HIA's chief economist, Tim Reardon.

"Sales in the month of February rose by 14.3% compared to the previous month but remain exceptionally low."

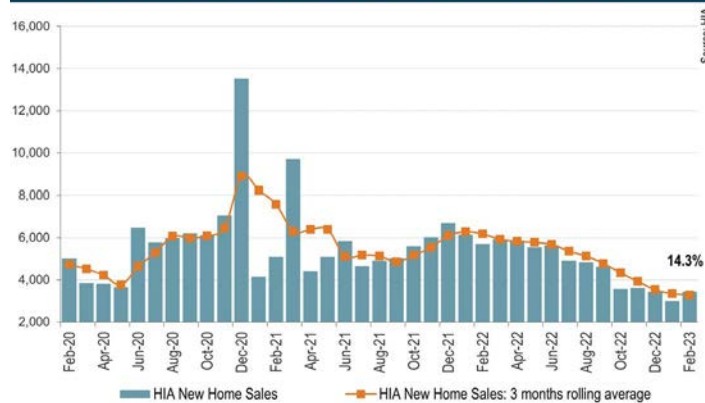
At the same time, the Westpac Melbourne Institute Consumer Sentiment Index was unchanged at 78.5 in March, holding near historical lows. Two months in a row of such low consumer sentiment (100 is neutral and 101.1 the average over the life of the survey) is extremely unusual. Even during Covid and the GFC, the index only dipped below 80 for a single month. Consecutive months at this level haven't been seen in over 30 years.

CONSUMER SENTIMENT INDEX



The Westpac Melbourne Institute Consumer Sentiment Index remained near record lows for a second consecutive month.

PRIVATE NEW HOUSE SALES - AUSTRALIA (SEASONALLY ADJUSTED)



HIA's private new house sales data for the past three years.

Inflation was a key component here, with Westpac reporting that "around 85% of respondents

– an overwhelming majority – viewed the news on inflation, interest rates and the economy as unfavourable."

One of the most troubling indices in Westpac's report is the 'family finances vs a year ago' sub-index, which was very low overall, but particularly weak for consumers that rent, with a dire sub-index read of just 56.9, down 14.7% since February.

Troublingly, paths out of rental are narrowing in every direction. Reardon said, "When the cash rate started to rise in May 2022 there was a very large pool of work to commence construction. This pool of work yet to commence is shrinking quickly as new sales remain very low and the number of new projects entering the pipeline falls.

"Tighter access to finance and a higher cash rate is seeing many new home buyers withdraw from the market. Customers that received approval to build a new home early in 2022 are cancelling these projects as the cost-of-living bites and banks withdraw financing. Without an improvement in access to finance, or a lowering of rates, the number of new homes commencing construction will slow later this year."



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The IPCC's final synthesis report says action on climate change must happen now

Without carbon capture, we'll sail past 1.5° warming.

THE IPCC has released the Synthesis Report, the final part of its Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) cycle. This report takes the data from a long series of IPCC reports and compiles and condenses it into more easily accessible information for policymakers.

It's not good news.

The report, signed off on by 195 countries, states that human-caused climate change is unequivocal, that 3.3 to 3.6 billion people live in places highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

The Headline Statements released as part of the report include Statement A4:

"Policies and laws addressing mitigation have consistently expanded since AR5. Global GHG emissions in 2030 implied by nationally determined contributions (NDCs) announced by October 2021 make it likely that warming will exceed 1.5°C

during the 21st century and make it harder to limit warming below 2°C. There are gaps between projected emissions from implemented policies and those from NDCs and finance flows fall short of the levels needed to meet climate goals across all sectors and regions. (high confidence)"

The report goes on to say

that future climate-related impacts are "up to multiple times higher than currently observed" and that some future changes are now unavoidable or irreversible.

However, those changes can still "be limited by deep, rapid and sustained global greenhouse gas emissions reduction. The likelihood

of abrupt and/ or irreversible changes increases with higher global warming levels. Similarly, the probability of low-likelihood outcomes associated with potentially very large adverse impacts increases with higher global warming levels."

The report also warns that "adaptation options that are feasible and effective today will become constrained and less effective with increasing global warming."

So what does this mean? In short: we need to act now, and in multiple ways. Simply limiting the amount of carbon we pump into the atmosphere will no

longer be enough, we need to actively remove carbon that is already there.

The report's authors call for enhanced technology and international cooperation. Industrial carbon capture is a hotly pursued goal, but while that develops, tree planting is our best bet.

With every increment of global warming, regional changes in mean climate and extremes become more widespread and pronounced

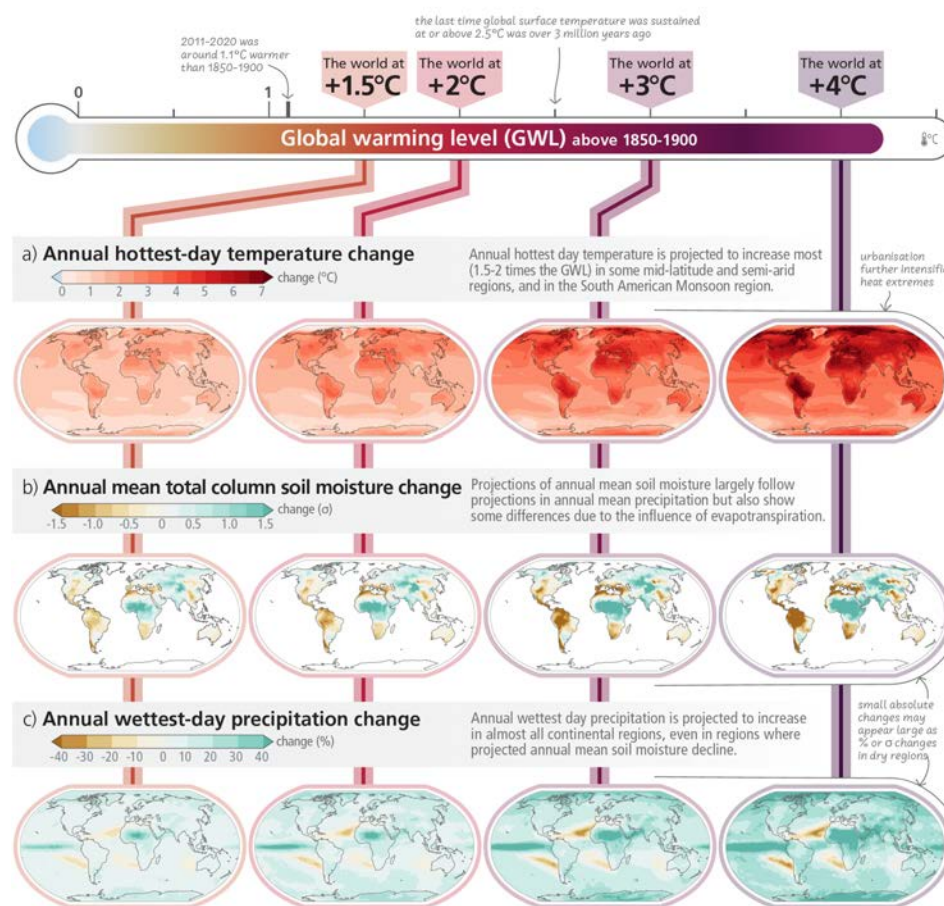




Figure SPM.2 from AR6 shows projected changes at different global warming levels.



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Record amount of rubbish found in forests

The Gambier region is a microcosm of an illegal dumping problem that is growing worse Australia-wide.

As council waste disposal facilities have closed or become more expensive to use, there has been a boom in illegal waste dumping around Australia. In South Australia, major forestry company OneFortyOne has put out a call to Limestone Coast residents to stop dumping rubbish in the forest, after a record amount of rubbish was found across the forest estate



1/ Much of the dumped rubbish is domestic and could be disposed of in normal collections.
2/ Jeremy Cookson, Gambier Area Supervisor Jeremy Cookson for OneFortyOne, and some of the rubbish found.



Jeremy said a lot of the time the rubbish could've easily been sorted into recycling or is smaller items that would fit into a home landfill bin. Other items found like whitegoods, tyres, paint, and chemical tins, while a bit trickier, all have disposal options at the transfer stations.

over the past year.

Gambier Area Supervisor Jeremy Cookson said a whole range of items from abandoned vehicles and

vehicle tyres to general waste and whitegoods, even a kitchen sink, have been among the litter on the OneFortyOne estate. It's not just small amounts of waste. It's tandem loads and small trailer loads that have been dumped.

"If you're not sure how to dispose of something, contact your local Council," Cookson said.

"There's always a better, more environmentally conscious, and safer way than mindlessly dumping your rubbish in the forest."

Cookson urged people with information about illegal dumping to anonymously share information with Crime Stoppers on www.crimestopperssa.com.au or freecall 1800 333 000.

"It's going to take a collaborative and targeted effort between forest growers, local councils, community, and police to start minimising the issue," he said.

He added that local residents could find disposal resources at the City of Mount Gambier Waste Transfer Station on (08) 8721 2443 and Which Bin www.whichbin.sa.gov.au.

“NOT ONLY IS IT AN ENVIRONMENTAL AND FIRE RISK, IT'S ILLEGAL

"It's bewildering that there are people out there that still think it's okay and acceptable to dump rubbish like this in the environment," Cookson said.

"Not only is it an environmental and fire risk, it's illegal. Our forests are great for things like walking, horse riding, and 4WDing, and it's disappointing that these activities may be affected by rubbish dumping, [which can make] areas of the forest unsafe to the public."

On the cover: Jeremy Cookson is concerned that rubbish represents a fire risk as well as a threat to forest and user health.

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Master Builders Australia 2023 Awards

Members are encouraged to nominate and have their excellence recognised.

NOMINATIONS have officially opened for the prestigious Master Builders Australia National Business Excellence Awards 2023.

The awards recognise business best practice, improvement and innovation initiatives, compliance, safety, customer service and corporate social responsibility.

Nominations are open to Master Builders members across all state and territory associations providing an opportunity to be recognised as leaders in the industry.

Nominations will close Friday 4 August 2023 with the gala dinner and awards

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Canberra's Manteena Commercial won Large Commercial Construction Business of the Year, 2022.

night held on Wednesday 6 September in Sydney, NSW.

Master Builders Australia CEO Denita Wawn said the awards provide a way to nationally recognise small, medium and large businesses across the building and construction industry from residential, commercial to civil construction and celebrate best practice in achieving business success.

"We encourage all members to seize the

opportunity to showcase their business best practice and achievements in the industry," Wawn said. "The Master Builders Australia National Business Awards are the only awards that recognise business best practice in the construction industry.

"The building and construction industry is made up of over 436,000 businesses with over 98% of them being small business in nature. We know it's been a difficult few years and changes to

the industry seem never-ending. These awards are just one way to celebrate your achievements in overcoming adversity."

Businesses can apply by visiting www.masterbuilders.com.au/Events/National-Business-Excellence-Awards, where you can also find a video of Wawn explaining how best to structure entries and provide the information that will give entries the best chance of success. She notes that you don't need to be the biggest

business or to have had the best year, any solid business with a good plan and strong operations can win, as the awards are judged on a much wider set of criteria than just one period's returns.

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Introducing Skills Insight – the New Jobs and Skills Council

Skills Impact is excited to be establishing a new organisation, Skills Insight, with the role of a Jobs and Skills Council (JSC) for a range of industries, including forestry and timber. As one of ten JSCs announced by Brendan O'Connor, the Minister for Skills and Training, Skills Insight will be part of a national network of not-for-profit, industry-owned and led organisations designed to provide leadership in addressing national skills and training needs.

Working with our partner organisation ForestWorks, we will support the voice of industry in the Australian skills and VET system.

Skills Insight's coverage also includes primary



Strategies to improve skills and training for the sawmilling, timber processing and forestry sectors will be a key part of the new JSC.

production, plants and animals, textiles, clothing, footwear and furnishing, as well as emerging industries around natural resource security and environmental

management. These industries are connected by a complex value chain that is crucial to Australia's communities, ecosystems and prosperity. When the skills of these industries are supported, everyone in Australia benefits.

As a JSC, Skills Insight will be working to examine all parts of the skills pipeline to analyse what is working and what is not and to describe strategies and solutions on behalf of all stakeholders. This means our scope of work will be well beyond training package projects. It will also be highly collaborative, working with employers, unions, RTOs,

other JSCs and Jobs and Skills Australia to provide strategic leadership and align efforts across industries. Drawing on its networks, Skills Insight will support industry, government and the VET sector to address system-wide barriers and add value across the economy and all education pathways.

Built on the base of Skills Impact's people and values, our drive to improve industry skills and training delivery is the same. We are excited to be able to empower industry and all stakeholders to have a say in all stages of the system, from the development of national skills standards, through to training delivery and assessment.

Skills Impact held a Skills Service Organisation contract with the Commonwealth Government from 2016–2022. A submission to move into the role of a Jobs and Skills Council, as Skills Insight, received over 200 letters of industry support as well as the support of Skills Impact's Members, the National Farmers' Federation, and ForestWorks.

A website for Skills Insight will be available in the coming months.



ForestWorks

Develop our future workforce

ForestWorks is an industry-owned not-for-profit organisation offering services to support the skills development of the forest, wood, paper, timber and furnishing industries.

ForestWorks works with industry, government and the education and training sectors to improve skills standards and qualifications and support the development of forestry-related industries, their people, and enterprises.

To find out more:

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Phone: 1800 177 001
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MARCH

27: Field Days at Levendale – Tasmania. The March event is the second of two and will be held in the southern Midlands region, 53 km north of Hobart. The Southern Midlands Council area 53 km north of Hobart. **Time: 9 am-1.00 pm.** Contact admin@pft.tas.gov.au or call (03) 6477 7389 for more details.

APRIL

25-26: Institute of Chartered Foresters National Conference 2023: Connecting Trees, Farmers and Foresters – ONLINE EVENT. Exploring how to integrate trees into the farmed landscapes and build relationships between farming and forestry. For further information see: <https://www.charteredforesters.org/event/national-conference-2023-connecting-trees-farmers-and-foresters>.

MAY

15-18: Ligna trade show – Hannover, Germany. The world's leading trade fair for the woodworking and wood processing industry is jointly organized by Deutsche Messe and VDMA Woodworking Machinery. It showcases the entire range of products and services for the primary and secondary

industries – tools, machines and systems for custom and mass production, surface technology, wood-based panel production, sawmill technology, energy from wood, machine components and automation technology, as well as machines and systems for forestry, round wood and sawn wood production.

18-19: The Forest Industry Engineering Association – Melbourne. Woodtech would be showcasing new innovations, new products and new equipment to improve local sawmilling, wood manufacturing and wood panel company's operating efficiencies - and profitability. For bookings: <https://www.eventalways.com/woodtech>

25-26: TABMA National Conference and Awards – Crowne Plaza - Hunter Valley, NSW. TABMA Australia and Hardware Australia will be joining forces and hosting a national conference and awards program in 2023. TABMA and Hardware Australia are proud to announce the 2023 Timber & Hardware National Conference to be held in the Hunter Valley. Offering members and industry representatives an opportunity to connect as industry leaders and come away with information and tools to take back to your

business to help you today and succeed in the future. As part of the National Conference, TABMA Australia and Hardware Australia will be hosting the National Awards program for the industry to participate in. The awards recognise the outstanding achievements of individuals and organisations in delivering or producing high quality products and services. For any queries contact events@tamba.com.au. For bookings: <https://www.trybooking.com/events/landing/993638>

28-2 June: International Research Group (IRG) on Wood Protection – Cairns, QLD. The IRG is the world's peak world body on timber durability research and will be hosting more than 250 researchers from 30-40 countries to discuss new developments in the field. Information about the conference and registration is available at: www.irg-wp.com/IRG54/index.html

31-1 Doing Timber Business in Queensland Symposium & Field Tour – Brisbane. The 4th Biennial symposium Doing Timber Business in Queensland 2023: Preparation, Opportunity, Success will delve into where growth potential for Queensland's forest and timber industry is most likely to occur. This

special event will commence with an industry research and development tour on 31 May, followed by a symposium and networking event on 1 June. For more information admin@timberqueensland.com.au

JUNE

18-20: Malaysian Wood Expo – Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Malaysian Timber Council, International Wood & Woodworking Expo. For further information see: www.malaysianwoodexpo.com.my or email: info@malaysianwoodexpo.com.my

AUGUST

29-30: Timber & Forestry enews Australian Timber Supply Summit – Melbourne. Early warning alert. For any queries relating to the conference, please contact CORP COMM. Email: info@corp-comm.com.au Phone: +61 3 5977 0244

OCTOBER

15-19: ANZIF Conference: Embracing our natural capital: The science, technology, and art of managing forests for all values – Twin Towns Conference Centre, Coolangatta, Queensland. Further details from Forestry Australia at: <https://www.forestry.org.au/>

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How does FWPA's StatisticsCount work?

A new video series takes users behind the scenes of the vital information-gathering scheme.

THE FWPA statistics and economics program, which has long played a crucial role in promoting the competitiveness of the forestry industry, is about to enjoy an exciting increase in scope with the launch of a new video showcase. Click here to watch the first video in the series.

The StatisticsCount video series will inform viewers about various aspects of the program, and the vital role it plays in collating, analysing and sharing valuable statistics in support of smart future planning. By presenting analysis and data that reflects various aspects of the supply chain, the program supports the industry's ongoing growth and success.

First up in the video showcase is an episode focused on how FWPA collects, analyses and uses valuable data from across the industry.

Essentially, viewers will see



A screenshot from the first StatisticsCount video.

that different data such as softwood volume, hardwood volume and value, and grower and processor safety is provided by companies working within the industry. This anonymised data is then analysed and used to predict trends, with the goal of providing valuable insights that members can use to make the most informed decisions for their own businesses.

The online FWPA data management system allows members to privately and

safely log in and enter their own data, which is then aggregated with data from all other contributing companies and calculated into industry-wide metrics. This is a blind entry system, meaning companies are only able to view their own data, and the industry aggregated data they

“ONLINE PORTAL APPRECIATED BY INDUSTRY AS A VALUABLE TOOL”

are contributing to. The result is a series of comprehensive data sets that provide all-encompassing, up-to-date snapshots of the industry, for the benefit of all users.

“Our online portal, which utilises information supplied by 50 companies, has long been appreciated by industry as a

valuable tool for remaining up to date with industry developments and the latest trends,” said Kevin Peachey, statistics and economic manager at FWPA.

“We hope viewers will enjoy this video as an opportunity to ‘peer behind the curtain’ and witness exactly what goes into creating a data management system relied upon by so many members to inform their decision making in a way that continues to drive the industry forward.”

Investing in people ... advancing the industry

Grant award applications for 2023 are now open:

- Skill Development Support
- Scholarships
- Fellowships

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Applications close on Friday, 5th May 2023.

Contact: Helen Murray
on 0419 991 424 or
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Combilift celebrates St Patrick's Day

The lifting specialist put on a show for its national day.



Are your forklift driving skills up to producing factory calligraphy?

WHAT do you get when you combine an exceptionally skilled forklift driver in a Combilift CBE with a giant pencil and an empty warehouse floor? If you guessed the 2023 Combilift St Patrick's Day video, congratulations!

While the Irish-based company is very serious about its lifting technology, it's less so when it comes to promotional videos. The team has previously produced The Elf Before Christmas, a set of Combi MR4s 'Irish dancing' for last year's St Pats' party and the huge team dancing the Jerusalem challenge in 2021.

This year marks 25 years of Combilift providing specialist solutions, particularly for long loads and oversized goods. Founded by Robert Moffet, a long-term stalwart of Irish forklifts,

“THEIR MOVE TO ELECTRICAL MODELS WILL ONLY INCREASE THAT MARKET

and Martin McVicar, an engineering wiz, the company was built on its range of multi-directional forklifts and its willingness to work closely with industry to produce models for specific needs.

Combilift's mix of technical innovation with strong safety and user focus, along with clever warehousing solutions, has seen the brand become a common feature in timber yards and hardware stores around Australia. Their recent move to focus on electrical models will only increase that market share as we move towards Net Zero.

Additionally, the company's work on maximising warehouse storage capacity is ideal for a market like ours, where the high costs of real estate and competition from cashed-up development funds can make it extremely difficult to expand businesses. A combination of storage optimisation and effective handling solutions can increase capacity by up to 100%.

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Resilient timber homes for Australians

WoodSolutions has launched a new program including a competition for designers to help tackle the effects of climate change.

AFTER years of consecutive record-breaking fires and floods, there are few places in Australia that aren't conscious of the need to build homes that can survive the worst nature will throw at them.

Too often we've seen people surveying the ashes of their homes or wading through mud and piling up ruined sheets of plasterboard. WoodSolutions' new Resilient Timber Homes (RTH) program is designed to find efficient and sustainable timber-based solutions, delivering homes that can be designed and built with a resilience-focused



Timber-rich homes like the Royd Clan's Autonomous House by level architecture are better able to withstand the rigours of climate change. Photo: John Gollings

"Code+" approach, to provide better safety and wellness for their occupants, as well as increased value for the

investors and the whole community.

The RTH program has multiple prongs. Run by

WoodSolutions and a steering committee of industry partners including research partners FTMA and OneFortyOne and contributing partners Meyer Timber, Mutinail, MiTek and Tilling, it hopes to develop and test better methods of designing and constructing homes, with health and survivability at front of mind.

This process will include producing a design guide, extensive RD&E, testing and – importantly – sharing what is learned as widely as possible.

Timber frame homes are the focus as they have

Cont P 11

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From P 10

shown themselves to be robust and resilient when subjected to adverse and extreme conditions, including those associated with floods, bushfires, and cyclones, for every location in Australia. They provide more than just life safety (which is the main objective of the NCC) and adequate property protection through good durability and easy maintenance.

As part of the first phase of the RTH program, a design competition is being run to help generate new, meaningful ideas. The competition – based on the Australian Institute of Architects (AIA) Model Conditions for an Architectural Competition – will be run in a single stage, with two briefs for entrants to choose from. Entries will demonstrate how Australian timber homes can be designed and built with a resilience-focused

“Code+” approach, to provide better safety and wellness for their occupants, as well as increased value for the investors and the whole community.

The Competition’s objective is to develop a new design by modifying a benchmark home, in order to:

1. achieve better resilience, with reference to the performances described in the brief.
2. estimate the cost premium associated with the modified design and suggest cost-offset tool(s) and/or initiative(s) that would turn it into an investment.
3. quantify the carbon footprint, using the Green Star’s Upfront Carbon Emissions calculation guide.

There is a \$50,000 prize for the winning entry responding to each of the briefs. Following the competition, the program’s

Partners may commission a full set of construction drawings from the winners, while WoodSolutions will work to support further R&D work suggested from the competition’s ideas.

The competition has already been launched and is in its Q&A period for registered parties. Find the details and register here. Submissions open on 14 April, which is also the last date to submit questions, and close on 26 May.

The in-depth judging process includes a technical evaluation of each entry and will take place from 12 June to 28 July. Judges include Dylan Brady, lead of Decibel

“WE’RE WORKING TOGETHER TO CREATE A BETTER AND MORE RESILIENT FUTURE

Architecture, and Andrew Dunn, CEO of the Timber Development Association among a panel of seven design and construction specialists. In addition, several technical advisors, a professional advisor and probity advisor will help to select the winning entries.

The winners will be announced on 4 August and the jury report completed by 15 September.

“At WoodSolutions we are continually impressed by the talent, creativity, and ingenuity that exists amongst Australian home designers,” said Resilient Timber Homes program manager, Paolo Lavisci.

“This competition provides a valuable opportunity for the design community to showcase its talents and work together to create a better and more resilient future for Australian houses and the families who occupy them.”

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Onetrak celebrates 15 years in Victoria

The heavy machinery specialists aren't just saluting the company's milestone, but its staff as well.

If you work in forestry or construction, you've probably encountered a machine sold or rented by Onetrak. The Australian dealer for major brands Tigercat, Hidromek, Striker, Anaconda, Fuchs and Dressta has locations in Tasmania, Victoria, New South Wales, Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland.

This year Onetrak celebrates its 15th anniversary in Victoria. The first Victorian premises were located in Dandenong up until 2016 when the company relocated to 1-5 Marlo Place, in Hallam, a suburb south-east of Melbourne, after having outgrown the previous workshop and office spaces.

"Fifteen years ago, we took the step to expand the then Tasmanian business into Victoria," said David Hazell, Managing Director. "Since then, Onetrak has continued to grow into a truly national business with branches, staff, and customers across 6 states of Australia. Thinking back, the move to Melbourne in Victoria was a significant step in the businesses development as it paved the way to many future opportunities that followed. Hallam in Melbourne remains a significant hub for Onetrak's national business activities with many of our key management, parts and product support teams residing there.

"Today I'm very proud to say we have built a strong team at Hallam and we are still focussed on building further capacity into our service offering in Melbourne



1

1/ The Onetrak Hallam team celebrating with some of their machinery.

2 David Hazell, managing director, says the move to Hallam was a significant step.



2

to assist our Victorian clients better. Our business plan sees expansion of the rental fleet and our specialist product lines into the market. A service centre in the western Melbourne district is on track to be completed by the end of 2024."

The team at Hallam manages a complex set of operations. There is a large new equipment sales program, as well as the rental fleet that is in heavy demand around the state and Onetrak's central warehouse distribution for spare parts.

Onetrak's management

aren't just celebrating the anniversary of the premises opening, they're emphatically celebrating the team that run the operation.

Melannie 'Mel' Amani, rental co-ordinator, celebrates her own work anniversary this year having reached 10 years with the business. "I'm working with a great team at

“THE BEST PART ABOUT WORKING WITH ONETRAK IS THE TEAMWORK

Onetrak and know I have the support I need to carry out my job," she said. "My favourite part of my role is being able to deal with customers on a daily basis,

whether it be an engineer or someone from the accounts department – I've been able to make so many great connections so far."

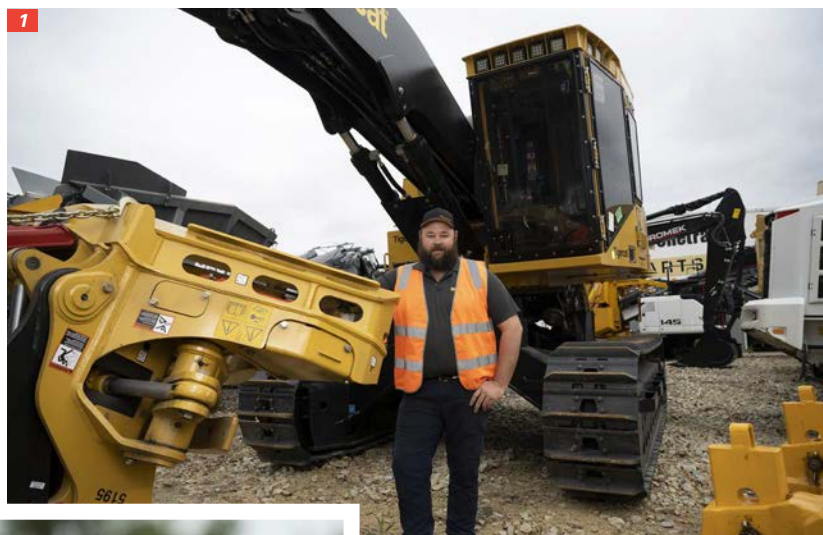
Onetrak is a small but flexible company with a can-do attitude across the business. One of the key focuses within the organisation is to ensure all staff have growth and development opportunities available to them. Jotham Allwright has held a few different roles within the company. "I've been lucky

From P 12

enough to work my way through a few different roles at Onetrak," said Allwright. "Starting as a field service technician working in the Mount Gambier area for several years, this then led into a service manager role looking after the service team in Mount Gambier. Now I focus on forestry equipment as Onetrak's national product support manager for forestry."

No two days are the same as the company services customers across construction, forestry and industrial material handling. The team knows that businesses in these sectors can have changing needs and cash flows, so in addition to the sales and rentals business, there is a second-hand machinery service. Additionally, Onetrak provides both regular services and urgent breakdown repairs, as the team knows only too well that machines need to be moving.

Being a national company there is opportunity to travel and see different places, something Sam Powell values in his role as national sales manager industrial material handling. "I get to visit customers all across the country," he said. "It's always amazing how many different



and everyone has a voice."

The company is currently looking to fill a number of opportunities across Australia, with vacancies listed at www.onetrak.com.au/careers.

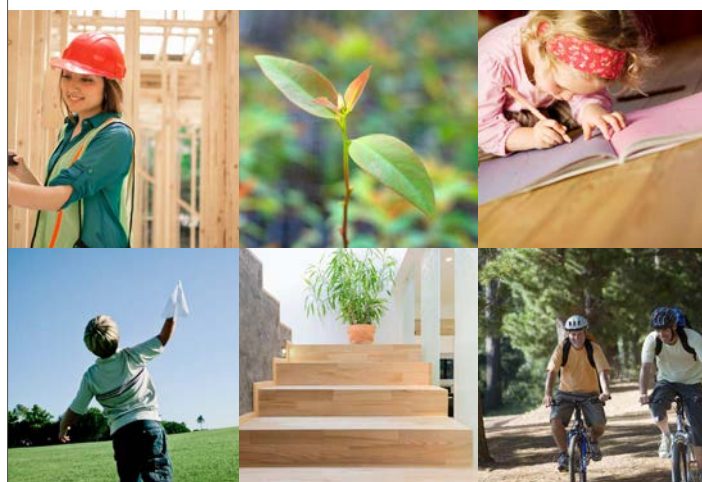
"Working at Onetrak is exciting and exceptionally rewarding," said Trevor Els, regional

- 1/ Jotham Allwright, national product support manager for forestry.
- 2/ Trevor Els, regional manager for Vic, SA and WA.
- 3/ Mel Amani is rental co-ordinator at Hallam and finds working with customers her favourite part of her job.

ways there are to crush, screen, and move different materials – I'm always learning something new. The best part about working with Onetrak is the teamwork. Everyone's happy to help, decisions are made quickly

manager for Vic, SA and WA. "Being a family-owned business makes us flexible and very responsive. We have a great team and a fantastic support structure here at Hallam and throughout all our other branches. At Onetrak we like to make the work place a fun and friendly environment. We are like one big family!"

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Iconic grass trees a distinctive feature of inland Australia

Perennial, flowering plants with some species growing to six metres tall.

GRASS trees (*Xanthorrhoea*) are an endemic Australian genus of 28 species, only a few of which grow substantial above-ground stems. They are iconic flowering perennials with the smallest species growing to about a metre and others reaching six-metres tall.

Grass trees have a unique structure, with a true stem of fibrous conducting tissue supported by a sheath of tightly packed old leaf bases glued by a reddish crystalline resin.

Hundreds of very narrow, hard-textured leaves radiate from the apex of each branch. Tall, rodlike flower spikes up to 4m long grow above the foliage, and then numerous tiny white flowers emerge from densely packed brown bracts in a spiral up the spike. They may take several years to flower, but the flowers produce great amounts of nectar, attracting a wide variety of insects, birds and mammals.

Most grass tree species are extremely slow growing. Studies of some of the taller species found that trunk height increases at about 8mm to 60mm per year, but this varies with local environmental conditions. They're often very long-lived – some are estimated to be 600 years old.

Grass tree leaves are narrow, linear and stiff. Old



Grass trees are extremely slow growing and often very long-lived – some are estimated to be 350 to 450 years old.

leaves often hang down and form a 'skirt' around the base of the trunk. The length of the skirt is a good indication of the time since the last fire – the longer the skirt, the longer the duration without fire.

They're highly fire resistant and are among the first to respond after a bushfire. Fires may burn their leaves and blacken their trunks, but the trees usually survive as the growth point is buried underground, protected by the leaf bases. Some grass tree species are stimulated by fire – in the spring following a summer burn, large numbers of plants often flower.

The grass tree is important to First Nations people across Australia. Its resin was traditionally used as glue in

In South Australia, grass trees are also known as 'yacca', which is likely derived from a Kurna word.

Grass trees are found in all Australian states and territories, especially on the east and west coast. The Austral grass tree (*Xanthorrhoea australis*) is one of the most widely distributed species, growing in Tasmania, Victoria, NSW, ACT and South Australia.

Some species of grass tree have been devastated by the cinnamon fungus. This fungus rots the roots of grass trees and causes dieback. The disease caused by this introduced plant root pathogen is often difficult to detect and, more worryingly, its impact may be considerable before being detected.

Other threats to grass trees include land clearance for agriculture and urban development; inappropriate burning; overharvesting of foliage and illegal removal of the plants from their natural habitat for sale as garden plants.

TALKING TREES



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spear-making and in patching up water containers. Flower spikes make fishing spear shafts and firesticks; the tough seed pods are used as cutting implements and the flower's nectar forms a sweet, slightly fermented drink.



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NSW timber driver drop-in day in Tumut

The Forestry Corporation of NSW is asking drivers to drop in and share their experiences to find ways of making haulage better.

HAULING timber is a complex job, with issues ranging from driver wellbeing and fatigue to chain of responsibility and load construction. Drivers have the most complete understanding of these problems but are often too busy to talk about them.

So, on 29 March, representatives from the softwood forestry and timber industry are again joining forces to host a drop-in day at Visy Pulp and Paper Mill near Tumut between 9am and 3pm. All timber industry drivers are invited to attend.

The day is a place for conversations on how the industry can further support drivers, safer roads and load practice, said Forestry



Timber industry drivers are invited to a day of discussing the issues that matter most to them with industry representatives.

Corporation NSW's haulage and sales manager, Linda Cotterill.

"Supporting the people supporting our forestry and timber supply chain is paramount to all we do," Cotterill said.

"We are very pleased to work with partners and special guests including Visy Pulp and Paper, Hancock Victorian Plantations, AirBrakeSystems, Riverina Bluebell, ExTe, Australian Trucking Safety Services & Solutions and The Forest Centre (Australia)

to host this day.

"We encourage all drivers and operators in the area to pull in and start a conversation on how we can work together for a safer transport industry."

Organisers and participants report that last year's driver drop-in day was a success in starting a conversation within the industry on what can be done to improve.

"Hearing drivers' stories of working in the forestry industry really bought home what a big part of our community it is and how much people care about it," said Cotterill.

For more details, email Linda Cotterill at linda.cotterill@fcnsw.com

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Floods 1: Rambo the fox 0

After five years eating wildlife and escaping hunters, Rambo the fox is no more.

A 5800-HECTARE fenced area in the Pilliga State Forest was supposed to be a safe place for near-extinct native animals like the bilby and numbat. All the Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC) team had to do was eradicate the feral animals inside the fence once it was erected. For the most part, it was a quick job. Cats? Gone. Dogs? Gone. Pigs? Out of there. Rambo the fox? For nearly five years he outlasted literally thousands of baits and hundreds of hours of hunters tracking him with dogs.

Now the wily predator is no more, presumed drowned in the floods that covered the region late last year.

AWC Pilliga operations

manager Wayne Sparrow said the long-awaited confirmation that the zone was predator-free was a huge boost for the project.

"The intent is to remove all feral species – pigs, cats, foxes, goats and the like," he said.

"Our project here is to reintroduce native mammals, particularly bilbies, bettongs, nail-tail wallabies and Shark Bay bandicoots. All of those mammals fall into a critical range of species that are heavily predated on by cats and foxes."



Rambo has not been caught on an AWC camera trap since October last year.

The AWC frequently snapped Rambo on camera and Sparrow said "a huge amount of time" was spent trying to catch him.

"Probably 80% of our control efforts were actually spent trying to find evidence of the fox existing and where he was

moving," he said.

"But we are now very confident this fox has met his match."

As adept at evading his hunters as the character he was named after, Rambo was last seen in camera trap footage in early October 2022.

With his demise allowing the area to finally be declared predator-free, wildlife conservationists are moving forward with plans to reintroduce six endangered species.

Source: abc.net.au

Artists and scientists work to save seaweed forests

Lichen Kelp, artist and founder of Seaweed Appreciation Society international was swimming in the Great Southern Kelp Forest off Whyalla, researching giant cuttlefish, when she realised the beauty of the kelp and the fragility of the forest.

"Over the past 30-40 years, the giant kelp forests in the Southern Ocean have depleted by 95%, which is huge considering it's the basis of the ecosystem in that intertidal zone."

It shifted her focus entirely. Now her work as a science-based performance and artist incorporates objects like bioplastics based on seaweed and algae latex. "There are artists doing amazing things with seaweed ... it's become an interesting material for artists to experiment with."

A huge number of aquatic species rely on the kelp in exactly the same way birds rely on trees.

Dr Alecia Bellgrove, senior lecturer in Marine Biology

and Ecology and director of the seaweed research group at Deakin University. She says that Australia has a large number of species of seaweed, many unique to our waters. "Seaweed is in everything from toothpaste, beer, ice-cream, processed foods and [more]. There's a lot of work being done looking at the use of seaweed in sustainable fibres in bioplastics and also as wholefoods, with incredible nutritional and health benefits."

Bellgrove says that

developing aquaculture could help to protect and restore the dwindling populations of all seaweeds along our coasts, not just giant kelp. Ranges have been contracting here and around the world thanks to climate change, so some of the research is devoted to finding species that are more robust at higher temperatures and extremes of temperature.

Click for this Radio National segment to learn more about the forests and some of the remarkable things people are making with seaweed.

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HEAD OFFICE

Timber & Forestry eNews
PO Box 69, Potts Point, NSW 1335,
Australia
Phone // +61 (0) 417 421 187

PUBLISHERS

John Halkett // +61 (0) 417 421 187
johnh@timberandforestryenews.com
Dennis Neilson // +64 (0)7 349 2764
dana@dana.co.nz

EDITORS

Nicky Ainley // +61 (0) 410 538 034
news@timberandforestryenews.com
Donyale Harrison // +61 (0) 417 487 497
edit@timberandforestryenews.com

ADVERTISING

Campbell McInnes // +61 (0) 406 223 007
campbellm@timberandforestryenews.com
advertising@timberandforestryenews.com

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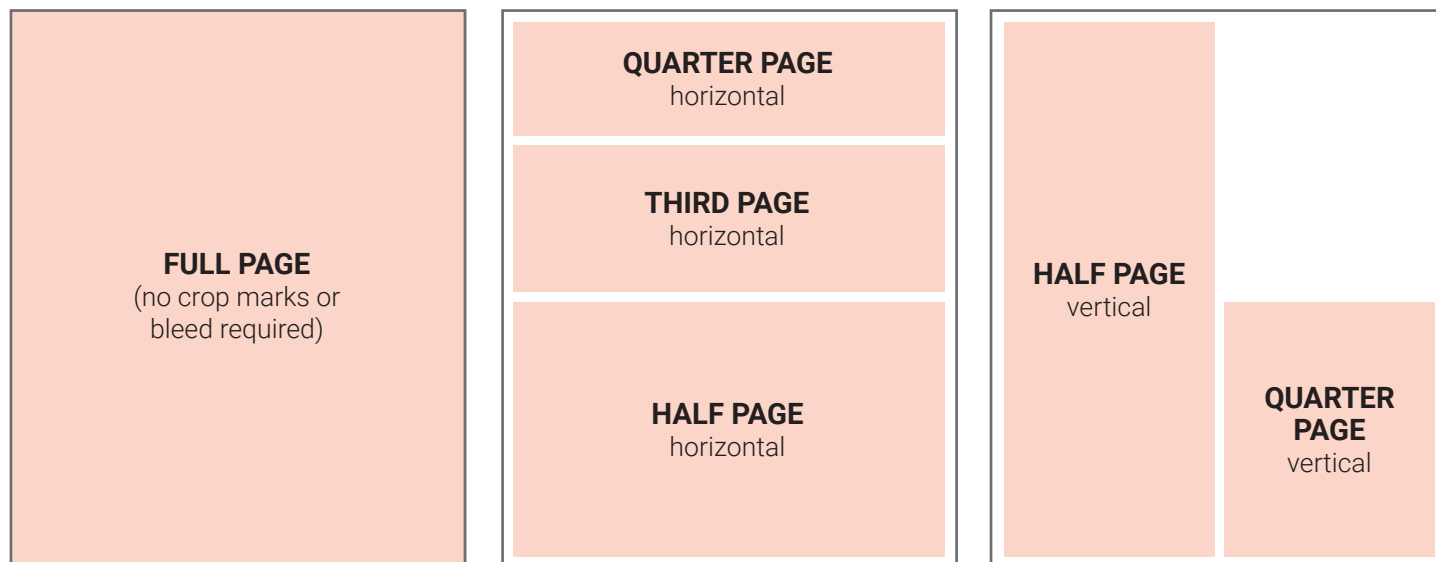
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WHO TO CONTACT

Media releases and editorial: Nicky Ainley e: news@timberandforestrynews.com and Donyale Harrison e: edit@timberandforestrynews.com

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