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ISSUE 789 // February 8, 2024

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## New timber hub at UQ already delivering results

COVER STORY P 3



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# New Board members at Forestry Australia

Monique Blason and Ruth Ryan bring storied experience to the association.

FORESTRY Australia has announced the appointment of two new board members, South Australia's Monique Blason and Victoria's Ruth Ryan.

Forestry Australia CEO Jacquie Martin said Ms Blason and Ms Ryan would bring exceptional experience in filling the casual vacancy positions.

"Monique and Ruth's experience in softwood plantations, fire management, stakeholder engagement, policy and regulation will make a valuable addition to the board's skillset," Martin said, welcoming the two.

"Monique has a 30-year career covering policy and regulation development, focused on public land, fire and biodiversity management, community and stakeholder engagement as well as developing and coordinating whole of government emergency management, crisis resilience, public safety regulation in South Australia.

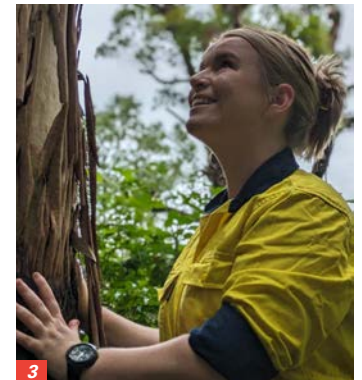
"Ruth is a Forestry Australia Fellow and has more than 40 years' experience in forestry and fire in Australia, with a focus on commercial softwood



1



2



3

- 1/ Policy, regulation and management specialist Monique Blason has joined the Board of Forestry Australia.
- 1/ Ruth Ryan AFSM FFA brings a wealth of expertise including softwood plantations to her new role.
- 3/ An additional Board Observer role is being filled by Emily Post, senior private native forestry officer with Local Land Services NSW.

plantation management in Victoria, and was appointed to the European Union funded FIRE-RES research project and The Commonwealth's Wildfire Resilient Landscapes Network."

The two new members are hitting the roles running. Monique Blason said, "I am honoured to have been asked to join the Forestry Australia Board. I look forward to contributing to the collective knowledge and leadership of the Board to advocate for sustainable forest management and to support and develop our members."

Ruth Ryan AFSM FFA said, "I have been a long-time

member of Forestry Australia and proud to be amongst the early cohort of Registered Forestry Professionals. I have always believed in the sense and purpose of the organisation to promote professionalism and dialogue to ensure wise management of our forests. I am excited by

**“ WE WORK TO INCREASE RECOGNITION OF THE VALUE OF SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY IN SOCIETY ”**

the recent revitalisation of the organisation and look forward to growing Forestry Australia's future.

Forestry Australia has also announced the appointment of Emily Post as an additional Board Observer. Martin said the Board Observer position provides a broader point of view and diversity at Board meetings, as well as facilitating pathways for younger members with an interest gaining executive level experience and developing their leadership and governance skills.

Cont P 10



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# New Timber Hub officially launched

The new ARC Research Hub to Advance Timber for Australia's Future Built Environment has been opened at the University of Queensland.

LAUNCHED last week at the University of Queensland (UQ), the Australian Research Council (ARC) Research Hub to Advance Timber for Australia's Future Built Environment (ARC Advance Timber Hub) has been years in the planning. Its genesis came out of the understanding that teaching on timber has historically been minimal in degrees including architecture and engineering, but that timber is a key building material for the nation if we are to meet our climate and housing challenges.

Accordingly, the hub was originally conceived as a way of removing obstacles for getting more timber into the built environment.

ARC Advance Timber Hub Director, Professor Keith Crews, has been a long-time advocate of timber in the built environment. As he said at the launch, two fundamental research questions underpin the hub: 'What would it take to enable 20% market share for timber in the



1/ (L-R) Assistant Minister Anthony Chisholm, Professor Keith Crews, Professor Rachel Parker and ARC Acting CEO, Dr Richard Johnson  
2/ Professor Crews speaking at the launch.

midrise building market in Australia?' and 'How can the use of timber in the built environment contribute to Net Zero 2050?'

The answers include more timber, faster building with new timber building methodologies, innovative use of material and smarter

methods of fabrication.

Research hubs are a highly efficient way to both make advances in a field and disseminate the information learned in those advances. Prof Crews described hubs as "a consortium of a whole lot of projects that are going to support and inform one another." They bring together academics from multiple universities, government departments and industry partners (in this case many of the timber sector's leading timber, connector and data suppliers, as well as associations and building firms, with new ones still coming onboard) and use those relationships to both drive focused projects and test the research coming out of them.

Their success is driven by the necessary collaboration of the hub, where research is not siloed off, but shared, discussed at early stages and fed by (as well as feeding into) other projects underway.

Cont P 10



## eNEWS Special Announcement

We are very pleased to announce Forestry Industry Association Northern Territory (FIANT) will partner with *Timber and Forestry eNews*, and our issue next week will include a feature article all about Forestry NT. Don't miss it!

# Logging halts highlight worrying trends

## Environmental activists are counting on court wins to stop forest industries.

FIFTY Victorian community forestry operators are out of work after the end of community forestry in that state on Monday. While Native Timber harvesting had ceased on 1 January, community forestry operations, including harvesting wind-thrown timber, felling single trees and thinning, had been allowed to continue.

Campaigners in the



**An area cleared in Wombat State Forest for timber harvesting machines to do salvage logging.** Image: ABC Ballarat: Rochelle Kirkham

Wombat Forest and other areas challenged this decision in the Victorian courts, saying that VicForests had

breached requirements to survey for threatened species. As a result, VicForests has closed all timber harvesting

operations, saying community forestry operations could not continue because of “risk of litigation” and “the cost it would burden the taxpayer with”.

“The court is also likely to require a disproportionate survey effort before any operations can occur,” the statement said.

“VicForests does not consider that it has the capacity to provide coupes to licensees and to manage community forestry operations.”

Paul Beaton, one of the community forestry operators who had been harvesting

Cont P 13

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**Australian Forest Products Association**

# Calls to double housing fund

The Community Housing Industry Association says the government is a long way from dealing with current shortfalls.

THE community housing sector is urging the federal government to double the Housing Australia Future Fund to at least \$20 billion to combat the halving of low-income housing supply since the early 1990s.

A new Community Housing Industry Association (CHIA) analysis of Productivity Commission government services data shows that total social housing stock has grown at just a third of the rate of Australia's population in the decade to 2022-23. Public and community housing stock numbers increased by just 21,744 or 5.2% since 2012-13, far slower than overall population growth of 15.1%.

The result is that public and community housing has dwindled to only 4% of all housing at a time when soaring rents and limited availability have made private rentals more inaccessible than ever across most of the country.

CHIA CEO Wendy Hayhurst called on the Commonwealth Government to at least double



The new Elger St housing in Sydney's Glebe delivered 158 social dwellings. Photo: Sardaka, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

capital investment in the \$10 billion Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF) to help meet unmet housing need, forecast to jump from 640,000 to one million households by 2041.

"Using a true measure of supply that takes into account population growth, the provision of social housing has effectively more than halved since the early 1990s," she said.

"Australia's housing system has failed catastrophically to respond to soaring need. The government's commitment

to fund 40,000 new rental homes through the HAFF and the National Housing Accord represent significant initial steps in reversing decades of national housing policy neglect. But commitments to date are simply not enough to meet the sheer scale of demand from Australia's lowest income households as

“PROVISION OF SOCIAL HOUSING MORE THAN HALVED SINCE EARLY 1990S”

rental availability vanishes and costs soar.”

Below the national level, CHIA found that South Australia's social housing availability went backwards, provision declining by 3,424 dwellings or 5.7% of stock. NSW, meanwhile, accounted for 55% of the national 10-year increase in social housing supply, adding 11,983 homes.

"To bolster social housing investment the government should use its budget surplus to at least double its capital stake under the HAFF," said CHIA NSW director and BlueCHP CEO Charles Northcote.

"Channelling the additional investment returns to an expanded social housing program could be done without increasing inflation, as this could simply enable us to extend the program beyond 2030," Hayhurst added.

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# Vale Ron Eddy

**Ron Eddy, 73, was far-sighted strategist in wood preservation.**

The death in Auckland on January 31 of Ron Eddy, aged 73, a respected and far-sighted strategist in the field of wood preservation, has sent waves of shock and sadness across the industry and his many friends and business associates around the globe.

Ron's contribution to the timber industry over many decades is legend, especially the high goals he set and achieved over a long career that included roles as managing director of Koppers Hickson Timber Protection and founder and managing director of TimTechChem International Ltd.

Ron's legacy spanned 40-plus years with the timber treatment and protection industry, starting out in his home country South Africa where he worked for Hickson Timber from 1977.

In 1986, he emigrated with his wife, Lyn, and family to New Zealand where



**1/ TimTech Chemicals foundation staff in New Zealand in 2001... Ron Eddy, managing director (bottom right), with West Hill Australian director, and Mark Fortune and Ross Grant, technical representatives**  
**2/ Ron Eddy's impact on the field of wood preservation was extensive and long-lasting.**

he transferred to Hickson Timber NZ as marketing director in 1990.

The joint venture company Koppers-Hickson Timber Protection (NZ) Ltd was set up with Ron as the managing director.

In 1997 he took a break from timber treatment working for the NZ Institute of Management for a few years before launching TimTech Chemicals Ltd in New Zealand in 2001 and in Australia a year later.



Ron's driving force behind TimTech from 2001 to 2020 opened new horizons in the marketing, research and application of wood treatment technologies on both sides of the Tasman against competition from two major global companies. He retired in 2020.

His education included a national diploma in analytical

chemistry (University of the Witwatersrand); Post Graduate Diploma in management, science and technology and Master of Management, strategy, (University of Auckland).

Ron was appointed to the executive council of the International Research Group on Wood Protection at the 47th meeting of the IRGWP in Lisbon in May 2016. He was chosen from a list of international candidates to take part in leading the group's future over the next three years.

A supporter of many charities and global networks, Ron was president, secretary and director of the Rotary International Club of St. Johns in Auckland.

A postscript from an Aussie mate: "Ron was a brilliant chemist and an outstanding market strategist. Wood is better for him."

Ron is survived by his wife Lynn, two daughter Janine Stewart and Angela Burgess, four grandchildren, a brother Clive in South Africa and a sister Sheldene Crookes in New Zealand.

His funeral service was held in Auckland on Monday.



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## FEBRUARY

### 15: Private Native Forestry: Case studies – Webinar.

Forestry Australia highlights Local Land Services work with owners of private native forests in NSW on approvals, extension and project activities. This webinar will highlight LLS's training and extension work including its Forest Stewardship Pilot Project, which aims to assist native forest owners to improve the health and productivity of their forests. Features private native forestry case studies including project outcomes, their learnings and insights for forestry. Forestry Australia member fee is \$10; non-member: \$60; student members free. Registrations close 10am, Wednesday 14 February. Visit <https://www.forestry.org.au/events-2/>

### 28: Modern Tree Breeding – A quiet achiever with huge upside – Webinar.

In this webinar Dr Josquin Tibbits will highlight major innovations adopted by tree breeders over the past 25 years and discuss impacts on plantation productivity and quality, as well as look forward to the current innovation space and its potential future impact in the sector. Visit <https://www.forestry.org.au/events-2/>

## MARCH

**5-6: ABARES Outlook 2024 – Hyatt Hotel Canberra and online.** The theme of this hybrid conference is 'Shaping the Future: Opportunities,

risks, and resilience' and topics include debt, biosecurity and climate change impacts. The opening session focuses on the national and global economic outlook, including expert speakers from Westpac and the OECD. To register visit [https://www.agriculture.gov.au/event/abares-outlook?trk=organization\\_guest\\_main-feed-card-text](https://www.agriculture.gov.au/event/abares-outlook?trk=organization_guest_main-feed-card-text)

### 18-19: FTMA National Conference – Geelong, VIC.

The conference is designed to expand members' perspectives by thinking beyond the conventional. Topics covered: understanding future housing scenarios, highlight potential threats to our market position, provide strategies for navigating the industrial environment, offer advice on defending your business from work cover claims, and shed light on future framing possibilities. Registrations now open at <https://conference.ftmanews.com/register-now/>

## 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. For more information, visit [www.sydnebuildexpo.com](http://www.sydnebuildexpo.com)

**1-2: International Forest Investment Conference – New York City.** For more information,

visit [www.getfea.com](http://www.getfea.com)

### 20-21: IV International Forest Business Conference – Sheraton Sopot Hotel, Poland.

A two-day conference on megatrends that shape responsible forest and wood industry investments. The conference aims to bring together leading timberland investment management organizations, investors interested in forestry asset class and sustainable wood industry representatives in order to exchange and share experiences and ideas about new forest business frontiers. Register at [www.fba-events.com](http://www.fba-events.com) or contact [rafal@forest-analytics.com](mailto:rafal@forest-analytics.com)

**22-23: Wood Transport & Logistics 2024 – Rotorua, NZ and online.** With an international focus and a rich understanding based in the forestry expertise of New Zealand, this regular conference delivers insights into wood handling and transport innovations, automation, log scheduling and logistics being employed by leading forestry, wood harvesting and log transport companies. Topics include transitions to new electric, hydrogen and diesel-hybrid powered heavy vehicles, including the integration of truck automation and platooning, as well as new innovations in log measurement, scheduling and logistics. For more and to register, visit <https://innovatek.co.nz/event/wood-transport-logistics-2024/>

## JUNE

**14: NTHA Vic/Tas State Awards.** More details to follow. Sponsorship opportunities available.

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## JULY

**27: NTHA Qld State Awards.**

More details to follow. Sponsorship opportunities available.

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## AUGUST

**9: NTHA SA State Awards.**

More details to follow. Sponsorship opportunities available.

Contact [alicia@ntha.com.au](mailto:alicia@ntha.com.au)

## SEPTEMBER

**13: NTHA NSW State Awards.**

More details to follow. Sponsorship opportunities available.

Contact [alicia@ntha.com.au](mailto:alicia@ntha.com.au)

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

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

**25-27: Field Trip – Rio Grande do Sul State, Brazil.**

## OCTOBER

**11: NTHA WA State Awards.**

More details to follow. Sponsorship opportunities available.

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

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# Solving the issues for pine alternatives

## A New Zealand report highlights the benefits and challenges of developing alternatives to pine.

Part two of two. By MICHAEL SMITH.

IN a follow-up to last week's article on the New Zealand forest industry's reliance on a single species (*Pinus radiata*), we look further at a shortlist compiled by Scion researchers of viable exotic species that could mitigate the risks inherent in that strategy.

The authors/ collaborators\* of the report 'Stock Take of the Commercially Viable Alternatives to *Pinus radiata*' highlighted 12 species "with established potential or known attributes that support their use as ready-to-plant alternative commercial species".

The researchers took into account several important characteristics in compiling the shortlist: timber productivity; the value, usability and marketability of each species' timber; their adaptability across a range of growing conditions and their potential climate resilience or resistance to pests/diseases.

Further, they noted that "particular investment in species with high growth rates should be encouraged, as these could fulfil as high-volume contingency timber species for radiata pine."

By way of contrast, a

“THE LONGEVITY OF *SEQUOIA SEMPERVIRENS* MAKES IT AN EXCELLENT CHOICE FOR PERMANENT FORESTS.



1/ **Cypresses: fast growing and durable; the timber is suitable for furniture and other high-value uses.** Image: Scion

2/ **Central North Island pine forest: investment is a significant barrier to commercial-scale development of suitable alternative exotic species.**

number of the selected species with low anticipated rates of productivity (or reduced levels of climate adaptability) were also considered as possible alternatives to pine, given that they possess timber with a potentially high market value, which could be developed rapidly using domestic processing.

Among the most

promising species for consideration was *Sequoia sempervirens* (redwood). It has a fast growth rate, and is noted as being particularly free of pests and pathogens, while its timber is suitable for appearance-grade applications.

The researchers added that the longevity of the species makes it an excellent choice for permanent

forests that can continually sequester carbon and supply timber.

Various fast-growing eucalypt species (currently involved in a number of trials) are believed to be suitable for a range of present-day or possible future climates – particularly with respect to drought.

The study noted that *Eucalyptus spp.* cover a range of credible uses – as construction timber, in high-value non-structural applications and as a source of bioenergy and pulpwood.

Other shortlisted species of note included cypresses (which are adaptable to warmer climates, have a low pest/disease risk and produce durable, high-value timber) and macrocarpa (also durable and of high value, with an existing domestic processing industry and market, but prone to canker in warmer locations).

Overall, the various highlighted species "have a range of potential attributes suitable for development into new circular bioeconomy value chains".

The researchers added that "socio-economic benefits and ecosystem services available from

Cont P 15

\*Authors/collaborators: Alan Jones, Toby Stovold; Gary Fleming, Vaughan Kearns, Dean Satchell, Rob Webster (Farm Forestry Association); and Paul Millen (New Zealand Dryland Forests Innovation).



# FEA-DANA INTERNATIONAL FOREST INVESTMENT CONFERENCE **NEW YORK CITY** **MAY 1-2, 2024**



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**Forest Economic Advisors is pleased to partner with DANA to host the first FEA-DANA International Forest Investment Conference in New York City on May 1–2, 2024. We will be located at The Westin New York at Times Square.**

Forests have never before garnered as much attention from investors as they do now. In addition to the returns from managing for timber production, new opportunities are rapidly arising in related markets such as carbon and biomass. The FEA-DANA International Forest Investment Conference is an investor-driven event that offers critical insights and networking opportunities in a growing sector.

This unique conference will be a valuable experience for timberland investors as well as those who are intrigued but need more insight from experts before entering the market. Timberland managers, appraisers, and market participants interested in timberland investment trends and expectations will also benefit. Are you hungry for informative discussions on timberland markets and networking opportunities with industry leaders? This is where you want to be May 1–2, 2024.

**LEARN MORE AT [WWW.GETFEA.COM](http://WWW.GETFEA.COM)**

From P 2

"We look forward to incorporating and capitalising on Monique, Ruth and Emily's contribution as we work to increase recognition of the value of sustainable forestry in modern Australian society," Ms Martin said.

Emily Post responded to the welcome, saying, "Forestry Australia and the broader forestry community have shown me unwavering support throughout the formative years of my career. I am humbled and delighted to have been offered an opportunity to contribute to the continued success of Forestry Australia and the professionals it represents."

Forestry Australia is an independent professional association of more than 1200 forest scientists, managers and growers who work in and care for native forests, plantations and provision of environmental services.

From P 3

The ARC Advance Timber Hub aims to deliver results that will be quickly usable, both for engineers like himself and for all others in the timber supply chain, from foresters to builders and every step along the way – in a way that is readily acceptable to those who will drive the demand, whether they be developers, government agencies or end users.

"We've got a budget of about \$16.5 million all up including in-kind," said Prof Crews at the launch, "and in-kind is ... in some ways

**“THE HUB IS A CONSORTIUM OF PROJECTS THAT WILL SUPPORT AND INFORM ONE ANOTHER**

more precious than cash, particularly when you look at the expertise that's being presented with that."

The launch at UQ was officiated by Senator the Hon Anthony Chisholm, federal Assistant Minister for Education, who said: "The Advance Timber Hub will enable an advanced manufacturing transformation of Australia's timber and construction industries, supporting resource diversification and creating new opportunities for regional development and employment.

"The Hub will help Australia's timber and construction sectors transition to a circular and net-zero economy, supporting the Albanese Government's commitment to increasing the use of sustainable timber in the built environment by 2030."

UQ's Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research), Professor Rachel Parker expressed great hope in the work that will come out of the hub. "What the ARC Advance Timber Hub helps us envisage and realise is an environment that's a bit closer to the natural world – and one that's also more practical, sustainable, and more suited to our well-being," she said.

"And that's the other benefit of timber. It feels right, it feels natural, and research shows that timber in our buildings is good for our mental health and productivity."

The hub has already produced valuable research, including ways to increase productivity from current timber harvests (see last week's eNews #788) that will increase the supply of housing.

*On the cover: Prof Crews, Dr Richard Johnson, Prof Parker and Senator Chisholm with attendees celebrating the launch of the hub.*

**ForestWorks**

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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.

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**Dear Editor**

**timber & FORESTRY eNews**

# AKD commits to mental health

AKD has partnered with TIACS (This is a Conversation Starter) as part of the AKD 2024 'Healthy Body + Healthy Mind = Healthy Me' campaign.

The TIACS Alliance is a collective of businesses that support blue-collar communities by funding easily accessible mental health counselling. Even if a workplace is ideal, people may still have personal issues, whether financial stress, relationship issues or health issues. For companies like AKD with its 1100 workers, providing support is crucial.

"There can be challenges with being able to access mental health support at times due to the cost associated with it, the time or inability to get into a counsellor when you need it most, navigating the system

with referrals, etc," said Toni Kirkup, AKD's National Health & Safety Manager.

"We are really pleased to be able to assist in providing our entire AKD team and their families with access to support by removing some of these barriers. Along with access for our customers, suppliers and the wider community."

Ed Ross and Dan Allen founded TradeMutt and TIACS on the philosophy that maintaining mental health is integral to overall well-being. TradeMutt is renowned for its funky work shirts designed to start conversations about



Dan and Ed, co-founders and directors of TIACS at AKD.

mental health. What they soon learned is that starting the conversation sometimes means that you need to continue that conversation with a professional.

TIACS offers a text and call service connecting individuals directly to professional counsellors. Since 2020, TIACS has supported over 18,000 clients through

18,500+ hours of conversation.

"TIACS is funded by the industry for the industry. There's no way that we can do the critical work for the industry without that support," they said.

"We are stoked to welcome AKD to the TIACS Alliance

Partnership. The funding that AKD provides not only allows us to ensure we can support every teammate at AKD but also the wider blue-collar community right around Australia when they need that support the most."

To learn more about TIACS, check out [www.tiacs.org/](http://www.tiacs.org/) resources.

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# New social media tools for carbon messaging

ASK anyone within our sector why timber is a great building material and 'it stores carbon!' will be one of their top answers. But that message is still filtering through to the wider community of building and design professionals, as well as to the general public, who often worry about an imagined risk of losing forests for wood products.

Accordingly, FWPA is happy to announce a set of new social media assets, both images and short animations, so organisations within the sector can help to spread the word faster and wider.

Using simplified data from FWPA's new three-part Carbon report series, the tiles and animations highlight information that can help to change minds about timber in construction. For example, did you know that just 10% more timber in Australian buildings would reduce annual CO2 emissions by 1.9 million tonnes? Or that only 1.4% of

the carbon in wood in landfills is lost to the atmosphere?

Topics include a range of forestry carbon facts, biomass for bioenergy, the facts about how little of Australia's forest resource is actually harvested, plus how forestry supports Australia's carbon balance and can help with climate mitigation.

The animations are

delivered in a range of formats that are easy to upload to your websites or social media, and cover most of the sector, from foresters to furniture makers, suppliers to builders.

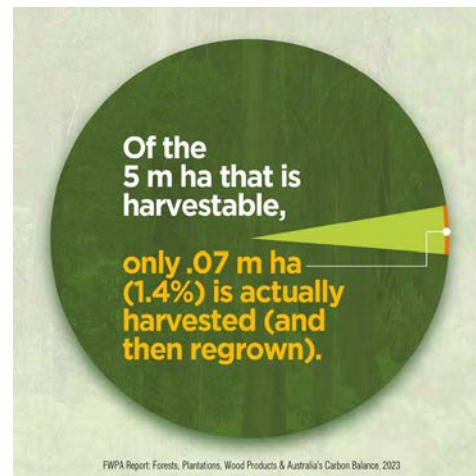
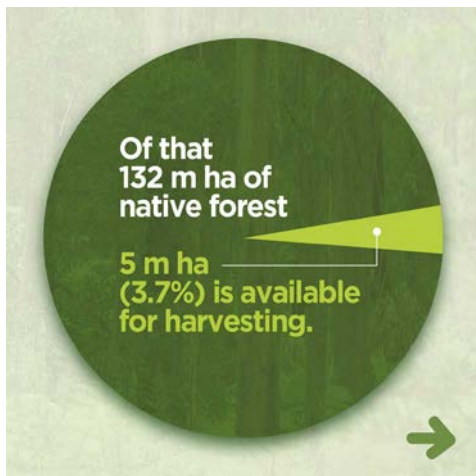
FWPA's new Carbon report series is also available, including the Forests, Plantations, Wood Products & Australia's Carbon Balance report, which delivers a detailed

breakdown of both carbon sequestration through forest growth and timber use and emissions; the Carbon Primer and Glossary, which demystifies many of the terms and arguments around the role of timber and forestry in meeting carbon challenges; and the Timber Design Guide 55 The Role of Wood Products in Zero Carbon Buildings, which is a valuable resource for design professionals wanting to specify wood products in sustainable buildings.

Through a combination of these

comprehensive guides and the easy-to-understand social media assets, more people will soon have a clearer understanding of timber's role in making construction more sustainable and helping Australians reach our Net Zero targets.

To access the social media assets and the new Carbon Guides, click here.



These slides form a social media animation showing how little of Australia's forest resource is actually harvested.

FWPA Report: Forests, Plantations, Wood Products & Australia's Carbon Balance 2023



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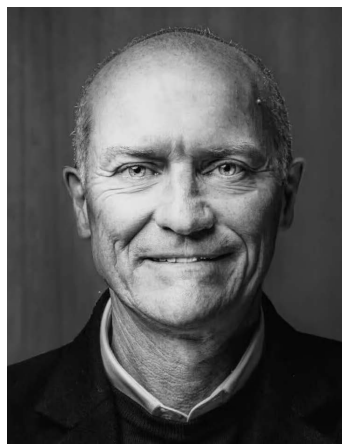
# Stephen Dadd new chair of AFPA

Following Joel Fitzgibbon's decision to step down, the Pentarch Group executive director has been elected to the leadership role.

STEPHEN Dadd was yesterday elected to the position of Chair for the Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA).

Having been a member of the AFPA Board for 3.5 years, Dadd has actively represented the industry in various capacities, contributing significantly to its growth and development.

In addition to his role at AFPA and his storied professional tenure at the Pentarch Group and Boral before it, Dadd is known for his active involvement in other



**Stephen Dadd, who has coupled a renowned career at Pentarch Group with extensive timber sector advocacy, is the new AFPA Chair.**



**Joel Fitzgibbon (left), AFPA's Natasa Sikman and DP World's Blake Tierney at COP 28 last year.**

forums, including serving as a member of the Board for Forest and Wood Products Australia, participation in various Forestry Hubs (including the North East NSW Forestry Hub, which successfully saw off a threat to native timber harvesting late last year), and State-based arms of AFPA. His comprehensive engagement reflects a commitment to advancing the interests of the forest products sector across different platforms.

Cont P 17

From P 4

fallen timber in the Wombat State Forest for firewood and to supply a local sawmill, told ABC Ballarat Breakfast his business had to shut abruptly and he was not sure what he would do next for work.

"We were firewood licensed for 3500 tonnes in a season," he said. "People are going to have to look at an alternative because there won't be any firewood available. How far are we going to transport it?"

The closure follows the suspension of forestry operations in an area of Tasmania that is said to be home to the rare swift parrot. The Bob Brown Foundation is challenging the legality of logging at a forestry coupe in the Huon Valley south of Hobart and an injunction has been successful in advance of a future hearing.

As reported in *The Guardian*, Suzette Weeding, the general manager of conservation and land management at Sustainable



**The swift parrot is a critically endangered species.** Image: Rob Blakers

Timber Tasmania, said the state-owned company was confident that forestry operations carried out in the coupe late last year were "compliant with the Tasmanian forest practices system and the Tasmanian forest practices code".

"Sustainable Timber Tasmania welcomes the opportunity for the matter to be decided by the court," she said.

"Sustainable Timber Tasmania recognises its responsibility as land manager and continues to implement

conservation outcomes for the swift parrot on permanent timber production zone land."

Meanwhile, in NSW, a recent watchdog decision has drawn the ire of environmentalists. The EPA has told stakeholders it is ditching specific search requirements for glider den trees, which must currently be retained with a 50-metre logging exclusion zone around each one.

Instead, Forestry Corporation will have to keep more large, hollow-bearing trees per hectare – 14 instead

of the current eight in high-density glider areas, and 12 instead of the current eight in low-density areas.

EPA chief, Tony Chappel said gliders would be better protected under the changes, and exclusion zones would still apply around "known recorded locations of greater glider dens".

"Instead of depending on unreliable point-in-time surveys to find the habitat of the gliders, we will assume the species is present and conserve their habitat," he said.

Dr Kita Ashman, a threatened species ecologist with WWF-Australia who was briefed on the changes by Chappel encapsulated environmentalists' not-so-measured responses: "I told him that as an expert on this species, the EPA would be locking in this animal's extinction."

Expect to see more taxpayer money being used to defend forestry in courts soon.

# HQ Plantations' new high-tech fire detection system

Artificial intelligence trained on camera and satellite images is helping the renowned forest growing company to protect its assets against fire.

QUEENSLAND-BASED timber provider HQPlantations is predicting and detecting bushfires across 288,000 hectares of its pine forests with cameras, satellite imagery and artificial intelligence.

The company entered a commercial agreement with Sunshine Coast-based vendor exci, formerly called Fireball.International, in mid-2022 after a one-year trial of exci's AI-Assisted Fire Management Tool in its coastal plantations.

"The trial period straddled perhaps the quietest fire season in about 20 years," said HQPlantation's corporate fire manager Andrew Dunn in an interview with *iTnews*.

"But the exci AI software detected fires – from smoke – and it was enough to convince us that it had a lot of potential in the fire detection space."

As well as detecting fire signatures like smoke and heat, exci predicts when and where they're likely to occur with machine learning models.

Using AWS S3, Amazon Elastic Kubernetes Service and other AWS services, exci trains its models on over 2.5 million camera images – from its Australian and North and South American partners – and 30GB of satellite data every day.

Satellite images are unable to detect fires; lower earth orbit satellites don't continuously point at the same forests and geostationary satellites don't have the resolution. Instead, satellite images are augmented with camera images to train



AI is helping foresters to detect fire risk and events in real time.  
Image: Blueys photography via HQPlantations

exci's fire prediction models.

Dunn said that 360-degree rotating cameras connected to exci – mostly stationed on watch towers – now cover 90% of its 320,000 hectares of plantations, which are scattered across Queensland from Passchendaele near the NSW border to Kuranda northwest of Cairns.

"We have numerous recorded instances where exci's AI detection has been the primary source of a fire detection," Dunn said.

"It's [exci] not a solution on its own; we will always retain a dependency on staffed fire towers on high fire danger days when there is a lot of smoke in the air and visibility is low, and our own fire camera observers will continue to monitor screens during business hours.

"The AI detection particularly comes into its own after hours, into the evening and in the early morning, as a lot of our fires start overnight; largely from dumped, stolen cars.

"We have also found exci's detection images very useful for fire investigation purposes as it provides an ignition time, details whether the fire was a single or multiple ignitions, and informs us on fire behaviour."

HQPlantations has a fleet of 80 4WD fire fighting vehicles, including 12 tankers and more than 250 trained fire fighters among its employees and contractors.

Using Amazon Simple Notification Service and Amazon Simple Email Service, exci sends alerts to the frontline responders within two minutes of smoke detection.

Expanding coverage to the final 10% of its plantations and investing in more cameras "is the subject of a current analysis," said Dunn.

**“ AI DETECTION COMES INTO ITS OWN AFTER HOURS, AS A LOT OF FIRES START OVERNIGHT**

"The majority of our key plantation areas are covered, some remote areas are not; there is scope at Kalpowar in central Queensland and potential for some more cameras in Northern Queensland.

"With increasing risk in Southeast Queensland, we are also exploring further opportunities to triangulate fires across these estates with additional cameras."

Speaking at AWS re:Invent in Las Vegas in December, exci co-founder and CEO Christopher Tylor said that exci's partners also included state fire services, powerline and agriculture companies but that timber providers were the bulk of its customers.

"Mainly we protect forests and plantations because they can't be insured... they can only be self-insured."

The global increase in bushfires has made timber insurance premiums spike in both Australia and the US, leaving plantation companies no other option but to invest in self-insurance through fire response and detection capabilities.

Tylor accurately described the situation in his speech, saying: "They [timber companies] need to have an early warning system in place because it takes 20 to 40 years to grow wood; it can be destroyed within two days of a fire; they need quick responses before the fire gets out of control."

Source: *iTnews*

From P 8

commercial forests could be enhanced if a mix of exotic species were grown within 'transitional' forest management systems – potentially also incorporating adaptive silvicultural practices such as continuous cover forestry and the ecological co-benefits of growing multiple commercial tree species in one setting."

A gap analysis assessment workshop, involving a panel of experts, emphasised a range of issues/priorities that needed to be addressed in

**“COMMERCIAL FORESTS COULD BE ENHANCED IF A MIX OF EXOTIC SPECIES WERE GROWN**



**Sequoia sempervirens with pollen cones.** Image: KENPEI, CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons

the development of market-ready alternative species. They included developing value chain business cases, changes to building standards legislation to enable the wider use of alternative species in construction settings and familiarising the public with the available options and how to grow them.

Value chain analysis

determined that the greatest initial limitations with most species "arise with germplasm availability, breeding development and propagation capacity". Challenges with wood processing and manufacture, sales and distribution and end-of-life processing were also identified to varying degrees with most species or groups.

The shortlisted species have already been the subject of extensive breeding, planting and silvicultural research – but not necessarily within New Zealand.

The report's authors concluded that specifically tailored investment to increase species' knowledge in a domestic setting should lead to improvements in their commercial viability – and a range of co-

benefits (bioeconomic, environmental and social) that "extend beyond the obvious advantages of increased market diversification or system resilience ... Development work should focus on the most cost-effective, or rapid-to-solve alternative species first..." which are cypress, eucalypts, redwood and Japanese cedar.

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# Accurate carbon assessment in mass timber

A legitimate question about how embodied carbon in mass timber is calculated has become a weapon in the hands of opponents.

GREENWASHING is one of the fastest ways to upset a potential market. Pretending to do the right thing by the environment then breaking faith by knowingly basing your offer on false or misleading data will always engender a backlash.

So questions that ask if the mass timber industry has been wrong about its carbon benefits compared to traditional steel and concrete construction bear investigation and concern.

The starting point is entirely reasonable: is the standard life cycle assessment (LCA) method of measuring the carbon cost of timber elements in buildings accurate, given it starts at the point where logs are moved to mills?

Beverly Law, emeritus professor of global change biology and terrestrial systems science at Oregon State University is critical of current methodologies. In 2019, she told *Yale Environment 360* (click here for the article) that her research showed timber LCAs were routinely underestimated and that the industry itself (in Oregon at least) undercounted its carbon cost.

"We looked at long- and short-term products, what mills burn for heat, fuel burned for harvesting, transporting from forest to mills to end use, and emissions along the way," she said, adding that other major issues were how long the wood products would be in use, end of life disposal



1/ Beverly Law on a Koa tree on the Island of Hawaii.

2/ Interior of the Sara Cultural Centre, a 20-storey timber high-rise, in the centre of Skelleftea, Sweden. Photographer: Jonas Ekblom/Bloomberg

and how much carbon the forest was taking up before and after harvest.

Since then, both researchers and industry have been working to develop modelling that can calculate and integrate some of these complex inputs. However, a recent article from the World Resources Institute (WRI) in leading scientific journal *Nature* suggests that the vast

majority of harvested timber is wasted and that timber product use raises rather than sequesters carbon.

but also, in a statement that should ring alarm bells, wrote, "WRI's findings were not lost on the US concrete industry. The National Ready Mixed Concrete Association has cited them in social media posts. Gregg Lewis, the association's chief communications officer and an architect, told *Bloomberg Green* the paper 'should be eye-opening to anyone who has jumped on the "wood is green" bandwagon."

Happily, Roston does not stop there. He quotes Mel Allwood, director and sustainability head of the London building group of Arup saying: "We make buildings out of timber, right? We don't just chop down trees and roll them into place. There's a whole bunch more processes that happen in between, and all of those cost us carbon."

She highlights that provenance is everything, and that just as electric vehicles powered by solar have a very different environmental impact to those powered by coal, so do timber products that come from well-managed resources, compared to those that are not carefully sourced.

The full article considers a range of arguments, and there are clear lessons to be drawn from it.

The first is that accusations of greenwashing are powerful. As an industry, the timber sector needs to be ahead of bad-faith arguments made by our competitors

Bloomberg's Eric Roston recently wrote a major feature looking at this research and questioning its basis (click here for the article). He quotes other research that accuses the *Nature* paper of double-counting carbon in its assessment,

and how much carbon the forest was taking up before and after harvest.



From P 16

and detractors and able to show that we are addressing legitimate questions.

The second is that data matters. The *Nature* article was predicated on a high percentage of wasted fibre in timber harvesting, which is not accurate for most light timber products and definitely not for engineered wood products including mass timber. When accurate industry figures for timber are used, our case is stronger. Similarly, being able to quantify forestry management practices in LCAs will give data-driven reassurance to construction markets when they look at timber products.

Finally, that we need to maintain perspective. As Roston concludes: at the most, worries about mass timber depleting global forests are premature. Amy Leedham, an architect and carbon expert at design consultancy Atelier Ten, puts it this way: "There is no scenario in which we are ever building enough timber buildings for this to be an issue."



1/ **The Cederhusen development, an apartment block constructed with cross-laminated timber, in the Hagastaden district of Stockholm.**

Photographer: Erika Gerdemark/Bloomberg

2/ **Stacks of cross-laminated timber at a manufacturing facility in Washington state.** Photographer: Margaret Albaugh/Bloomberg

From P 13

He replaces former Chair Joel Fitzgibbon, who has attracted praise from individuals and industry groups for his tireless advocacy in the role, including leading a recent delegation to COP 28 in Dubai and chairing collaborative sessions on timber's role in carbon-friendly construction.

The Softwoods Working Group released a statement on the breaking news, saying it "extends its heartfelt appreciation to Joel Fitzgibbon for his exceptional leadership as both CEO and Chair of the Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA). Joel has played a pivotal role in steering the organisation

through a transitional phase, demonstrating unwavering dedication and commitment.

"Joel's leadership and strategic vision have been instrumental in maintaining the association's momentum and enhancing its standing within the industry. Joel Fitzgibbon has tirelessly worked to elevate the profile of the forest products industry, championing its cause and fostering collaboration among stakeholders. His passion for the sector has left an indelible mark, and the Softwoods Working Group expresses its deepest gratitude for his contribution."

Dadd was also praised by the SWG, which noted his

comprehensive background and history of creating effective coalitions.

"Stephen brings a wealth of experience and a deep understanding of the industry to his new role. He is highly respected by all in the industry and we look forward to his contribution and leadership as Chair," said Carlie Porteous, executive officer SWG.

"The Softwoods Working Group looks forward to working closely with Stephen Dadd in his new capacity as Chair of AFPA and is confident that his leadership will further strengthen the industry's position and foster continued collaboration among industry stakeholders."



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### HEAD OFFICE

Timber Media Australasia Pty Ltd  
PO Box 3001  
Maraylya NSW 2765

### PUBLISHER

Timber Media Australasia Pty Ltd

### EDITORS

Nicky Ainley  
Donyale Harrison  
Jess Hockridge  
editors@timberandforestryenews.com

### ADVERTISING

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

### ACCOUNTS

Chris Parker // +61 (0) 413 710 203  
cparker@ttnews.com.au

### SUBSCRIBE

www.timberandforestryenews.com

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**Media releases and editorial:**

Nicky Ainley // Donyale Harrison // Jessica Hockridge

e: [editors@timberandforestrynews.com](mailto:editors@timberandforestrynews.com)

**Display ad bookings:**

Campbell McInnes // e: [campbellm@timberandforestrynews.com](mailto:campbellm@timberandforestrynews.com)

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