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Well-known builders collapse

Cost increases are continuing to impact on Australian builders.

THE Rork Group is the most recent building firm to collapse, breaking the news last Friday. Its three companies have specialised in commercial and government refurbishments for the past 26 years, with 63 current projects across NSW, the ACT, Victoria and Queensland.

Tradies were advised to make appointments to collect their personal belongings and up to 80 staff may now be out of work.

Director Brian O'Rourke announced the business was going into administration, with a note on the Rork Group site saying: "Builders are in crisis because of high interest rates, labour shortages and material supply constraints following the pandemic."

The administrators from insolvency firm McGrath Nicol hope to restructure or sell the three companies.

It's the third notable collapse in just over a week, with Melbourne-based construction company Apex Homes Australia failing with more than a dozen projects not yet completed and debts



1/ A completed Rork refurbishment project for National Paediatrics in Deakin, ACT. Image from Rork website

2/ Cubitt's granny flats and extensions were famously energy efficient.

of almost \$200,000, and Cubitt's Granny Flats and Home Extensions, the well-known builder of high-quality

granny flats, also going into voluntary administration after three decades of building homes.

The Cubitt's team announcement on their website echoes Rorks: "Due to bank lending conditions, supply prices, taxation changes, insurance prices, Covid recovery and lengthy weather events, Cubitt's company has suffered more than it can shoulder."

"Cubitt's made the decision in 2021 to honour fixed price contracts and not pass on price rises to their customers, bridging the shortfall and completing projects with significant loans to the company by the owners, Ian Cubitt, Kim Cubitt and Kate Cubitt, using their personal assets."

"Unable to bridge the gap entirely, the directors have today appointed Richard Stone and Brett Lord from RSM Australia Partners as Administrators with the objective of finding a buyer for this truly special and iconic business, building affordable housing that Australians can be proud to live in."

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NeXTimber Tarpeena officially opened

The Premier of South Australia was among those welcoming the official opening of Timberlink's new CLT and glulam facility.

IN late 2020, South Australia's Tarpeena was announced as the site of Timberlink's new CLT and glulam manufacturing plant. Since then we've seen the site been developed at a cracking rate and, in recent months, the first pieces of CLT and glulam coming off the production lines.

Last week, the official opening of the NeXTimber® by Timberlink® manufacturing facility and upgraded green mill was held.

The launch event was attended by over 300 people, including South Australian Premier the Hon. Peter Malinauskas MP; Minister for Primary Industries, Regional Development and Forest Industries the Hon. Clare Scriven, MLC; District Council of Grant Mayor Kylie Boston; District Council of Grant CEO Darryl Whicker; Member for Mackillop, Nick McBride and CEO of the South Australian Forest Products Association, Nathan Paine.

Premier Peter Malinauskas noted the products coming off the new plant's lines will be invaluable for Australia's building plans, saying, "This unique facility in South Australia's Limestone Coast presents tremendous opportunities for value adding, product diversification and market expansion for the state's \$1.4 billion forest

industries as well as the ability to contribute to the construction of taller and more complex timber buildings.

"I congratulate the Timberlink team, and everyone involved in delivering this project which will have significant flow on benefits for the Limestone Coast economy and that of the whole state."

The Timberlink facility is Australia's only combined CLT and GLT radiata pine mass timber facility, and the first in Australia to be integrated with a structural timber manufacturing plant. It can produce CLT panels up to 16m long and 3.5m wide, and GLT beams up to 12m long.

Timberlink's \$70 million capital investment in the facility was supported by a \$2 million grant awarded by the SA government under the



1/ South Australian Premier the Hon. Peter Malinauskas MP & Minister for Primary Industries, Regional Development and Forest Industries the Hon. Clare Scriven, MLC stand in front of the NeXTimber building.

1/ SA Premier Peter Malinauskas (centre) and Troy Bell MP (right) observe Cross Laminated Timber in the NeXTimber facility.

2/ (Left to right): South Australian Premier the Hon. Peter Malinauskas MP, Minister for Primary Industries, Regional Development and Forest Industries the Hon. Clare Scriven MLC, Timberlink CEO Paul O'Keefe, SAFFA Chair Tammy Auld, Member for Mount Gambier Troy Bell MP, Timberlink Chief Sales, Marketing & Corporate Affairs Officer David Oliver, SAFFA CEO Nathan Paine inside the NeXTimber facility. shutterstock

Strategic Business Round 2020 of the Government of South Australia's Regional Growth Fund. The NeXTimber brand was announced in 2021 with the tagline 'It's what better tomorrows are built on'. Ground was broken with the first sod turn in Tarpeena in 2022 and construction of the site continued until late 2023. The facility has been taking orders since November 2023, with over 30 new full-time positions also created for local workers, on top of hundreds of jobs during the construction period.

Minister Clare Scriven said: "South Australia's forest industries have a long and proud history of sustainably growing and utilising our local resources to address the growing demands for timber, both domestically and internationally.

"This new facility at Tarpeena continues that tradition of innovation, both by showcasing some of the world's best new innovations and supporting greener, secure and modern employment opportunities, all critical ingredients towards ensuring Limestone Coast communities continue to thrive.

"This initiative, which the State Government

is proud to support, links in with other government commitments to the industry including a \$15 million investment towards the establishment of the Forestry Centre of Excellence in Mount Gambier, the \$2.346 million upgrade of the South East fire tower network including the installation of ground breaking artificial intelligence based bushfire detection and monitoring system and the \$2 million contribution to assist the rollout of projects identified in the South Australian Wood Fibre and Timber Industry Master Plan," Scrivener added.

Timberlink CEO Paul O'Keefe said, "We are well positioned to play our part in supporting the Australian government's COP28 commitment to increase the use of timber in the built environment by 2030."

Forestry a key Tas election theme

TASMANIAN premier Jeremy Rockliff grabbed headlines last week when he promised to open 40,000 hectares of protected native forests to logging. The stands are in the Future Potential Production Forest (FPPF) and were 'banked' in 2014 as part of a Liberal plan to end the forest wars.

While the usual suspects came out raging against the plan, it wasn't well-received by parts of Tasmania's forestry sector, either. Many weren't happy with a plan that used the industry as "a political football", in the words of the Tasmanian Forest Products Association (TFPA) CEO Nick Steel.

Subsequent policies announced by Rockliff and his team have been received far more positively. On Friday, they announced that existing

native wood supply contracts for 14 Tasmanian sawmillers would be extended beyond the current 2027 expiry date to 2040.

Minister for Resources Felix Ellis announced at McKay Timber's Glenorchy facility that if re-elected, the Rockliff government would "Update STT's Ministerial Charter [to] ensure that its focus continues to be squarely on backing in Tasmanian industry because Tasmanian wood should support Tasmanian jobs."

He also committed an additional \$5 million to help Tasmanian sawmillers and processors upgrade and move further up the value chain through the On-Island Processing Program.

"It's pleasing to see the Liberals have recognised the



Nick Steel, centre, with Craig Farrell MLC for Derwent, and Luke Edmunds, MLC for Pembroke at a bipartisan meeting for Tasmanian forestry in August 2023.

importance of the first priority in the TFPA Election Wish List – Supporting Tasmanian Businesses," Steel said. "Continuing its commitment to the State's On-Island Processing Grants program will make a real difference to Tasmanian forestry businesses and their ability to adapt to future demands."

Labor Leader Rebecca White has also promised to protect forestry jobs and provide security by ensuring open, transparent and secure access to resource by Tasmanian businesses with investments in Tasmania.

Shadow Resources Minister Shane Broad said, "Labor will ensure that contracts are extended out to 2040 and include plantation sawlogs, special species are managed independently and that a 25% local benefits test applies to logging and haulage contracts." To download the TFPA wish list, click here.

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Housing plans all on paper

As politicians outline housing ambitions, fewer homes are starting.

THE Greens are calling on the Federal Government to enter the property development game and directly develop 360,000 homes in the next five years, which would then be available for the public to buy and rent at reduced costs.

“What we need are homes that people can actually afford, and the way to do that is for the government to build homes where you cut out the profit margin,” Greens housing spokesperson Max Chandler-Mather told the ABC ahead of a National Press Club address yesterday.

The policy would see the government take on developer roles and contract out construction, and while the buyers would not be means-tested, they would not be able to profit at market rates, being contracted to sell back to government.



Max Chandler-Mather is the Greens member for Griffith and housing spokesperson.

The independent Parliamentary Budget Office has expressed doubts that the scheme could be implemented as designed and while it would definitely

“THE VOLUME OF HOMES COMMENCING CONSTRUCTION WILL CONTINUE TO SLOW THIS YEAR

wipe a large amount of money off house prices or rents for participants, it may cost \$5.8 billion in the next four years and \$27.9 billion in the next decade, on an underlying cash basis according to figures reported by the ABC ([click here](#)).

Meanwhile, ABS figures for building approvals continue a run of weak results.

“Approvals have been declining since the first increase in the cash rate in mid-2022 and this trend

appears to be continuing into the start of 2024. Building approvals nationally fell by a further 1.0 per cent in January 2024,” said HIA Chief Economist, Tim Reardon.

“Detached home building approvals fell by 9.6% in the month of January 2024. This decline leaves approvals 5.3% lower in the three-month period to January compared to the previous year.”

Reardon noted that multi-unit approvals had increased, but from a very low figure the previous month.

“The low volume of building approvals throughout 2023 will see the volume of homes commencing construction continue to slow this year. The rise in the cash rate is the primary cause of this slowdown in approvals,” Reardon said.

“Approvals have declined across all jurisdictions, however, there is an increasing divergence among the jurisdictions as the rise in the cash rate falls disproportionately on those markets with higher land costs.”

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AFPA dinner highlights housing woes

Industry leaders and an informed MP looked to the future in Canberra.

By **CAMPBELL Mc INNES**

LAST week saw Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA) members and guests gather in Canberra for the February Dinner at the QT Hotel.

AFPA's Joe Prevedello took on master of ceremonies role and began the night with announcement that scheduled Minister for Industry & Science the Hon Ed Husic MP, was unable to attend but Federal Shadow Minister for Housing, the Hon Michael Sukkar MP was taking over speech duties.

And while the party focus may have had a different flavour, the meat of the problem was very similar. Sukkar has long been involved in this sector and has a realistic grasp of the issues involved. He told the audience, "We are facing difficult times in the Housing sector, with new housing starts down, and approvals down even further."

Going off new housing starts data, he was pessimistic for improvements over the next two years, and considered the Albanese government's goal of 1.2 million homes over the next 5 years unlikely, predicting it would fall at least 400,000 short.



Members enjoyed the opportunity to catch up and network after dinner.

"The real question for the current government is 'what is the current plan to get supply of housing moving?'" said Sukkar. "Part two of the question needs to be, 'how are they going to unlock the supply and also stimulate the finance side of the issue?'"

He noted that a person on an average salary is all-but unable to access finance in this country, with banks targeting their lending at those who already possess significant wealth or have guarantors and a prospect of inherited wealth, describing the situation as a "huge hurdle", though one that was outstripped by current supply issues.

"How do we materially move the dial on supply and, from your industry's perspective, how can this be done in a more stable and predictable manner?" Sukkar asked.

He described an idea currently being floated that utilises federal funds to directly and quickly incentivise local governments to get involved in housing, though he was realistic on the difficulties in

solving that bottleneck.

When Sukkar became Minister for Housing back in 2019, they did an analysis on money flowing from the Federal Government to the States and Territories for housing (public housing is a state and territory responsibility). Collectively the States and Territories had been receiving an additional \$1.2bn per year over 10 years. Over the same period, the overall stock of State Government Housing had dropped by some 15% and the quality of the existing stock had deteriorated.

Sukkar suggested that part of the solution could be for the Federal Government to work more closely with local governments where highly engaged councils can quickly approve projects and get them going. He also reiterated the Coalition's commitment to the Super First Home Buyer policy it took to the last election, which enables first home buyers to access up to \$50K of their superannuation for a deposit on a new home, with the requirement that they pay

“THE MOST IMPORTANT SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN AUSTRALIA IS HOMES AND A ROOF OVER YOUR HEAD”

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MARCH

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

1-2: International Forest Investment Conference – New York City. For more information, visit 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 or contact 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. Contact alicia@ntha.com.au

JULY

27: NTHA Qld State Awards. More details to follow. Sponsorship opportunities available. Contact alicia@ntha.com.au

AUGUST

9: NTHA SA State Awards. More details to follow. Sponsorship opportunities available. Contact alicia@ntha.com.au

12-13: Timber Construct Conference – Rydges, Melbourne. The Timber Offsite Construction Conference and Exhibition has been rebranded as the Timber Construct Conference to encompass the full spectrum of timber building. The conference provides an invaluable forum to address pressing challenges and opportunities influencing timber's role across the built landscape. Technical sessions will cover research updates, emerging products, building code enhancements, and best practice case studies. For more information, visit <https://timberoffsiteconstruction.com>

SEPTEMBER

13: NTHA NSW State Awards. More details to follow. Sponsorship opportunities available. Contact 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. Contact alicia@ntha.com.au

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.

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Counting her in

Forestry has made real improvements in gender equality stats.

This Friday is International Women's Day and this year's UN IWD theme is Count Her In: Invest in Women. Coincidentally, last week saw the release of new Australian data from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency's Employer Census on gender pay gaps, which provided interesting reading (click here for the full interactive version).

The data came from real salaries paid by Australia's biggest companies and figures. Part time and casual employees had their rates modified to annualised full-time equivalent earnings, making sure the rates were like for like as women are more likely to work part-time than men. Then four figures were given for each company's data set: the median base salary gender pay gap (GPG), the median total remuneration GPG (counting bonuses, super and overtime) and the average figures for each of those (which are less useful as they contain extreme salaries like the CEO's). The number of women in each pay quartile (upper, upper middle, lower middle and lower) for a business was also recorded.

The Australian average GPG was 14.5% for the median base salary (MBS) and 19% for median total remuneration (21.7% and 17.2% for the respective average figures). At poor-performing Jetstar, the MBS GPG was 53.5%, with women dominating the lower pay quartile and only 7% of the upper. Gambling machine



1



2



3

1/ **Elissa Bond works as a spatial systems coordinator in the Snowy Region, where she says there's a great workplace gender balance.**

2/ **Kurrily Oliver is a Forestry Corporation harvesting supervisor at Bathurst after a mid-career change.**

3/ **Unlike construction, the forestry sector is better than the national average when it comes to the gender pay gap, and some parts are particularly good.**

manufacturer Aristocrat, on the other hand, had an MBS GPG of -11.7%, favouring women. Interestingly, the same company also had a negative total remuneration gap and women make up a fairly even 25-30% of the workforce across all pay quartiles.

The GPG for the Forestry and Logging sector sits at just 10.3% GPG for median total remuneration, with the MBS GPG actually weighted slightly in favour of women at -4.9%. Women are still a minority within the sector, but were reasonably well distributed across the pay quartiles.

Impressively, 86% of forestry employers have a workplace policy for equal remuneration and the same percentage of employers undertook a payroll analysis, while 67% of Forestry and Logging companies had

achieved gender pay equity across total remuneration. The sector also scored well for flexible work.

Sadly, the Building Construction MBS GPG sits at 37.9%, with women dominating the lowest pay quartile.

MORE WOMEN IN FORESTRY

Private businesses and public corporations alike have seen the results of improving women's participation in the workforce, both in terms of pay and inclusion. Having a better diversity of gender in a workplace is positively linked with multiple metrics including productivity.

Forestry Corporation of NSW is one such organisation and has proudly announced its improved gender parity data ahead of International Women's Day, with women currently make up a quarter of its workforce and many of its female leaders in management roles standing

at the forefront of the industry.

Forestry Corporation's talent & OD business partner Amba Addinsall said there has been a marked increase in female representation in Forestry Corporation's executive and leadership teams: "Our executive leadership team has hit gender parity for the first time ever and 24 per cent of our senior leaders are now women.

"This is an increase of four per cent over two years and really celebrates the calibre of women that we have in the workplace," Addinsall added.

"They are creating more inclusive teams and are role modelling what's possible for our newer recruits."

Forestry Corporation interviewed several of its female employees ahead of IWD to gain their perspective on working in the sector.

Among them was Kurrily Oliver, a harvesting supervisor at Bathurst. She said that forestry had been a late-career

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From P 8

change for her: "I was stuck in typical office-based roles for nearly 20 years and one day thought what else could I be doing in my life in my early 40s.

"Until I started working in the role, I never knew how much went into the business regarding how in-depth the management of forests is and the huge amount of work that goes into the renewable side of the business, through to how everyone is welcomed as part of the broader teams, male or female."

Oliver is now furthering her career education. "I am looking forward to starting Certificate III in Forestry Operations through TAFE," she said. "I feel this will broaden my knowledge within the corporation and hopefully give me a long career within forestry as women make the same contribution in forestry daily. We are all equal and do a fabulous job in our roles within the industry."

An older hand in the sector, Elissa Bond is a spatial systems coordinator with Forestry Corporation Snowy Region and has found it to be a welcoming environment. "I've always found there has been gender equality in Forestry," she said. "I have been with the organisation for 12 years and in that time there has been a definite trend of more females taking on all roles from field-based to supervisor and onto the more senior roles.

"As an example, here in the Tumut Forest Resources team we have four females and five males. It's a great workplace gender balance. I see more and more women applying for roles within the business and I think there's strong equal standing in the organisation.

"Everyone in this workplace has flexibility when it comes



FWPA data notes a slow but steady increase in women in the sector and a slightly faster increase in women in executive roles. Source: FWPA Diversity and Inclusion survey 2023

to their home life and parental duties, which is so important for working mums and dads. There's a real family focus within Forestry and that's why it's such a great place to work."

Meg Clery, who works as a field ecologist at Eden, previously worked as a ranger with the NPWS and has an abiding love for animals, particularly birds.

"I love working in beautiful forests where there is so much biodiversity," Clery said.

"My field work takes me from the coast up into the tablelands and I enjoy being part of Forestry's moves to increase its environmental credentials. The variety of work as an ecologist is amazing from fauna monitoring of small mammals, birds, frogs to floral surveys in being able to find beautiful orchids growing in nature. We also do night work, a lot of camera trapping studies spending a lot of time analysing interactions and images of animals and surveying threatened species.

"Generally, the ecology team is female-dominant in forestry across the state and I guess that comes down to women finding the attraction of studying animals."

Kristen Coady, land access officer at Dubbo, echoed the sentiment. "A career in forestry is more than just trees and timber," she said.

"Our forests have a wide range of social, ecological and cultural values and women have a huge role to play in the promotion and protection of these values and our natural assets."

FWPA NOTES IMPROVEMENTS

Also this week, FWPA has released its Gender and Diversity Survey results for FY2023. For the fourth year running, companies in the forest grower and timber processing sector completed a voluntary Gender and Diversity Survey, which is part of an ongoing industry-wide commitment to increasing the participation of women across the workforce.

The 2023 survey was completed by 23 companies. The key finding shows a positive trend in the increasing number of female employees in the industry. The survey also highlights an increase in female executive roles in both forest grower and timber processing sectors. Over the past 2 years, the proportion of female executives has increased from 20% (27 roles) in 2021 to 29% (42 roles) in 2023.

“OUR EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM HAS HIT GENDER PARITY FOR THE FIRST TIME

"As a female executive in this historically male-dominated industry, it is great to see gender diversity improving, clearly recognising and realising the benefits of diverse thinking at a strategic level," said Katie Fowden, general manager at Hyne Timber and board member at FWPA.

"The gender diversity at industry events has completely transformed in recent years and it is vital that the leaders in our industry, whether male or female, continue to support such opportunities. Appreciating that gender is only one aspect of diversity, as an industry, we need to be cognisant of the broader opportunities diversity can deliver," added Fowden. Erick Hansnata, statistics and economics manager at FWPA emphasised the organisation's focus on gender as part of its strategy for a sector that more accurately reflects wider Australia. He said, "The ongoing FWPA member commitment to the diversity and inclusion survey plays a key role in providing key information for the industry, reflecting their positive efforts in the diversity and inclusion policy area."

There is more that can be done for gender equality in the forestry sector (and a lot more that can be done in construction) but it's clear that timber businesses are heading in the right direction.

SA's forestry plan released

The Malinauskas State Government has released the South Australian Wood Fibre and Timber Industry Master Plan.

THE South Australian government knows that forestry equals jobs in its state and the Wood Fibre and Timber Industry Master Plan released late last week recognises this. Developed by the Forest Industries Advisory Council of South Australia in consultation with the Minister for Forest Industries, the Hon Clare Scriven MLC,



Minister Clare Scriven, MLC launching the plan with the premier (back left) and members of the Forest Industries Advisory Council. Image from Facebook

“As the birthplace of Australian plantation forestry, South Australia’s \$1.4 billion forest industries have a long and distinguished history of nurturing a forward thinking and innovative mindset,” said Premier Peter Malinauskas.

“The South Australian Wood Fibre and Timber Industry Master Plan provides

“ THE PLAN PROVIDES A STRATEGIC DIRECTION FOR THE INDUSTRY TO BUILD ON ITS STRENGTHS

the plan sees three goals running through its wider aims to strengthen the state

forest and timber industries, domestic manufacturing and infrastructure capability. These are:

- The right resource and capability
- A future focused workforce
- A clean and green circular economy.

a strategic direction for the industry to build on its numerous strengths particularly through the further investment in major value-adding activities such as sawn timber, engineered wood products and in emerging markets such as carbon farming and biomass.

Two investments were ready to go at the time of the plan’s announcement, the first being \$200,000 for Fennell Forestry to commence Phase Two of an electric log truck trial examining how heavy vehicle decarbonisation can contribute towards a green circular economy. The second is \$70,000 in funding for the South Australian Forest Products Association to develop a State of the Industry Report.

“The State Government is making sure the industry is ready for the future, through our contribution to this Master Plan, our \$15 million investment over ten years for the new Forestry Centre of Excellence, and through the \$2.3 million fire tower network upgrade project with its game-changing artificial intelligence (AI) bushfire camera detection and monitoring system.”

Other projects identified as priorities through the plan will be developed and implemented over the next three years as part of the State Government’s \$2 million election commitment.

For further information on the South Australian Wood Fibre and Timber Industry Master Plan, including the Forest Industries Advisory Council and state priorities such as the Forestry Centre of Excellence and the Trees on Farms Initiative, click here.

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Forestry unfairly painted as problem

THE timber sector continues to be misrepresented as an environmental problem rather than solution. Events this week highlight the issue.

Media has widely reported the deaths and injuries of koalas on Kangaroo Island, where blue gum plantations are being cleared to return to agricultural land. The stories have condemned 'logging', despite the fact the land clearances are being carried out by Australian Agribusiness Group (a wholly owned subsidiary of international CK Life Sciences Int'l., (Holdings) Inc). In 2021, Kangaroo Island Plantation Timbers ceased plantation operations and converted to agriculture following fires and its failure to achieve a new seaport on the island.

Meanwhile, in NSW, the Environmental Defenders



Kangaroo Island Mayor Michael Pengilly (centre) says he and other council members have received threats after the news broke.
Image Kangaroo Island website

Office (EDO) last week issued a report highlighting the fact that two recent court decisions have weakened the legal defence provisions for NSW Forestry Corporation activities. The EDO announced the rulings mean that it is "now legally recognised that communities with a special interest have the

right to hold the state-owned logging agency to account over its forestry operations in native forests."

The first ruling came from a claim in which the North East Forest Alliance challenged logging approvals in Myrtle and Braemar State Forests. As EDO said, "While NEFA was not

ultimately successful, the court confirmed for the first time that the Forestry Act does not prevent persons with a special interest from taking legal action over forestry operations in NSW, including disputing logging approvals."

This decision has since been reinforced by a ruling in the NSW Land and Environment Court which threw out an attempt at an injunction sought by conservation group South East Forest Rescue (SEFR) against Forestry Corporation NSW, saying the group did not have standing to bring the legal action, contrasting this with NEFA, which was successful "because they could demonstrate size and scale of their organisation".

Expect more action in the courts and the court of public opinion.

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Building East Arnhem forestry capacity

A recent FWPA project shows great potential for developing sustainable, Traditional Owner-led forestry in the Northern Territory.

THE vast Indigenous-owned and -managed forest estate of Northern Australia has been attracting commercial interest in recent years. At the same time, Elders in these communities are looking for ways to increase self-determination and economic independence in ways that align with Indigenous notions of value and continue to care for Country.

Against this background, the 'Indigenous Commercial Forestry Opportunities' project investigated the potential for Indigenous-led commercial native forestry, focusing on the East Arnhem Land region of the Northern Territory. Its final report has just been published.

FWPA facilitated this important work by providing funding to match the investment made by project partners including the University of the Sunshine Coast (UniSC), Gumatj Corporation, Northern Territory and Queensland governments, and other regional organisations.

Together, the partners worked to boost the forestry capacity of Traditional Owner (Yolngu) communities in the East Arnhem region. The research project has showcased great potential for the development of sustainable native forestry activities in the Northern Territory, led by Traditional Owner



Dallas Anson welcoming workshop attendees July 2023 on Birany Birany Homelands in East Arnhem Land.

communities.

'Sustainable' in this context emphasised environmental and cultural health and resilience, and perpetual Indigenous-led commercial forestry livelihood opportunities and benefits.

Practical and hands-on training was undertaken by 35 Traditional Owners in commercial forestry activities including inventory, sawmilling and construction, as well as forest garden design, establishment and management.

The project kick-started the creation of an effective East Arnhem Indigenous forestry workforce, with a total of 1647 hours of paid training injecting almost \$48,000 into the Homelands of East Arnhem Land.

Northern Territory Government Project

Manager Dallas Anson said this introductory training emphasised boosting practical operational skills, as well as knowledge around the principles of forest management.

"We conducted additional capacity building with the local Indigenous forestry workforce to support the development of sustainable forest livelihoods amongst the Yolngu people," Anson said.

Out of this process, a new forestry training proposal was designed in collaboration with regional stakeholders which suggests future training initiatives should incorporate culturally appropriate design and delivery conducted on Country and in local language, as well as engaging skilled 'Local Champions' as mentors.

Throughout the project, forestry business development

activities took place at a Sustainable Native Forestry Demonstration Site established in the remote community of Birany Birany, with the manufacturing of naturally durable, solid roundwood products using state-of-the-art spindleless lathe/debarking technology.

Markets for both timber and non-

timber forest products were identified.

UniSC Project Manager Dr John Meadows said the project team is now working to develop a follow-on project to further test the commercial viability of Indigenous community forestry in East Arnhem.

"The mixed activities and income streams associated with sustainable, small-scale native forestry, including payments for ecosystem services, have the potential to create long-term forest livelihoods, while promoting and supporting local culture, language, and integrational knowledge transfer," Meadows said.

The full report contains details on the opportunities, objectives, outcomes and more. Read it by clicking here.



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Timberlink launches its Reconciliation Action Plan

SOME of the less pleasant voices in the Australian commentariat last year announced the failure of the Voice referendum was a vote against Reconciliation. They could not have been more wrong.

At a local and national level, many businesses and community organisations have been doing the real, hands-on work required for Reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. One common tool for this work is a RAP: a Reconciliation Action Plan, which is designed to help workplaces engage staff with reconciliation and provide an environment more supportive to First Nations peoples.

Timberlink is the latest major Australian Business to take this journey, this week announcing the launch of its Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan, the first stage in the RAP process. The company said, "This is a significant milestone for Timberlink as it embarks on a journey to enhance its awareness and appreciation of the First Nation Peoples of Australia."

Endorsed by Reconciliation Australia, Timberlink's 2024-2025 Reflect RAP is focused on equipping the organisation to actively participate in meaningful reconciliation efforts. It is designed to further support positive relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples while establishing the areas where Timberlink can make the most impactful contributions to further Reconciliation.

The RAP provides a structured approach,



1/ Timberlink RAP Working Group with First Nations artist Tamay Beam (centre) and Dannielle Sio (far right).

2/ First Nations artist Tamay Beam (Instagram: @tamaybeamart) created artworks using timber from Timberlink's Bell Bay manufacturing facility.

outlining clear actions aimed at establishing and strengthening mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and organisations, which include:

- Increasing understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Cultures, histories, knowledge and rights through cultural learning.
- Improving employment outcomes by increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples'



The Reflect RAP is freely available for staff to read through and will be driven by the working group.

- recruitment, retention and professional development.
 - Establishing and maintaining an effective RAP Working Group (RWG) to drive the execution and governance of the RAP.
- Timberlink's chief people

officer sponsors the RAP program, with oversight by the CEO. This sponsorship is instrumental in facilitating the achievement of our RAP deliverables and overarching program objectives.

Paul O'Keefe, CEO of Timberlink, said "Our decision to embark on this journey was born from our desire to connect more fundamentally with the communities within the regions in which we operate and to strengthen our commitment to develop and nurture an inclusive and diverse working environment.

"Over the next 18 months, we are committed to progressing the key areas of Reconciliation through fostering relationships with our First Nations Communities, and to reflect respectfully First Nations cultural protocols within Timberlink."

Karen Mundine, CEO of Reconciliation Australia, said "This Reflect RAP enables Timberlink to deepen its understanding of its sphere of influence and the unique contribution it can make to lead progress. Getting these first steps right will ensure the sustainability of future RAPs and Reconciliation initiatives and provide a meaningful impact toward Australia's Reconciliation journey."

Timber builds star in award shortlist

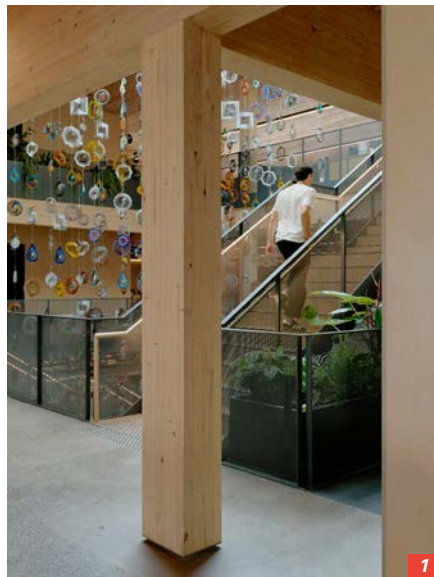
The 2024 NSW Architecture Awards shortlist is full of notable timber buildings.

THE recent announcement of the 2024 NSW Architecture Awards shortlist is really an excuse for lovers of fine design to while away an afternoon looking at some of the most beautiful, intelligent and impressive recent builds. The winners will be announced on 28 June 2023 at the NSW Architecture Awards.

Unsurprisingly, timber builds feature across the major categories. Here are some of our favourites.

In Sustainable Projects, BVN has absolutely hit the brief with their Darlinghurst Workplace. Built within the frame – much of it retained – of an old brick garage, the new structure is home to 300 workers for a company that is as focused on the environment as it is on employee wellbeing. A new CLT top storey has been added, along with a full-height void, skylights and a timber-rich open terrace. The original concrete has been polished to a high sheen to contrast beautifully with the warmth of the CLT columns and pine ceiling battens, and a huge mobile hangs in the lightwell.

In Education Architecture, the Barker College Maths and Student Hub is a nominee. Designed by Architectus and built by Buildcorp with engineering by TTW, this multi-use building features a mass timber second floor and roof, and a concrete structure for the ground floor and level 1. As TTW described the project: “Working closely with the architect and builder, our team designed the timber



structure and concrete elements to achieve a cohesive and visually appealing aesthetic. The timber structure

Newcastle beachside suburb of Stockton, subdividing one residential lot into two. Half

- 1/ BVN's Darlinghurst Workplace mixes business with delight.
- 2/ Olive Tree House borrows exterior views to make the small home feel much larger.
- 3/ Timber joinery and ply are key features of Olive Tree House.
- 4/ Barker College Maths and Student Hub. Image courtesy TTW

the size of the average Australian home, the rooms are flexible and the house itself is built around established trees on the site, including the eponymous olive tree. Materials are simple and in keeping with the workers cottages common in the area: concrete

features glulam columns, bracing and beams, cross-laminated timber (CLT) floors, lift shaft walls and roofs.”

A delightful change from monumental builds is Olive Tree House, a new urban infill project in the

floors, timber exteriors and plywood interiors, and colourful joinery makes this a house for living in, not just for awards.

Interestingly, many of the timber-rich builds featured on the shortlist are hybrid structures. Architects seem to have internalised the message that timber is a valuable material for its inherent qualities, and one that plays very nicely with others.

To find the full list of nominees, click here.

UniSC and University of Melbourne join AFWI team

TWO new research centres have been identified as preferred candidates to receive funding under the Australian Forest and Wood Innovations (AFWI) program after a competitive expressions of interest process.

Last year, it was announced that the University of Tasmania (UTAS) would host AFWI, a national research institute committed to advancing research and innovation to support Australia's vital forest and wood product industries, by drawing on the best researchers and facilities across Australia.

Last week it was announced the University of the Sunshine Coast (UniSC) and University of Melbourne will be invited to form AFWI

research centres, joining a third research centre being established at the University of Tasmania (UTAS) in Launceston.

Each research centre will have access to \$24.5 million in funding as part of the more than \$100 million AFWI grant agreement with UTAS.

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Murray Watt said that the three research centres in combination will provide good coverage of forest and wood products research. "The three research centres will help us to enhance our wood products and systems, manage and sustainably expand our Australian forestry resources, transform wood residues



Minister Murray Watt is confident that AFWI will make a material difference.

into renewable products and energy solutions – all while helping to address the threat of climate change," Watt said.

The Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA) welcomed the announcement. Acting CEO Richard Hyett said, "I congratulate both preferred candidates. I also

acknowledge the hard work put in by other institutions through a competitive expression of interest process.

"AFPA is very proud of the AFWI progress after playing a key role in its inception, based on the need for more varied and advanced forest products research in Australia. I'm confident these new centres will offer groundbreaking research into how we can maximise value from resource, boost the credentials and uses of timber and fibre as a climate solution and boost the innovation agenda across industry."

For more information on Australian Forest and Wood Innovations, visit the DAFF website.

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From P 6

this money, plus any proportionate capital gain, back into their super when they sell the home.

“We need to have better policies and systems that will focus on getting people into homes. Ensuring there is a sustainable lifeline that works for each group,” Sukkar said.

“While roads and bridges are important, in some respects we have lost our way and the most important social infrastructure in Australia is homes and a roof over your head.”

Tony Price from ForestWorks, a not-for-profit organisation that provides skills development services for the forest products sector, gave the organisation’s thanks for the keynote speech, saying: “We appreciate Mr Sukkar describing his vision and how he sees we may be able to move forward with housing. As an industry we have a whole range of things that need to come together throughout the whole supply chain, including the resource which needs further discussions.”

Newly appointed AFPA Chair, Steve Dadd, then introduced the new APFA CEO Diana Hallam, saying “I am confident the board will rise to excellence with Diana and support her in her truly important task.”

Dadd thanked previous



AFPA’s communications director Joe Prevedello took on hosting duties for the evening.



A last-minute speaker, the Hon Michael Sukkar MP drew on years of expertise to get to the meat of Australia’s housing issues.



Steve Dadd, newly appointed Chair addresses the AFPA members.



Diana Hallam, newly appointed CEO, explaining to the members the name tags were for her benefit for the evening.

Chair Joel Fitzgibbon, who made the decision to step down due to growing pressures on his workload, and acting CEO Natasa Sikman. “We thank Natasa for her advocacy and expertise and commitment and dedication to AFPA including service in other rolls over two and a half years. We also want to thank Richard Hyett, our Policy Director, who stepped up as acting CEO for the past few weeks,” said Dadd.

“I would also like to thank the entire AFPA State and Association teams, who have showed remarkable professionalism and grace

throughout the past year of instability. Now, it is back to business and a time to re-focus on some of the challenges that face us.

“We see an unprecedented situation in the face of a structural housing crisis in the building sector in Australia. The profitless pandemic booms and waves [have brought] deep uncertainty for manufacturers and a major slow-down with effects on the whole supply chain.

“It is vital that we are able to hang onto our manufactures’ capabilities and supply chains as soon enough we are going to need

this industry to house this rapidly growing nation.”

Media and activist attacks on forestry, including the ‘lawfare’ tactics used in Victoria and WA and now expanding into NSW were also discussed, along with Australia’s over-reliance on imported product, as were past mistakes.

“The argument for planting more trees has never been clearer for our climate, for the economy, to address the housing crisis and increasing natural benefits. Yet the collective memory of the MIS runs deep,” Dadd said, calling for the sector to work together to educate and advocate at all levels.

Diana Hallam was the final speaker and she freely admitted that her storied background was more focused in agriculture than forestry, so she would be in listening mode when it came to input from members. However, she emphasised that the data was already clear on the advantages of the forestry sector to the economy and environment. “We have so many good messages to sell,” Hallam told the audience, the job now was to sell them.

On the cover: AFPA Dinner attendees (L-R) Jim Bindon of Hyne Group, AFPA CEO Diana Hallam, Mick Stephens of Timber Old and Jake Lazarus of Southern Cross Forests.



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IKEA's international forest holdings

Being an international power may not be enough to keep IKEA investing in NZ forestry.

By DENNIS NEILSON

SWEDISH company IKEA is an international mega-star (private) company universally known for its massive stores, wooden flat-pack furniture and meatballs.

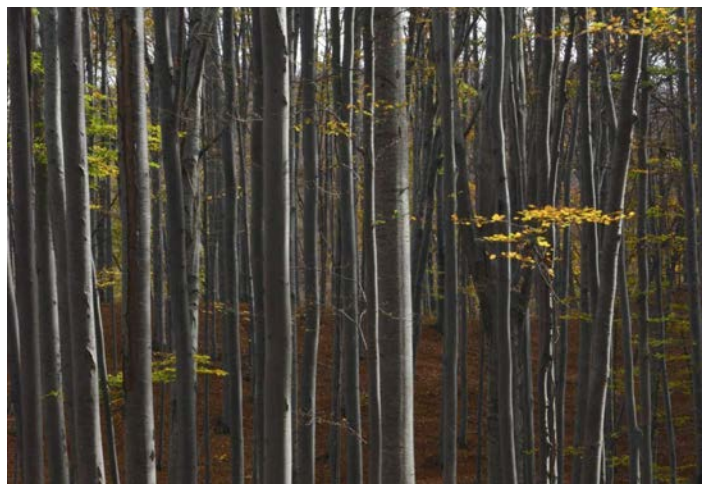
As the world's largest furniture retailer, IKEA has more than 450 stores and had retail sales of €44.6 billion in FY 2022. Globally, 860 million customers visited IKEA stores in 2023. That is one in nine human beings on Earth.

Alongside IKEA sits Ingka Group, which was also founded by IKEA's Ingvar Kamprad. Although the two groups of companies are separate, Ingka group is the largest IKEA franchisee, generating 89% of all IKEA sales worldwide through its IKEA Retail business, and through Ingka Centres operates 33 shopping centres in 15 countries, under different trademarks, always anchored by an IKEA store. Ingka Group is also a major and growing international forest investor through Ingka Investments.

Following its announcement in February 2024 of a further investment of 23,000 hectares in forests in the Baltics in February, it now has a total global forest asset base of 312,000 hectares – including 23,000 hectares in New Zealand

A relative latecomer to the New Zealand forestry scene, Ingka subsidiaries Investments Management NZ and Ingka Investments Forest Assets NZ were registered only in late 2020.

However, since August 2021, the New Zealand



Ingka Investments has been expanding its forest portfolio in the Baltics at the same time as facing hurdles in New Zealand.

Overseas Investment Office (OIO) has granted the Ingka companies 20 consents to buy more than 23,100ha of land, from Southland to the Bay of Plenty.

Most recently (in late 2023), Ingka invested \$11.3 million in 293ha of commercial forest at Taringatura, Southland, and paid \$16.6 million for 1646ha across two properties in Taranaki.

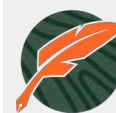
All but one of Ingka's consents were granted under the special forestry test, a fast-track process introduced in 2018 to streamline consent pathways for foreign investment in forestry.

But in response to ongoing concern over the rate at which productive farmland was being converted to commercial forests and damage caused by 'forestry slash', farm-to-forest conversions were removed from the special forestry test in New Zealand late last year. Indeed the new government has now banned offshore investors from even buying

farmland to plant trees (they can still buy existing plantation forests).

Ingka being a model steward of New Zealand rural land management (including the active protection of kiwi on its land) has not prevented it from being criticised repeatedly by various media – the latest in February (click here for the full article in French) – a "damning critique" published by NGO Disclose, with the opening: "*En nouvelle-zélande, ikea accapare des terres et menace les écosystèmes indigènes*" – which translates to "In New Zealand, IKEA is grabbing land and threatening native ecosystems".

This is just one instance of what seems to be a tsunami of criticism of the whole New Zealand commercial forestry sector by politicians, the media, NGOs – and all: to the stage that some feel that the commercial forestry industry in New Zealand is in danger of losing its social licence.



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