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ISSUE 782 // November 23, 2023

# timber & FORESTRY *e*news

## Responsible Wood showcases NSW sustainable forestry

COVER STORY P6



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# NSW grants Building Commissioner more powers and harsher penalties

## Buildings under construction will face rectification orders under new laws.

NSW Building Commissioner David Chandler has made no secret of his war on shoddy builders, one that has wide support from consumers and much of the NSW Government.

Premier Chris Minns announced new laws on the weekend to support Chandler and future Building Commissioners in their work, which are expected to pass through Parliament this week. They are part of a wider package to support the NSW Building Commission and to ensure the state's planned ramp-up in home builds is not compromised by shoddy work.

The changes include:

- New powers for the Building Commissioner to enter any apartment or free-standing home in NSW;
- Power for the Commissioner to uncover defects before completion of buildings and compel builders to get them fixed;



Premier Chris Minns with Building Commissioner David Chandler. Photo AAP: Jenny Evans

- New measures to prevent and penalise intentional phoenixing activities in the construction industry by cancelling or refusing licenses;
- Introducing new responsibilities across the building products supply chain ensuring that all products used in buildings are safe, compliant and suitable for their intended use.

Building Commission NSW will also receive a \$24 million

boost, allowing it to scale up to ensure quality buildings are being delivered in NSW. Media reports also say that 400 inspectors will be transferred from Fair Trading to the Building Commission.

"We're delivering more homes across the state but we won't let quantity get in the way of quality," said NSW Premier Chris Minns. "Home buyers in NSW can be confident that we've got a tough cop on the beat in the building industry, ensuring

that they can have confidence in the quality of the home they're buying."

The role of NSW Building Commissioner was established in 2019 under the then-Premier Gladys Berejiklian. Chandler was the inaugural appointee and remains in the role.

These changes came as part of a wider package on housing with the NSW Government also committing to develop a pattern book of endorsed housing designs for low-rise and mid-rise (up to six storeys) buildings. Building certifiers have also been under scrutiny, with four having their licenses cancelled so far this year over behaviour found to be dishonest or falling short of expected standards.



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# Forestry Corporation of NSW wins court battle

## Timber harvesting will continue in contested NE NSW areas.

THE Land and Environment Court's Judge Sarah Pritchard ruled on Monday that evidence presented by the North East Forest Alliance (NEFA) to support their claim that koala habitat was being destroyed in the Myrtle and Braemar state forests, south of Casino, NSW, was not relevant.

Accordingly, the Court has rejected the application to halt timber harvesting in the two areas.

NEFA spokesman Dailan Pugh told the ABC both forests were scorched by the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires, with the local koala populations reduced by an estimated 70%. "But they're recovering now, and that's just going to be halted in its tracks," he said. "We thought we had good grounds in this case, but they just weren't good enough."

Forestry Corp had attempted to have the case dismissed earlier, arguing that NEFA should not have been able to bring the action, but Justice Pritchard had allowed the case, only drawing the line at its reliance on expert evidence. Click here for the full ABC story on the ruling.

Forestry Corporation told the ABC: "Forestry Corporation is pleased with the judgement delivered by Justice Pritchard this morning dismissing all grounds of challenge brought by the North East Forest Alliance concerning our harvest plans for Myrtle and Braemar State Forests.

"We are reviewing the written reasons for judgement and considering when the operations will restart. Forestry Corporation is committed to ensuring all our operations



**1/ Despite highly credible research showing that koala numbers in well-managed forests remain stable, worries about the marsupial's future fuel protests.**

**2/ Dailan Pugh described the court decision as "extremely disappointing".** (ABC North Coast: Leah White)

are undertaken sustainably and in accordance with NSW's comprehensive and detailed forestry ruleset."

Research carried out by scientific teams from the NSW DPI has shown that koala populations in parts of NE NSW with regulated timber harvesting have maintained their numbers (click here for one of the papers from the research team), particularly when the areas are regenerated with preferred food trees.

Meanwhile, a separate ruling from the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) has fined Forestry Corporation \$500,000, which must be paid towards four environmental projects following the alleged

illegal harvesting of 17 protected trees in Coopernook State Forest on the NSW mid-North Coast.

The incident occurred when one of Forestry Corporation's contractors mistakenly harvested the trees in a riparian exclusion zone in December 2021, allegedly breaching the Forestry Act 2012. The alleged breaches were self-reported to the EPA by Forestry Corporation.

"These trees were in a protected riparian exclusion zone, close to streams, so removing them had the potential to destabilise the soil and cause potential harm to the aquatic system as well as reduce available habitat for fauna," said EPA director operations Steve Orr.

"Harvesting operations in State Forests are governed by strict rules to protect vegetation, threatened species and ecosystems. The EPA takes any non-compliances very seriously and won't hesitate to take appropriate action when breaches are detected."

The Enforceable Undertaking (EU) requires Forestry Corporation to fund four

projects that will deliver benefits to the environment, the local community, and improve its operations including:

- \$150,000 to develop and test an industry-first in-cab Boundary Warning Prototype to improve forestry operational boundary management.
- \$150,000 to improve Forestry Corporation's corporate website to better inform external stakeholders about its forestry operations.
- \$100,000 to establish and maintain a nature-themed playground at the Forest Camping Ground in Coopernook State Forest that will cater for an expanded visitor demographic.
- \$100,000 to establish, monitor and maintain breeding sites for threatened frog species in the Olney State Forest.
- Forestry Corporation has also agreed to pay the EPA's legal and investigative costs of \$37,802.94, as well as the EPA's reasonable costs of monitoring future compliance with the EU.

Daniel Tuan, general manager hardwood forests at Forestry Corporation, said compliance with the environmental regulations is of paramount importance. "We are disappointed that we did not comply on this occasion, and we are sorry.

"When we identified the error, we immediately self-reported it to the EPA. We have worked collaboratively with the EPA over the past 12 months to identify investments that will deliver tangible environmental and community benefits to compensate for the damage this operation caused."

# WA's FPC supports local firefighters

WESTERN Australia's Forest Products Commission (FPC) launched its new Community Fire Protection Grants Program in May 2023. The scheme is designed to provide grants of up to \$10,000 to support volunteer fire brigades and other relevant organisations with their fire prevention, preparedness, and response activities.

FPC said, "As well as protecting regional communities, fire protection of our State's softwood plantation estate is critical to the long-term security of Western Australia's timber resource.

"The FPC recognises the important role of volunteer fire brigades, local government authorities, and community organisations in protecting our forests and local communities from the threat of bushfire. The new grant program supports

their efforts in planning, preparing, and responding to bushfire emergencies."

Grants are for items such as training, equipment, and supplies that are not covered by the Emergency Services Levy or other funding provisions.

Following competitive judging process against selection criteria, 11 successful applicants have now received funding under the 2023 FPC Community Fire Protection Grants Program:

- Allanson Bushfire Brigade (1) - Radios
- Allanson Bushfire Brigade (2) - LED lights
- Argyle Bushfire Brigade - Radios



Some of the support materials funded by the grants.

- Donnybrook Town Volunteer Bushfire Brigade - Gazebos/ Chairs/Tables
- McAlinden Bushfire Brigade - Trailer
- Mumballup-Noggerup Bushfire Brigade - Submersible water pump
- Shire of Boyup Brook - Radios
- Shire of Cranbrook - Tank
- Shire of Donnybrook, Balingup - Radio twin packs
- Shire of Nannup, Volunteer Bushfire Brigade - Radios

- Upper Capel Bushfire Brigade - Water tank

Mumballup-Noggerup Bushfire Brigade President Garry Hatch said, "We would like to sincerely thank the Forest Products Commission and the Community

and Engagement team for the recent grant for our volunteer brigade.

"This grant means a great deal to our brigade as part of a program aimed at ensuring a reliable, secure water source at our Hearle Road Station, to enable refilling of a large storage tank and having a standpipe from which we can rapidly refill firefighting appliances, during a fire."

**Source: This story first appeared on the WAFPC's website**

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# Queensland doubles first home owner grant

## Qualifying new builds, including granny flats, will attract \$30,000 in support.

WITH one eye on soaring rents and the other on next year's state election, the Queensland government has doubled the first home owner grant to \$30,000 for new builds until mid-2025. The new grant only applies to buying or building a new home valued under \$750,000, including land and contract variations and only to first home buyers 18 and over. It's the most generous such scheme in the country.

Announcing the boost last Sunday, Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk described it as a "pre-Christmas bonus."

"You can also use it for money towards a new home, a unit, a townhouse or even if your parents want to put a granny flat out the back, so it covers the whole range of the spectrum," Ms Palaszczuk said (modular housing and renovations are also covered).

"This our big Christmas bonus for our first home



**Ethan Hughes welcomed the grant increase.** Photo: ABC News/James Kelly

owners and we understand that our families are hurting with big cost living pressures out there, and our government is making this small step to help people get into the market."

The announcement from the Palaszczuk government said they expected the doubling of the grant will support around 12,000 people to buy their first homes by 30

June 2025, when the boost is set to expire. It noted that over the last three years, more

“WITH CAPACITY CONSTRAINTS EASING IN RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION, NOW IS THE TIME TO ACT”

than 24,000 households had received \$365 million in first home owner grants.

Ethan Hughes, 22, told the ABC he hoped to make use of the grant. "The housing market is consistently going up so the earlier I can get in the better," Hughes said.

"This is a more than welcome increase, it's a very welcome handout."

Housing Minister Meaghan Scanlon said coal royalties had bankrolled the grant boost: "With signs that capacity constraints are now easing in the residential housing construction market, now is the time to act."

"And the reason we can do this is because of the strength of our budget. It allows us to take advantage of those changing conditions and to make the most of that emerging capacity."

Source: [abc.net.au](http://abc.net.au)



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# Getting the truth out about forestry

Responsible Wood and industry partners took a group of media, politicians and more out to see the minimal impacts and maximal results of well-managed NSW forestry.

By **JONATHAN TIBBITS**

OUTSIDE the sector, sustainable forestry practices are often misunderstood or overlooked. At times, particularly in recent media, they've been deliberately misrepresented.

Which is why on Tuesday of last week, Responsible Wood, in partnership with Pentarch Forestry, Forestry Corporation of NSW, the Australian Forest Products Association of NSW and Timber NSW, organised an innovative forestry field trip from Port Macquarie, New South Wales.

The event, attended by a diverse group of stakeholders including

**“ PARTICIPANTS HAD THE UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO WITNESS THE RIGOROUS FOREST PLANNING PROCESS ”**

journalists, members of the NSW Parliament, CFMEU Manufacturing Division representatives and industry supply chain representatives, provided a rare and exclusive glimpse into the world of responsible forest management.

The field trip began with a visit to a live forestry harvesting site, where attendees were offered an unfiltered view of the intricate processes of harvesting and processing. Participants had the unique opportunity to witness the rigorous forest planning process, ensuring the protection and management

of forestry values before, during and after harvesting operations. Real-time drone footage showcased the broader operational context, emphasising the importance of retaining trees in riparian zones for habitat, seed, sap, and future selective harvesting operations.

Long-term forest management strategies, estate historical data, yield planning and the crucial role of certification in demonstrating sustainable forest management were also presented to the engaged audience. Independent verification and third-party

auditing underscored the commitment to transparency and accountability in the pursuit of sustainable forestry practices underpinned by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and built upon the internationally agreed upon criterion and indicators of the Montreal Process.

The journey continued with a visit to the Burrawan State Forest, home to the Southern Hemisphere's largest Red Bloodwood tree – the Old Bottlebutt. Attendees enjoyed a serene walk through the

*Cont P 7*



1/ Dr Brad Law talking about his koala tracking research at Burrawan State Forest.



2/ Recent scare images of fallen trees in the media were contextualised to show the careful selection of logs and retention of surrounding forest.

Expression of Interest open for WA pine industrial wood from 2026

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**NOVEMBER**

**27: Melbourne Mass Timber Building Study Tour – 107 Victoria Harbour Promenade, Docklands, Melbourne.** Tour starts at 9.00am. Please arrive at 8.50am. More details <https://www.woodsolutions.com.au/events/woodsolutions-proudly-sponsors-melbourne-mass-timber-building-study-tour>

**29: NTHA TRAINING – Introduction to Plan Reading and Estimating – ONLINE EVENT.** Registrations open. For more information and to register, visit <https://www.ntha.com.au/events/training/>

**30: NTHA TRAINING – Timber Knowledge Beginner – St Mary's NSW.** Registrations open. For more information and

to register, visit <https://www.ntha.com.au/events/training/>

**DECEMBER**

**15: International Conference on Community Forestry and Conservation (ICFC - 23) – Melbourne.** Hosted by one of the most trusted organizations, SAIRAP, the conference provides a premier global platform for exchanging ideas and insights on the latest developments across various fields. Our goal is to offer a competitive venue for industry professionals and academic researchers to showcase and discuss cutting-edge advancements in their respective fields. More details <https://sairap.org/conf/index.php?id=1871959>

**SAVE THE DATES 2024**

**APRIL 23-24: Planned International Forest Investment Conference – New York City.** TBC

**MAY 1-2: Sydney Build Expo – Sydney.** Sydney Build is the only event in Australia to offer 300+ accredited presentations, 500+ exhibitors and incredible networking opportunities for all of Australia's construction, architecture, engineering and infrastructure industries.

**SEPTEMBER 23: Latin America Forest Investment Conference – Porto Alegre, Brazil.**

**SEPTEMBER 24-25: International Woodchip and Biomass Trade Conference – Porto Alegre, Brazil.**

**SEPTEMBER 25-27: Field**

**Trip – Rio Grande do Sul State, Brazil.**

**OCTOBER 22-23: International Woodchip and Biomass Seminar and Networking Event – Singapore.**

**SAVE THE DATES 2025**

**JUNE 22-26: World Conference on Timber Engineering – Brisbane.** WCTE is the world's leading scientific forum for the presentation of the latest technical and architectural solutions and innovations in timber construction.

**OCTOBER 20-22: International Woodchip and Biomass Seminar and Networking Event – Singapore.**

**OCTOBER 23-24: Field Trip – Vietnam.**

From P 6

dry rainforest, concluding with insights from renowned experts Dr Brad Law and Dr Fabiano Ximenes from the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries.

Dr Law shared findings from a koala tracking project that has been running since 2018 with the assistance of the Port Macquarie Koala Hospital and Forestry Corporation. Law's team's research is shedding light on the impact of forest disturbances such as bushfires and timber harvesting on koala



**Participants had the unique opportunity to witness the rigorous forest planning process.**

populations. The integration of AI to interpret data from acoustic arrays for koala tracking sparked much

interest, highlighting the innovative techniques employed in wildlife conservation efforts.

The talk by Dr Ximenes delved into research on carbon release from wood and paper products, providing attendees with valuable insights into carbon sequestration and storage complexities. The discussion extended to the potential of woody biomass crops for bioenergy, with Ximenes addressing questions on technical assessments related to biomass use for electricity generation.

The field trip culminated with a visit to Pentarch's Herons Creek Sawmill,

Cont P 8

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From P 7

offering attendees a behind-the-scenes look at how sustainably harvested forest products are processed through a certified chain of custody sawmill. This final stop showcased the journey of certified hardwood products from local processing to distribution throughout Australia.

While forestry field trips are not novel, this event stood out for its collaborative approach, bringing together a diverse range of stakeholders to witness



1, 2 & 3/ Experts talked about the various stages of forest management and timber usage.

forest sustainability in action. Live harvesting, certification

As the curtains closed on this journey of

credentials, expert presentations and first-hand accounts from forestry contractors collectively painted a picture of the responsible and sustainable future of Australia's timber industry.

sustainably sourced forest products, participants left with a newfound appreciation for the intricate balance between industry progress and environmental stewardship, undoubtedly intrigued to explore more about sustainable forestry in the future.

**On the cover: Attendees walked through actively forested areas and were able to see selective harvesting strategies in action.**

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# Industry and university educators unite

Experts from both fields came together to better timber education and R&D in architectural design, engineering and building courses.



Workshop attendees on day 1 of the WoodSolutions Education Program.

FWPA's WoodSolutions Education Program delivered its third Industry-University Educator workshop in Sydney (on 9–10 November), supported by the University of Sydney School of Architecture, Design & Planning and School of Civil Engineering.

Bringing together 34 participants from industry and 30 university lecturers from all over the country, the aim of this initiative is to discuss how to get more timber content taught in university engineering, architecture and building courses in Australia. Ensuring that the students of today, who become the specifiers of tomorrow, are well informed about timber product use and specification is vital for the industry's longevity.

The two-day workshop commenced with a joint welcome by Head of Built Environment Programs, Kevin Peachey, and A/Prof Arianna Brambilla, the University of Sydney's Associate Dean of Education.

The first session provided participants with an update on the development of a new WoodSolutions Strategic Plan, delivered by consultant to FWPA, Karl-Heinz Weiss, followed by exciting news delivered by Jon Shanks of a new WoodSolutions



1/ Alastair Woodard, WoodSolutions.  
2/ Jon Shanks, WoodSolutions.

micro-certification program, 'Timber Design for Residential Construction' currently in development with UTAS. The program includes state-of-the-art educational resource delivery in keeping with the current hybrid-blended learning approaches being adopted post-Covid by universities nationally.

“INITIATIVE AIMS TO GET MORE TIMBER CONTENT TAUGHT IN UNIVERSITY COURSES

After a very interactive networking lunch break, the group heard from four very different industry expert perspectives. Architectural was delivered by Jonathan Evans (Arbortech); engineering/prefab manuf by Jane Armstrong (Viridi); prefab building by Phillip Tondl (Lipman); and software by Adam Jones (CLT Toolbox),

who spoke on innovative

wood opportunities now emerging.

The final session of the first day focused on future collaborative research opportunities between industry and universities, and how to build technical timber research capacity within the institutes at the

Cont P 12

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# Reseeding for future forests

## Forestry Corp's replanting program is raising future forest compartments.

A FEW months ago, the media was abuzz with photos of kids and celebrities planting trees for National Tree Day. So you'd think there'd be excitement at the huge scale of similar programs in the timber industry. Alas, it looks like we'll need to blow our own trumpet.

This year, NSW's Forestry Corporation has sown 3.1 million seeds at its Grafton Nursery, as part of the organisation's annual replanting program supplying timber and wood resources for future generations.

It has been a busy time at the nursery with production



*Young seedlings being pricked out at the Grafton Nursery for their next stage of growth as tube stock.*

occurring in recent months. Dispatch to the seedling's planting sites was delayed due to dry weather conditions over spring, however with

recent heavy rain across northern New South Wales stock will start to be dispatched from the nursery from this week.

"We've dispatched more than 15 million seedlings from the Grafton nursery over the past five years, which have ultimately helped to build people's homes and vital infrastructure," said Trent Froud, Forestry Corporation's Grafton district manager.

"Around 1.765 million southern pine seeds have been sown this year along with 840,000 radiata pine. Seedling production is a year-round business, and we are also grading and dispatching 74,000 Hoop pine for planting over the coming month.

"Hardwood production will also see 1.2 million seedlings

grown from dispatch," he added.

The Grafton nursery also supplies a further 150,000 seedlings to private industry, including private forestry and revegetation/restoration organisations.

The nursery is providing a boost to local employment and continuing to regrow NSW State Forest plantations that have either been harvested for timber or affected by wildfire.

"This year the nursery has employed 20 permanent and casual staff," Froud said.

"The Grafton nursery is a crucial component of Forestry Corporation's operations.

"Wood is the ultimate renewable resource – our forests are regrown or replanted to continue the forest cycle into the future."

Over the coming year, the seed crop will be carefully hand-weeded, fertilised, nurtured and watered to produce seedlings in time for planting over summer and autumn.

Forestry Corporation is the largest producer of plantation-grown radiata pine in Australia, managing around 225,000 hectares of softwood plantations around the state and producing around 3 million tonnes of timber each year.

This is enough to construct about a quarter of the houses built in Australia each year.

Find out more about Forestry Corporation at [www.forestrycorporation.com.au](http://www.forestrycorporation.com.au)



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“HARDWOOD PRODUCTION WILL ALSO SEE 1.2 MILLION SEEDLINGS GROWN FROM DISPATCH”

# Forestry Australia wins transformation award

FORESTRY Australia was awarded the prestigious Association Turnaround of the Year Award at the Associations Forum Awards Dinner in Sydney on Tuesday night.

Forestry Australia CEO Jacquie Martin said the national recognition was a testament to members, staff, volunteers and the Board.

“The Association Turnaround of the Year Award recognises the successful transformation of Forestry Australia in recent years,” Martin said.

“In the last five years, we have achieved significant membership growth, increased members satisfaction, expanded member benefits, increased revenue and equity, and made a huge step-change from

being reactive towards leading the way.

“Since June 2020, our membership has increased by over 20%, reaching the 1200-member milestone in June this year.

Importantly, we are attracting the next generation of leaders in our sector, with a doubling of Student and Young Professional members in recent years, as well as a 6% increase in female members.

“We have taken the time to listen to our members and to deliver what they want, including webinars, mentoring programs, the appointment of a Science Policy Officer, and delivery of



Forestry Australia CEO Jacquie Martin (in green) with other FA leaders.

about the future – our team is committed to building on this momentum, and continuing grow for our members.”

The award follows the success of 2023 ANZIF

Conference, which attracted a record 475 delegates from across Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands.

“Forestry Australia is focussed on supporting active and adaptive forest management, evidence based decision making, and the scientists, professionals and growers who manage, study and care for our forests,” Martin said.

Position Statements,” she added.

“Our commitment to our members has seen our Net Promoter Score increase 67 points and member satisfaction has risen by 26% in five years; our member satisfaction has hit 85% in 2023, which is a remarkable turnaround.

“Our members now characterise Forestry Australia as ‘energetic’, and that is certainly how we feel

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From P 9

academic, postgraduate, and undergraduate levels. Prof Keith Crews, Director of the new Advanced Timber Hub at the University of Queensland, discussed the collaborative program opportunities underway, while Prof Greg Nolan overviewed the potential funding sources available.

A productive, small working group session then unpacked the practicalities and realities of improving the R&D collaboration between academia/education institutions and industry. It is well appreciated that building capacity in the university sector to provide R&D services not only helps the industry in having experts and facilities when needed, it also assists in getting more timber content into university student coursework as university departments tend to give more teaching weight to the products they research.

This collaborative engagement group exercise then set a very positive and engaging tone that continued during a networking dinner with all the industry and educator attendees.

The second day started with a short presentation from Lisa Ottenhaus and Kim Baber on the benefits of cross-profession timber education collaboration and the University of Queensland model, that brings architecture and engineering undergraduate students together on the design of a timber project. It was proposed that this model be expanded around the country through a National Cross-Profession Student Design Competition. Manager of the WoodSolutions Education Program, Dr Alastair Woodard provided an overview of the WoodSolutions resources suitable for tertiary wood



1/ Attendees included Tim Rossiter from MiTek, Tom Watts from XLam and Adam Jones from CLT Toolbox.  
 2/ Gareth Connell from Cabots and Kevin Peachey from WoodSolutions.  
 3/ Workshop attendees participating in one of the small group sessions of the WoodSolutions Education Program.

education and invited attendees to provide feedback on how best to get more timber topics into course curriculum and make the teaching of timber subjects more engaging, inspiring and effective.

The timing of this workshop and the recent release of details on the new Australian Forest and Wood Innovation (AFWI) program and the \$100M+ of Federal Government funding was very opportune. The final session commenced with an overview of the new program by AFWI interim director Prof Julianne O'Reilly-Wapstra and the current call for expressions of interest from universities to facilitate the remaining two Research Centres, along with the University of Tasmania. Greg Nolan then facilitated a full group discussion of possible joint collaborative research themes and partnerships, before the audience broke into smaller

groups to discuss in more detail four identified possible collaborative research themes: Lightweight timber framing, Building systems and solutions, Resource maximisation and Digital Technology.

Dr Woodard said, "This industry-educator collaborative initiative was an extremely unique and valuable event, and strongly supported by educators and industry alike".

He added: "The industry education program has been active for 27 years, making it one of the longest continually running industry programs; funded by FWPA. The key to

its longevity is the ongoing and close interaction with university academics and TAFE teachers, to clearly understand their needs in teaching timber-related subjects and developing specific WoodSolutions timber educational resources that they could utilise."

Feedback from both industry and university attendees was that the workshop was a great initiative and had been extremely worthwhile. The group are no doubt looking forward to similar future workshops.

The advice and feedback provided by the workshop attendees will be used to develop an ongoing WoodSolutions education strategy. For further information on this workshop or the WoodSolutions Education Program, please contact woodard@woodsolutions.com.au

“UNIVERSITY-BASED R&D DELIVERS MORE TIMBER CONTENT INTO STUDENT COURSEWORK”

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# Asbestos Awareness week highlights dust risks

**Decades after its ban, asbestos is still killing tradies and DIYers. Experts are hoping to stop engineered stone doing the same.**

IT'S hard to overstate the risk of asbestos to builders and DIYers: asbestos-related diseases are still killing over 4000 Australians every year.

"With one-in-three homes containing asbestos and with the continuing DIY boom, serious concerns have been raised that DIYers and tradies who renovate homes might be risking their lives and the lives of families by playing renovation roulette if they fail to respect the potentially life-threatening risks if asbestos is not managed safely," said Clare Collins, Chair of the Asbestos Education Committee.

Accordingly, this year's National Asbestos Week (running until Sunday) has the theme Respect Asbestos. It's particularly timely with so many structures damaged in floods and fires over recent years.

"Renovators need to be aware that asbestos fibres were used in the manufacture of more than 3000 building and decorator products that lie hidden in one third of Aussie homes, and that asbestos detection is not included in a standard building report. It's vital that before homeowners take up tools, they visit [www.asbestosawareness.com.au](http://www.asbestosawareness.com.au) to learn what they need to know to ensure asbestos is managed safely and in line with regulations, and have a licenced asbestos assessor or occupational hygienist inspect your property," said Collins.



**1/ Licensed asbestos removalists will follow regulations to keep homeowners and neighbours safe, as well as themselves!**

**2/ TV's Cherie Barber is Ambassador for the National Asbestos Awareness Campaign and urges people to check the website before working on older homes.**



While many renovators may think that only tradies are at risk of asbestos-related diseases; according to the most recent Australian Mesothelioma Registry (AMR) Report (April 2023), 83% of respondents were assessed as having had 'possible or probable' exposure to asbestos fibres in non-occupational settings – primarily homes.

Of the patients surveyed, the dominant non-occupational exposure to asbestos fibres (51%) occurred when undertaking major home renovations. 38% said they'd lived in a house undergoing renovations. 20% said they'd lived in the same home as someone who was exposed to asbestos at work and brought the fibres home, and 12% said they'd lived in a house made of fibro that was built between 1947 and 1987.

"Most Australians don't know asbestos-containing products are not just lurking in fibro homes, they were used widely in brick, weatherboard, clad homes and apartments and other structures commonly found on properties including backyard sheds, fences, garages, chook sheds and even dog kennels. It could be anywhere!" Collins added.

Meanwhile, another dust risk that has been seriously affecting young tradies may soon be reduced. Silicosis from engineered stone products is a serious lung disease that can be career-ending and life-limiting when not terminal. While asbestos-related diseases can take years to have an impact, silicosis often shows up on health screenings for younger workers. Like asbestos-related diseases, silica related diseases can include lung cancers.

Last month Safe Work Australia released a report recommending a national ban on engineered stone products and a special licensing scheme for the handling of existing benchtops, finding no level of cancer-causing silica is 'safe' for tradies – including the allegedly safe options promoted on renovation shows like *The Block*.

While the Federal Government and various state and territory governments have said they are moving to enact bans on the products by various dates, several around mid-2024, private companies are moving faster. Bunnings has said it will stop selling engineered stone products from 31 December this year and IKEA has also committed to removing the products from its range before a Federal Government response is imposed.

The CFMEU has imposed its own ban on engineered stone products and various unions have promised to support it in banning union members from handling the product from mid-2024. This includes importation and transport as well as installation.

Meanwhile, Caesarstone, the major brand behind engineered stone products, has been agitating against an outright ban, calling instead for a ban on products with more than 40% silica content. Safe Work Australia has said there is no evidence that these lower-level products are safe for workers.

# Site search for Net Zero 'Plus Prototype'

FINDING Infinity is a sustainability consultancy that provides advice and cost/benefit analysis on architectural projects, working towards the wider goal of self-sustainable, financially viable cities.

Principal Ross Harding began his career as an engineer and knows the importance of both prototyping and literally walking the sector through change. Accordingly, he's looking for a site for what Finding Infinity calls its 'Plus Prototype'.

As Harding described it in his LinkedIn post, "We are at a turning point in history, we are now able to deliver profitable projects with a positive impact on the environment. But there are far too few examples. Our industry needs

an authentic net zero building code: zero emissions in construction, zero emissions in operations. Key stakeholders are concerned that it will be too expensive, won't meet codes & regulations, or won't perform suitably.

"The 'Plus Prototype' is a plus energy, zero carbon construction prototype to demonstrate one floor of a typical office, one floor of a typical apartment and a typical rooftop garden, to show what is possible at scale."

Harding's team has an



**Timber construction and wood fibre insulation will make the Plus Prototype light and comfortable to live and work in.**

off-grid design that relies on timber construction and wood fibre insulation, is powered by a mix of solar energy and biogas generated on site from waste, collects and recycles its own water and heat and even features composting

toilets.

While it sounds revolutionary, all these are proven technologies that are cost effective, pragmatic and practical. The combination will show that they are also commercially viable initiatives that are scalable and replicable as a key part of a move towards Net Zero construction.

Harding is actively looking for a temporary site in the City of Melbourne to build. Site requirements include:

- Area: approx 315m<sup>2</sup> (26m x 12m).
- Duration: ideally 5 years on the site.
- Solar access: some solar access even in winter

Contact him via [hello@findinginfinity.com](mailto:hello@findinginfinity.com) if you know a suitable site.

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# NZ Hybrid Buildings Seminar

This innovative NZ seminar emphasised design efficiency and accurate costings.

By MICHAEL SMITH

In a concerted effort aimed at improving best practice in the construction industry – especially as it relates to engineered timber – Timber Unlimited recently hosted a Hybrid Buildings Seminar in Auckland, in collaboration with the Timber Design Society (TDS).

The hybrid system enables the efficient use of various structural materials – usually timber in combination with steel and/or reinforced concrete. It results in commercially competitive building designs, and provides a lower path of resistance for the industry to use more timber in the short and medium term.

Seminar hosts Dr Robert Finch (Director of Timber Unlimited) and Dr Daniel Moroder (President of the TDS) pointed out that using timber as part of a hybrid structure can solve design challenges and create structurally efficient, robust, low-carbon solutions that will help New Zealand to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions and transition to a low emissions economy.

The recent NZ Timber Design Awards recognised the importance of the hybrid model with its own category. It was won by Wall-É, a concrete and LVL workspace, and the concrete/glulam Dowie Rose



Daniel Moroder (left) from the Timber Design Society and Dr Robert Finch (Timber Unlimited) welcome seminar participants.

House took out the Highly Commended gong.

Among the speakers was Andrew Hewitt of Red Stag TimberLab who explained that designing for manufacturing and assembly (DfMA) is essential for engineered timber components.

Further, he noted that local manufacturing capacity is limited at the moment, sometimes resulting in longer lead times for mass timber elements, which can interfere with construction timelines. An understanding of such

challenges, designing efficient solutions, and the early involvement of manufacturing suppliers are critical to achieving a successful outcome.

Accurate costing of all timber elements at the design stage is critical, he believes. Specifying the right type of engineered timber for a given purpose is also important, as it will most likely reduce costs.

In New Zealand, cross-laminated timber in floors is typically a very cost-effective flooring option due to the low

quantity of required joints and connectors, and the rapid speed of erection, thus reducing overall construction costs.

Also, when considering surface finish, if an element won't be seen when the project is completed, it need not be finished to the same standard as visible elements. This offers further and substantial savings for a client, while performance under load isn't affected.

Nikki Vance from Dunning Thornton Consultants – one of New Zealand's most experienced structural engineering companies – presented a case study using 90 Devonport Road, Tauranga as an example of mass timber hybrid construction.

When completed, it will be an eight-storey curtain wall structure with lateral steel bracing and a CLT core – and will achieve a 6-star Green Star rating.

A hybrid structure was

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1 & 2/ Dowie Rose House: runner-up in the Hybrid Building category at the recent NZ Timber Design Awards. Image: Sam Hartnett





1/ **Dowie Rose House has a concrete ground floor and back wall to soundproof against the adjacent railway and provide thermal mass, then glulam timber upper storey.** Image: Sam Hartnett.

2/ **The timber framing took only one day to assemble on site.** Image: Sam Hartnett.

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chosen as the most efficient solution for the intended purpose and location, negating the unfavourable ground conditions where structural loads needed to be minimised. (Timber weighs four to five times less than steel or concrete, so foundation systems and depths can be significantly reduced – something that is becoming increasingly recognised in the industry.)

Ninety Devonport will have a 60-minute fire rating – taking known solutions for code compliance and refining them to create a more robust structural system. Timber moisture will be managed carefully, especially since the site is reasonably close to water – and any vibration issues will be resolved by working closely with the specialist consultants to ensure an optimal spread of high axial loads.

Representing Auckland Council at the seminar were principal fire engineer Ed

Claridge and inspections manager Jeff Fahrensohn who have recently been handling applications for a large number of hybrid and timber buildings.

Their experiences have revealed patterns that they hope will ease the path for future applications.

They encouraged developers, designers and all interested parties to attend pre-construction meetings with building inspectors at concept stage – or to at least use the council's online portal for help at the beginning of a project.

Initial costings should allow for something as simple as specifying the correct fastenings for each material, and understanding the often-

unexpected ways in which materials can interact with each other through these connections.

Chipped or incorrectly applied protective coatings can also significantly weaken a building's performance in high-risk events like fires or even long-term durability; and the council's representatives explained how comprehensive documentation would help with maintenance issues, including moisture control.

Given the highly problematic nature of fire resistance testing, they called for more understanding of fire performance data beyond the standard tests; and emphasised the need for structural and fire engineers to work together.

The seminar stands alongside existing resources from Timber Unlimited including hybrid build case studies in the Resources section of the website at <https://timberunlimited.co.nz>

“ FOUNDATION SYSTEMS AND DEPTHS CAN BE SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCED WITH TIMBER



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