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NSW timber industries push back against native forestry ban attempt

COVER STORY P4

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WA foresters let down

Sawmillers and other forest industries say the WA government has not honoured its transition agreement.

WITH native timber harvesting due to finish in WA at the end of this year, timber supply had been guaranteed to sawmills from the state-run Forest Products Commission (FPC) up to that date. Instead, the commission has contacted sawmillers across Southern WA and advised them no more log supply is available, throwing out transition plans for many businesses in the sector.

Forest Industries Federation WA (FIFWA) CEO Adele Farina said an urgent meeting with Forestry Minister Jackie Jarvis had been requested to discuss the matter back in July, however after weeks of waiting, the Minister's office has now



1/ **Jay Branson runs a sawmill in Dwellingup.** Photo: Mark Bennett
 2/ **FIFWA CEO Adele Farina.**

The state announced an \$80 million fund and agreement to help forestry companies and workers to transition into new industries.

Farina said part of the reason the industry had agreed to that deal was the promise of a continued supply of logs.

"Nothing in the agreement

removed contractual obligations for sawlog deliveries," she said.

"In fact, it was emphasised that current contractual obligations would be honoured. The decision by the FPC to no longer focus on sawlog production will starve our members of resource and make it impossible for sawmills to transition under the new FMP, forcing them to close before the end of 2023."

Forestry Minister Jackie

expecting their contracted sawlog high and dry," Farina said.

"This is contrary to the government's commitment to our industry and supply commitments made by the FPC earlier this year. It is extremely disappointing, particularly for those businesses that have made decisions based on continuing operations until the end of 2023."

“NOTHING IN THE AGREEMENT REMOVED CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATIONS FOR SAWLOG DELIVERIES

advised FIFWA they will not be available to discuss the issue.

"We have been told that the FPC is prioritising the harvesting of firewood over sawlog for the remainder of 2023, leaving businesses

Cont P 3



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From P 2

Jarvis said in a statement to the ABC: "Sawmills have contracts with the FPC until 31 December 2023, when the current Forest Management Plan ends. However, as part of the transition payment deed, log delivery volume obligations were removed under the deed."

While some of the bigger mills have already stopped production, other smaller mill operators have been wondering how they will

survive without wood to put through their mills and pay their workers until a new Forest Management Plan is announced in the new year.

Jay Branson owns the Dwellingup Sawmill. He signed a deed of contract with the government last year to receive a compensation package to help him transition to harvesting and milling logs from mine sites and private landowners.

"I did have a contract for approximately 5000 tonnes a

year," Branson said.

"And as the announcement said, at the time, that contract would be fulfilled to the end of December. Three weeks ago, we've been told verbally that we're not going to get any more saw logs."

While he has stockpiled timber from sources other than native forests, Branson said he was shocked by the FPC manager's phone call. "We budget upon there being some form of disruptions because of the downturn in the industry, but I did not budget upon it being five months earlier than the end of the contract," he said.

Farina pointed out there will be multiple flow-on effects if the decision causes more WA sawmills to close. "It will mean those sawmills will not be there to facilitate the government's ecological thinning program and process timber from mine site clearing," she said. "The result will be

another broken commitment by government, as they will no longer be able to supply local furniture manufacturers with sawn timber as promised."

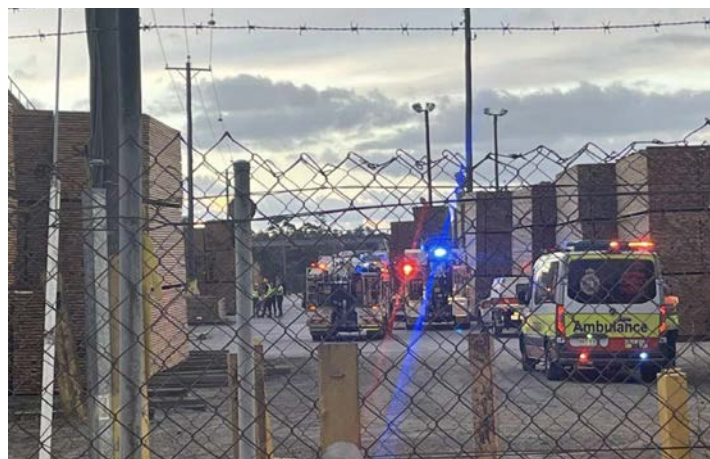
Complaints that some of the resource which had been earmarked for sawmills was instead redirected to firewood have been met with claims from government sources that this was due to reduced contractor capacity. Farina rejects these, saying contractors wanting to continue operating were willing to employ skilled workers from exiting contracting businesses in order to maintain capacity.

"We call on the government to honour its commitment to meet current contractual commitments through to the end of 2023," she said.

Source: abc.net.au

On the cover: Donna Layton (centre) handing the submissions to Mayor Ian Tilley (far right).

Hyne fire at Maryborough quickly contained



Emergency services responded quickly to the fire, which had already been contained by Hyne's sprinkler system.

DESPITE some breathless coverage in the local media, a fire at Hyne's Tuan Mill near Maryborough on Tuesday was quickly contained.

Hyne Group CEO, Jim Bindon describes the fire as isolated to one section of the mill and not a source of disruption to timber supply from the mill.

At around 3.30pm, the fire was reported to Queensland Fire and Emergency Services. Staff were evacuated for safety and emergency services were on site quickly.

"One team member was assessed by Queensland Ambulance Service at the Mill for potential smoke

inhalation," said Bindon. "Our own team decided to take him to hospital for further observation, but he has since been discharged. The ignition correctly triggered our fire suppression system with fire sprinklers activated in the area, successfully containing the fire.

"The Maryborough Fire Service eliminated all potential further risk and we thank them and all the emergency services personnel who attended the site, for their swift response and support."

By 9pm the same night, restoration work had begun on the parts of the facility involved. The cause of the fire is still being investigated.

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Clarence region timber industries push back

A Clarence Valley Council move to phase out native timber forestry has met with strong community resistance.

"WE'VE lost in Victoria, we've lost Western Australia. And if we lose New South Wales, we're going to be in trouble," says Donna Layton, general manager at Marshall Notaras Hardwoods.

Layton was talking about her region's response to a Clarence Valley Council motion to phase out native timber, which was originally introduced at the council's June meeting.

"The timber industry and the community weren't contacted regarding this motion," Layton says. "It was just lucky that we had heard about the day before the meeting."

Sympathetic councillors



The staff at Marshall Notaras Hardwoods. Donna Layton is at centre right in the medium-blue shirt.

had raised the alarm and were instrumental in pushing the political debate back to the October meeting. Layton and her fellow timber industry leaders in the region

immediately took up battle stations.

"Even then it's been harder than it should have been," she says. "This has been

run through the biodiversity subcommittee of our local council and there has been very little effort from them to

Cont P 5

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From P 4

inform the general public. Only five local sawmills were sent letters about the proposal, and one of them came late. They asked for a 28 August deadline for submissions but didn't even put the information up on the website until 3 August."

Where administration has been slow, the public has not. "There's been a great response," says Layton. "We've had so many submissions, it's unbelievable. Because we're a timber town. Not only the people that are directly employed in the mills, but also all the industries that we purchase from: our maintenance, our uniforms, our harvesting operators, our freight companies, even local businesses that use our mill residues to generate electricity."

That community has rallied behind its timber industries, "We're getting hundreds of submissions around town," Layton says. "From the pubs, from hairdressers, even people working in offices. We have not had one business say they won't sign it, instead they've put on the counter for the local people to sign as well."

"I thought we'd get some flack from people on the



A few of the crowd of timber industry workers and supportive locals at the handover of the submissions calling for native timber forestry to continue.

Green side, but no. Everyone knows what it means to have these workers here; without them, our towns won't survive."

On Monday, 2336 submissions were handed over to Clarence Valley Council Mayor, Ian Tiley.

"The event went well," says Layton. "We had around 100 people come to support us, including timber businesses, mill workers, contractors and their families, the local Men's Shed, plus interested community and local business members. Our local [NSW National] member Ritchie Williamson was also there to support the timber industry."

Local reporter Odessa Blain covered the handover for the

Daily Telegraph, reporting that Cr Tiley said he did not need to be convinced about the timber industry's value.

"(After hearing the call to phase out logging) council absolutely rightly said 'hey, hold the bus, let's go out and properly consult first,'" he said.

Pointing to boxes of submissions, Cr Tiley said: "This is a magnificent result of that consultation."

"Council will consider all

“EVERYONE KNOWS WHAT IT MEANS TO HAVE THESE WORKERS; WITHOUT THEM, OUR TOWNS WON'T SURVIVE

these submissions ... and we'll take it from there."

When we spoke with Layton on Monday, submissions from the wider timber community were still coming through. The next step is for the Clarence Valley Councillors to meet and review the submissions, it is expected that some

timber industry representatives will be invited to attend. Then, at the October council meeting, there will be informed discussion, timber sector representation and a vote on the motion.

"In the face of whole states closing down native timber harvesting, people might think this is a small thing," says Layton. "But it starts with the councils. If one council bans it on a belief that people in the area don't want native timber harvesting, then other councils will do the same thing. And the lobby groups opposed to native harvesting will go to the state government and say nobody in the country areas wants it, which simply isn't true."

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Regional log price falls

As China is replaced by India and Malaysia as a major market partner, prices and volumes have dipped.

INDUSTRYEDGE'S Australian and New Zealand Export Log Price Index fell 17.5% in June 2023, measured in US dollars. The weighted average export price was US\$Fob77.34/m³ for the month. The weighted average New Zealand price fell 13.3%, while the Australian equivalent declined just 0.2% in the demonstrably softening market.

The combined index value for April trade was at 71.8418 points, meaning the average log price was 28.2% lower than the index starting point in January 2017.

The difference between the recent movements in Australian and New Zealand log export prices appears to have something to do with the



IndustryEdge's Australian and New Zealand Log Price Index: Jan '21 to June '23. Source: ABS, Statistics NZ, RBA, RBNZ and IndustryEdge

deteriorating conditions in the Chinese economy, to which New Zealand ships most of its logs, compared with the

reportedly stable conditions prevalent in India, where the majority of Australia's softwood logs are currently directed.

The index combines and weights softwood log exports from Australia and New Zealand. It provides a consistent view of the price being achieved for the region's logs, for the combined trade from Australia and New Zealand, as well as for each of Australia and New Zealand separately.

IndustryEdge also reported that it suspects a large

shipment error for the June hardwood log export data, with the May total of 26,275m³ skyrocketing to 121,900m³ in June and the Indian export over the same period going from 20,000 to 119,496m³. The report suggests Malaysia is the key recipient of Australian Hardwood log exports, having replaced China as the dominant market player.

Over the year-ended June 2023, Australia's total exports of softwood logs were 35% lower than the prior year, totalling just 0.465 million m³. Reported exports totalled 121,900 m³ in June 2023, at a weighted average price of AU\$Fob129.92/m³, with larger diameter logs dominating. Australian softwood log exports continue to be dominated by shipments to India (98% in June).

New Zealand's softwood log exports were stable in 2022-23, totalling 20.890 million m³, while Australia's total log harvest in 2021-22 was down for the fifth successive year, totalling 25.983 million m³, around 4.0% lower than the previous year.

To read the full report, click here.

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Including visits to Melbourne and Brisbane. To participate and for further information contact John Halkett at john.halkett@forestlands.com.au or 0417 421 187

SEPTEMBER

5: WoodSolutions Free Webinar – ONLINE EVENT.

Galkangu Bendigo Gov Hub Design & Construction Case Study. Galkangu/ Bendigo GovHub is a new \$133 million project, built to accommodate up to 1000 City of Greater Bendigo and Victorian Government workers who service the Bendigo community. Icon Fairbrother, Lyons Architects and mass timber manufacturers and suppliers ASH (Masslam) were some of the team that worked closely to deliver the structural component of the project and will have representatives at the webinar.

RSVP at https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_3qEMK4X0TrqKAs1H-hiFJg#/registration

9: Women in Forest & Timber Network Charity Cocktail Fundraiser – Rose Room, Brisbane.

3:00 pm to 6:00 pm. Annual charity cocktail fundraiser in support of the Brisbane Domestic Violence Service (BDVS). For further information and sponsorship opportunities contact Jacinta. Colley@vidawood.com

11-12: Timber Off-Site Construction Conference – Crown Promenade Melbourne.

The theme for 2023 is “Timber & Technology – The Zero Carbon Future”. For more information visit www.timberoffsiteconstruction.com

28: Wood You Like To Know Summit - ONLINE EVENT.

The event promises to ‘transform the way you approach design’. Multiple streams of panel discussions on topics shaping the future of the industry will be headed by industry experts. Topics include Digital Evolution

In The Building Industry: BIM, Robots & Prefab Homes; Unpacking the Latest NCC Changes and Designing for Bushfire Prone Areas. Online expo and networking sessions included, with exhibitors including ITI Australia, Intergrain and Weathertext. Tickets from \$49 for half day live to \$99 for full day and on demand, earn up to 10 CPD points. For more, visit www.event.woodyouliketoknow.com.au

OCTOBER

2-6: 30th Session of the Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission (APFC – Hyatt Regency Sydney Hotel.

Formulation of forest policy and to review and coordinate its implementation on the regional scale; to exchange information and advice on suitable practices and action in regard to technical problems. Further details www.fao.org/events/detail/apfc-30/

11-12: 71st International Softwood Conference – Hilton Vienna Park Hotel Vienna.

The conference will offer the opportunity to scrutinise trends in the timber market focusing on facts and figures showing softwood production as well as consumption. Further more info visit <https://isc2023.com/>

15-19: ANZIF Conference – Twin Towns Conference Centre, Coolangatta, Qld.

The Theme for 2023 is “Embracing Our Natural Capital: the science, technology and art of managing forests for all values”. Further info from: www.forestry.org.au/

NOVEMBER

9-10: Sustainability summit and awards 2023 – Sydney.

The event begins with the summit, with its topics ranging from the Brisbane 2032 Olympics builds to Designing for Resilience and Sustainability Certification and Compliance, held at Allianz Stadium in Sydney and online. Then on Day 2, the prestigious awards will be held at the Sydney Cricket Ground. Tickets start at \$149. Visit www.sustainablebuildingawards.com.au/#s-summit



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Phil Clements retires from SWG and MRFH

The highly respected forestry expert will continue to consult.

EXECUTIVE Officer of the Softwoods Working Group (SWG) and the Murray Region Forestry Hub (MRFH) Phil Clements has retired.

SWG and MRFH chair, Peter Crowe OAM, said after spending much of his career with the Forestry Commission of Batlow and Bombala (District Forester) and Norske Skog, Phil Clements joined SWG in 2007 as executive officer.

“Phil played a major role in setting SWG and later folding the MRFH into the not-for-profit organisation,” he said.

Crowe said SWG was a unique forum set up to examine issues and prepare plans to focus on regional community development based on the plantation industry.

“Its membership includes

forest growers (public and private), local governments, regional development committees and various relevant NSW Government agencies,” said Crowe.

“MRFH is one of 11 regional forestry hubs created under the National Forest Industries Plan to identify the constraints limiting forestry and timber industry growth.

“It takes in about 3.5 million hectares east of the Hume Freeway, west of the Great Dividing Range, south of Gundagai, and includes plantations in north-



Phil Clements with Paul Smith from Supergoat Media working on a promotional video for MRFH near Tumut after visiting the Pilot Hill Arboretum, Bago State Forest.

east Victoria down to Lake Eildon.”

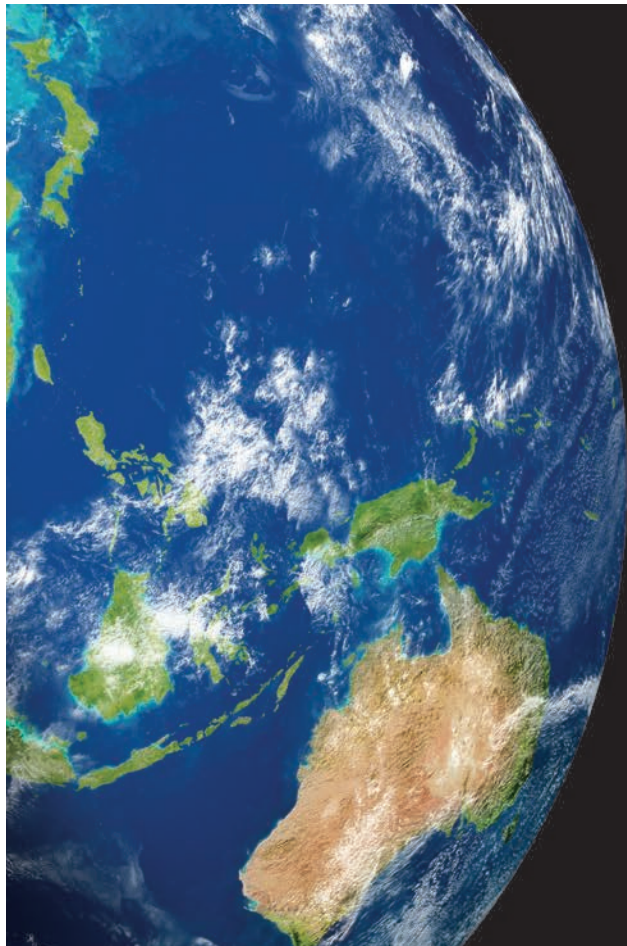
Crowe said Clements’ forestry and pulp and paper experience served both

organisations very well and was complemented by his experience as project manager for the Ettamogah Rail Hub at Albury.

“Phil has great energy, is an excellent communicator, and a diligent and thorough business manager,” Crowe said.

“He handled his expanded role with the creation of the MRFH in 2019 in expert style, managing a vastly increased suite of projects and consultants, while keeping our members fully tuned in at all times.

“Phil’s expertise will not be lost to us, as he will be available in a non-executive role to help with specific projects requiring his excellent knowledge of the timber industry in the region and his extensive skills.”



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New venture as Japanese forestry investors branch out

JAPANESE forestry and other related investment companies have long invested in overseas countries, being especially prolific in Australia and New Zealand.

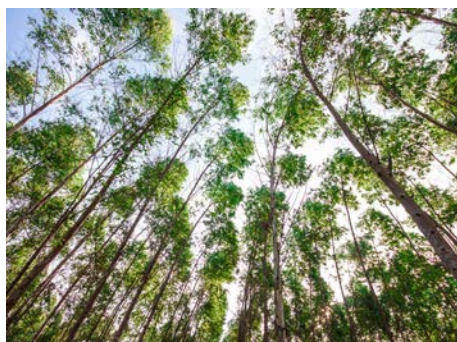
In Australia most of this investment has been in eucalyptus pulpwood plantations in Western Australia and in the Green Triangle; with Oji Paper, Marubeni and Mitsui featuring, to secure resources to export woodchips to Japan, though some of these companies have been exiting their Australian plantations as a direct investment.

Japanese companies Oji, Sumitomo Corporation and Juken NZ hold extensive radiata pine plantations in New Zealand – grown for sawlogs –

and Oji and Itochu hold a small joint-venture eucalyptus plantation in Southland grown for woodchip exports.

Recently Japanese companies have been looking overseas for forestry investments for carbon credits, as well as for wood fibre ownership

As a result, a new consortium of 10 Japanese companies is participating in Eastwood Climate Smart Forestry Fund I. Eastwood's lead broker and shareholder, Sumitomo Forestry Company,



Australian timbers are now desirable as carbon credits as well as for their fibre resource.

announced that East Forests LLC in the US has established Eastwood Climate Smart Forestry Fund I (the Fund) and has started investing. The Fund's operating period will be 15 years, with an initial six billion yen (AU\$64 million) in assets.

Eastwood Forests was

established in October, 2022 by Sumitomo Forestry's wholly owned subsidiary Sumitomo Forestry America, Inc. A subsidiary, Eastwood Forests will serve as the asset management company of the Fund, providing advice on the management of forest assets.

Sumitomo Forestry's wholly owned subsidiary SFC Asset Management Co., Ltd. handles the Fund's private placement and has been entrusted by the general partner to manage the operation in Japan.

The 10 Japanese companies investing in the fund say that they are participating to "achieve a goal of decarbonisation".

[Click here for the full announcement of the fund.](#)

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Sydney homes cheaper to build near CBD

As governments get serious about housing, the full cost of building programs is being researched.

ANYONE who's ever bought or rented in Sydney will tell you there is a CBD tax: the closer you live to the centre of the city, the more you pay. But new research released by the NSW Productivity Commissioner shows that, conversely, building in and close to Sydney's central business district (CBD) can save up to \$75,000 in infrastructure-related costs per home.

NSW Productivity Commissioner Peter Achterstraat AM has released Building more homes where infrastructure costs less, the second in a series of papers that considers how NSW can use evidence to plan for new homes in the right locations and leverage Sydney's existing infrastructure.

"At least 550,000 new homes are needed across Sydney by 2041," Achterstraat said. "In this housing affordability crisis, it's more important than ever to make sure new housing is built in the right areas and that we make the most of existing infrastructure.

"This paper investigates the costs of building across Greater Sydney and finds that the economic costs of growth vary from \$40,000 to \$114,000 per home, with the lowest cost in areas near the CBD and increasing significantly moving north, south, and west.

"Building up in existing areas is cheaper because much of the necessary infrastructure, such as roads, public transport, schools, utilities and open space, is already in place. More homes close to jobs also means shorter travel times."

After an ABS boundary



More townhouse and flat construction in areas like Sydney's Newtown will save on infrastructure costs in NSW and deliver housing people want. Image: Shutterstock

change, Melbourne pipped Sydney as the nation's the most populous city back in April, but there are still close to 5 million people currently living in the Harbour City and a million more are expected by 2041, requiring at least 550,000 new homes.

The NSW Government has made a commitment to improve its levels of housing (currently lagging most national capitals) in a way that is evidence-based and with the goal of creating a more liveable city. The goal is also to direct development without introducing social problems, such as lack of access to schools and hospitals and higher crime rates in areas with little natural amenity. In May this year, the commission released a paper titled Building more homes where people want to live, which tallied the benefits of increasing housing in high-demand areas across Sydney, instead of pushing new homes further away.

It encouraged higher density and taller construction

near transport hubs, as well as townhouses and other medium-density development, noting that many people were already looking for homes in these areas for ease of access to work and study as well as lifestyle reasons and that there was capacity remaining in local schools, health facilities and so on, as well as sufficient green space for recreation. Achterstraat called this "density done well".

That paper also showed the benefits of housing 'filtering', where new high-quality housing is occupied by high-income households, freeing their former dwellings to be occupied by middle- to high-income households at a reduced cost. In turn, these households leave dwellings that can be occupied by lower income families, reducing the burden on social and affordable housing. While the term sounds off-putting, the result is more people able to afford housing of some kind in the areas where they want to live.

"Our previous paper showed the Eastern Suburbs, North Shore, inner city, and Inner West have the greatest unmet demand when it comes to where people want to live. This paper [Building more homes where infrastructure costs less] suggests these areas also have the most existing capacity and are the most cost-effective areas to build in," Achterstraat said.

"Put simply, more housing in the right places, where people want to live, will improve affordability, reduce infrastructure costs, and limit the burden on taxpayers."

The infrastructure costs considered in the paper include:

- the economic costs, or impacts on individuals, of road congestion
- the economic costs, or impacts on individuals, of crowding on trains
- the costs of upgrading schools to take on new students
- the costs of new water and wastewater connections
- the purchase or contribution towards land for open space.

These two housing papers are part of a series commissioned by the NSW Treasury that focuses on evidence-based decision-making in planning.

[Click here to read the full papers.](#)

Input call for tree felling project

Chainsaw safety is paramount, but a new project is looking at ways to deliver training more efficiently.

NOT-FOR-PROFIT group Skills Insight is one of 10 government-funded Jobs and Skills Councils helping industry to have a voice regarding its skills needs, from the development of national skills standards, through to training delivery and assessment. Its industry scope covers forestry and timber, as well as agriculture, furnishing, pulp and paper manufacture and several other industries.

Currently, Skills Insight is conducting a review into manual tree felling training. This skill is currently delivered at three levels of competency – basic, intermediate and advanced – and all require hands-on instruction and assessment, which necessitates felling a specified number of trees.

It's broadly recognised that the number of trees required at each level needs to be low enough that it does not present a barrier for training



Safe chainsaw use is an essential skill for many industries.
Photo: Power Safety Training.

organisations in sourcing them, but high enough that learners will be safe and competent when they take their chainsaw skills into the workplace.

Training providers have been concerned that the current requirements are making it difficult to deliver training due to the number of trees required. Accordingly, Skills Insight and ForestWorks

are undertaking a project to review the three tree felling units in consultation with industry, considering how many trees are required to

“SKILLS INSIGHT AND FORESTWORKS ARE REVIEWING THE THREE TREE FELLING UNITS”

demonstrate each skill level and what other mechanisms may be needed to support safety, competence and accessible training.

The project has already begun its scoping studies and will be developing a training product solution throughout September. The next scheduled step is to have first drafts available for review in October and then final drafts in November. Skills Insight has called for stakeholder input from interested and expert parties at all stages of this project, including foresters, arborists and emergency services workers, noting that the units need to reflect real work experience if they are to deliver a skilled and flexible workforce for the future.

If you would like to be involved in this project, please contact the project manager, Georgiana Daian at gdaian@forestworks.com.au.

To read more about the overall project, [click here](#).

Woodchopping events rescued at the Royal Adelaide Show

IT'S one of the most loved events at the Royal Adelaide Show, but the woodchopping nearly got the chop this year

Nathan Paine, CEO SA Forest Products Association, told ABC Radio Adelaide that the Victorian state government's early shutdown of native timber forestry meant an instant end to the logs that had previously been used at the show, all of which had come from Victoria's sustainable native forestry industry.

"Historically they've used

two different types of hardwoods, one a mountain ash and the other a woollybutt," says Paine, noting that these had been brought over the state border because most South Australian timber resource is softwood.

Graeme Hyde from the Royal Adelaide Show Woodchopping Committee called Paine earlier this year



Axe woman, Jillian Stratton saws a log of wood in 2015.

saying there was a problem: a lack of Victorian timber meant the woodchopping would have to be cancelled for the first time since 1905.

South Australian foresters came to the rescue. "We've been able to find the fibre that actually works for these guys and allow the show to go on," said Paine.

The log used is reject log that isn't suitable for structural framing timbers, so it's not using a tree that could have gone into a sustainable house frame. The chopped wood is donated to a charity that sells it as firewood to fund their work.

To hear the full story, [click here](#).

Nailplate companies to make new product access easier

Pryda, Multinail and MiTek are working together to make the process of bringing new supply into their software more straightforward.

ADAM Dawson, marketing and engineering manager ANZ at Pryda, describes the current attitude of engineers and timber industry groups in the country as 'vigilant'.

Two issues have been drawing on that vigilance of late. The first is the concern that Russian timbers are bypassing various international tariff and ban schemes by rebadging.

"It's been processed through other countries that don't have the same trade restrictions and sold as though it originated there," Dawson says.

He notes that there is no way for nailplate companies to tell the actual country of origin. "We're being asked to test it, to review certifications



1/ Marketing and engineering manager ANZ Pryda, Adam Dawson.

2 Pryda's Banjo Vincent from the builder solutions team demonstrating the company's Speed Truss System.

and include it in our software to make it available for use in the industry," says Dawson. "But we're relying on importers having done their due diligence of that supply chain and the origins. We can usually tell you what species of timber are in a product, but not exactly where

those trees have come from."

The second issue is the tail of some effects caused by the peak in demand through 2021-22. "A lot of opportunistic suppliers saw Australia struggling and prices going up," Dawson says. "So all sorts of product was coming in.

And anecdotally we've heard of some issues with LVLs, for example, delaminating quite quickly."

As a result, he says, "we're all still trying to encourage a high level of vigilance, particularly with engineered wood products, to ensure they meet all the requirements to be used and sold in Australia. Industry groups like Timber Queensland are doing a really good job of sharing those best practices for how to verify that the materials that you are using have that appropriate

certification and testing data and are OK to use."

To help speed the entry of appropriate new product into the market, Pryda engineers have come together with their counterparts at MiTek and Multinail to work on a best practice document. "It will mean we're all applying the exact same process, no matter whose software you're getting your product integrated into," Dawson says. "The same steps will apply for each one, so it will be consistent, easy and efficient."

Timber importers/suppliers will still need to pay for testing with each company, as each brand of nailplate functions slightly differently to others and nailplates themselves are very sensitive to some materials, particularly LVL, which is why different LVLs cannot be freely substituted in engineered designs.

"We hope that this will raise the quality of products on the market," says Dawson. "Timber suppliers will have a single checklist with the same steps to prepare for each nailplate supplier. We will have that consistency in the industry and it will be easier to verify whether a product has been through that rigour or not."

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Gene editing trees could bring quick breakthroughs

Scientists could find more benefits using cutting-edge gene editing in forestry than medicine says new research.

A NEW paper published in the prestigious journal *Science* marries AI and multiplex CRISPR to the sustainable production of wood fibres and improvement of timber resource. The results offer the promise of making fibre manufacturing for a wide range of products – from cardboard and paper to disposable nappies – greener, cheaper, and more efficient and the same techniques may also be used to develop better structural timbers in the future.

“The [CRISPR-edited wood] that we’ve made can have a tremendous impact on industrial operations and building the bioeconomy,” said co-senior author Dr Rodolphe Barrangou, professor in the Department of Food, Bioprocessing, and Nutrition Sciences at North Carolina State University (NCSU).

Barrangou and colleagues reported on their development in a paper titled “Multiplex CRISPR editing of wood for sustainable fiber production,” in *Science* (click paper title for link).

Co-senior author Jack P. Wang, professor at the College of Natural Resources at NCSU, said that the importance of trees for the environment and as our major source of natural materials and resources and the largest biological carbon sink on earth means that they must be used responsibly.

“If you think about how far along agriculture, in general, has moved and how far along therapeutics has moved, there are substantial opportunities in forestry to make tangible



CRISPR-edited poplar and wild-type controls growing in a greenhouse. Photo: Chenmin Yang

benefits that could make our natural resources much more efficient, productive, sustainable, and of higher quality,” said Wang.

In their research, the team was aiming to produce wood fibres in which the famously tough lignin, which forms a part of the cell walls of wood and bark, would break down easily, allowing for faster, less resource-intensive pulp production.

Historically, breeding weaker lignin has been a slow process, but decades of research by the team has generated large amounts of genetics and omics data that were processed with AI to predict and then sort through more than 69,000 different multigenic gene-editing strategies targeting 21 important genes associated with lignin production.

“[Trees] are very complex

organisms that can thrive for hundreds of years, so their genetics are hard to understand,” said Wang. “That’s why we needed that machine learning model to really decipher and understand the genetic regulation for information and then modify them using CRISPR in ways that can produce woody materials that are compatible with industrial processes or the conversion to useful products.”

CRISPR is a gene editing technique that, to use a rough analogy, scissors out and removes or replaces bits of genetic code. Multiplex CRISPR technologies do this to multiple parts of the genome at once. Using the information on which strategies would be most effective that had been sorted by the AI, the research team was able to lower lignin levels and increase the carbohydrate to lignin (C/L) ratio and the ratio of two important lignin

building blocks—syringyl to guaiacyl (S/G)—in poplar trees. Together, these changes hit a fibre sweet spot that could reduce greenhouse gases associated with pulp production by up to 20%.

With multiplex CRISPR technology, they produced 174 edited poplar variants, which they planted, grew for months and harvested for analysis and the generation of paper with gains

that translate to industrial processing.

The study also included sophisticated pulp production mill models that suggest reduced lignin content in trees could help mills produce up to 40% more sustainable product.

Barrangou pointed out that trees may be a better use of CRISPR technologies than medical therapies when it comes to human health.

“CRISPR has shown success in the clinic, but it took eight years to dose the first patient,” said Barrangou. “How long will take to help a million people? But the number of people that can benefit from editing trees is in excess of 10 billion – everyone alive today plus people who will be born over the lifespan of those trees.”

Source: Genetic Engineering & Biotechnology News

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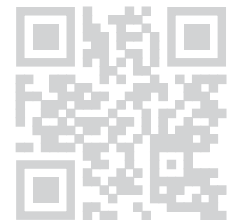
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Queensland timber theft attracts hefty fines

A QUEENSLAND man has been issued with two Penalty Infringement Notices (PINs) totalling \$2167 after rangers caught him removing timber from the Wondai State Forest earlier this month.

Compliance Manager Michael Devery said rangers located the 56-year-old man parked on a bush trail and found that a fallen tree had been cut up.

“After identifying themselves, rangers located 12 blocks of firewood, a chainsaw and axe in the tray of the vehicle,” Devery said.

“It is unlawful for anyone to take timber from the State forest without a permit. The man told rangers he had cut the blocks for firewood, but

everything in the State forest is protected by the Forestry Act 1959.”

The rangers also noted the man was inappropriately equipped for his adventure, wearing only thongs and with no safety equipment or ear protection, raising the risk of serious consequences if he had injured himself.

The man voluntarily relinquished the blocks of firewood he had cut up, which were removed by rangers.

“Under Section 39(1) of the Forestry Act 1959, he was issued with one \$1548 PIN for



Cut-up sections of tree were discovered in the man's ute. The tree had already fallen, but it is illegal to remove any timber from a state forest without a permit in Queensland.

interfere/cause to be interfered with forest products in a State forest without authority,” said Devery.

“He was also issued with a \$619 PIN for using a restricted item such as a chainsaw without authorisation in a State forest.”

Mr Devery said rangers have a zero-tolerance approach. “We conduct regular compliance patrols in our protected areas, and people collecting or cutting up timber for firewood will be fined,” he said.

“As part of our compliance activity, we can seize vehicles and equipment such as chainsaws. The maximum court-applied penalty for unlawfully taking firewood from our protected areas is \$143,700 for a first offence or \$413,550 for subsequent offences.”

Suspected illegal behaviour in Queensland protected areas can be reported by phoning 1300 130 372 or by emailing ParkEnquiries@des.qld.gov.au

For the full report, [click here](#).



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Award-winning British timber builds

Timber stars in several contenders for the RIBA House of the Year 2023.

TIMBER is the hero in several contenders for the RIBA House of the Year 2023. The Royal Institute of British Architects has recently announced its longlist of 20 projects and the judging committee has prioritised sustainability in its criteria.

Dido Milne, Jury Chair, said of this year's longlist: "At this critical point in time in terms of 'climate break down' we were really looking to see how deep a dive the architects had taken into issues around environmental sustainability. It was encouraging to see in both the prototype for modular social housing and some of the larger houses on the longlist how there was a much more holistic approach to what might constitute a truly sustainable house. What we are building with, the provenance of materials and the impact on biodiversity are starting to really influence designs."

While several homes on the longlist feature expressed timber as major design elements, the following are some of those to use it as a major construction element.

Cuddymoss, North Ayrshire,

by Ann Nisbet Studio, sees a new timber-framed and partially timber-clad structure sit in and around a 200-year-old stone and brick ruin, with an extension added for more space. The glass link between the two parts of the building separates the time periods

and highlights the natural environment.

Forest Road SNUG home, Bristol, by Ecomotive, has a footprint of just 44m² on a formerly neglected corner block. The modular timber-framed design was prefabricated offsite and many of the

building's materials are recycled or repurposed.

Green House, Tottenham, by Hayhurst and Co, sits in a conservation area and was built on a very tight budget. Exposed cross-laminated timber is the main building



1/ **The new part of Cuddymoss is timber clad, with timber-framed building inside the old ruin.** Photo: David Barbour

2/ **Forest Road SNUG home.** Photo: Tony Gilbert

3/ **Green House.** Photo: Kilian O'Sullivan

4/ **Spruce House and Studio.** Photo: Rory Gardiner

material, with sliding doors of polycarbonate sheeting reflecting the garden structures that give the house its name.

Spruce House and Studio, Walthamstow Village, by ao-ft, is another finalist starring CLT, which was chosen as the material for this linked home and workplace for both its beauty and short on-site installation time frame.

For the full list, click here.

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