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Carbon pricing boosts forestry investment

COVER STORY P2



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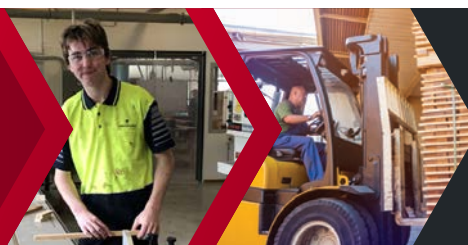
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Why a carbon price is changing the future of forestry

By **ANDREW MORGAN**, Managing Director, SFM

FOR more than two decades, SFM has worked at the intersection of forestry, agriculture and investment. We've partnered with landowners, investors and industry to unlock the full potential of plantation forests across Tasmania, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia.

Our work is grounded in trust—built over decades through our deep understanding of agricultural landscapes and the strong relationships we've forged with farmers and agribusinesses. Today, we manage more than 50,000 hectares of production forest across Australia. Like many in the sector, we've navigated long cycles, fluctuating commodity prices, and

increasingly complex land-use decisions.

But something fundamental has changed. In recent years, we've witnessed a structural shift in what drives value in plantation development — and it's been driven by something invisible,

yet incredibly powerful: a real, regulated and recognised price on carbon.

The arrival of a carbon price has irrefutably reshaped the investment landscape for forestry in Australia.

Historically, the economic viability of new plantations

was tied almost entirely to future timber prices and market access. Today, we're seeing a credible alternative source of revenue — one that aligns commercial ambition with climate action.

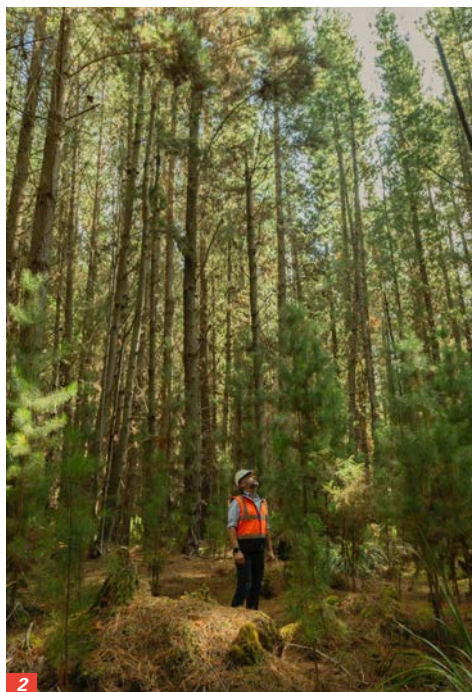
A carbon price has brought forward investment. It's unlocked projects that once seemed too risky or not viable. It's helping landowners and investors think long-term and back sustainable, climate-positive

land use.

In practice, that means a steep grazing paddock in northern Tasmania, or a marginal dryland property in the Green Triangle, can now



1/ SFM Forester, Rafaela measuring humidity in the pine plantation.



2/ Andrew Morgan inspecting a pine forest managed by SFM. Images: SFM

Cont P 3

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From P 2

support a viable plantation carbon project. These forests generate high-integrity Australian Carbon Credit Units (ACCUs) and produce timber that stores carbon in homes and infrastructure for decades to come.

At SFM, we've now registered over 40 plantation projects with the Clean Energy Regulator — representing roughly 25 per cent of all plantation carbon projects in the country. And we're just getting started.

But this is about more than just credits on paper. A credible carbon price gives investors confidence — from

“CARBON PRICE HAS RESHAPED THE INVESTMENT LANDSCAPE FOR FORESTRY

family landholders to global institutions — to allocate capital into forestry. And it's bringing diversity in that capital: investors seeking long-duration, nature-based assets with strong climate credentials; farmers looking to diversify income while improving land condition.

Crucially, this doesn't replace the value of timber — nor should it. Instead, we now have a dual-income model that makes forestry more competitive with other land uses. It's enabling reforestation at scale, supporting regional jobs, and enhancing the resilience of our agricultural landscapes.



Andrew Morgan, Managing Director SFM. Image: SFM

Perhaps most importantly, it's reframing the conversation. We're no longer debating whether forestry can compete with agriculture. We're exploring how forestry — supported by carbon — can work alongside agriculture to deliver integrated, landscape-scale outcomes that benefit climate, biodiversity and rural

communities.

Of course, there's work ahead: refining methodologies, ensuring integrity, and scaling responsibly. But the momentum is real, and the opportunity is here.

At SFM, we believe the carbon price is more than a market signal. It's a signal of intent — that Australia is serious about climate action, that our

forests are critical climate infrastructure, and that smart, evidence-based plantation development will be central to a net-zero, nature-positive future.

On the cover: Pine plantation managed by SFM in southern Tasmania. Image: SFM



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Forestry centre breaks ground in Mount Gambier

State Government invests in timber industry's future, marking a milestone for South Australia's 150-year forestry legacy.

ON April 9, 2025, a historic milestone was marked in Mount Gambier as the first sod was turned for South Australia's Forestry Centre of Excellence (FCoE) at the University of South Australia's (UniSA) Wireless Road tertiary precinct. This event, celebrated by the South Australian Forest Products Association (SAFPA), underscores the State Government's long-term commitment to advancing forest industries research, enhancing global competitiveness, and boosting economic and employment opportunities in the regions.

The \$16 million investment, part of a 10-year collaborative project between the State Government, UniSA, and the forestry industry, forms a cornerstone of a broader \$55 million Mount Gambier education, training, and research precinct. This precinct also includes a \$35 million Technical College and a \$5 million TAFE SA upgrade, creating a hub for school education, vocational training, university education, industry collaboration, and research. The Centre, designed by Russell and Yelland, is slated for completion in January 2026 and will showcase local timber while fostering long-term R&D for the Green Triangle—a powerhouse of Australia's forestry industry.

South Australia has been at the forefront of forestry for 150 years, a legacy that began with Australia's first commercial plantation forests in 1876. The state pioneered the domestication



Mount Gambier sod turn marks 150 years of forestry innovation. Image: courtesy South Australian Forest Products Association

of radiata pine, hosted the Australian Forestry School, and led innovations in timber production. The FCoE builds on this history, aiming to position Mount Gambier as the nation's hub of forestry innovation. The Centre's vision is clear: to be acknowledged as an international leader in forest industries research, education, product, and market development, enhancing the Green Triangle through local capacity, national collaboration, and global reputation.

The FCoE will tackle pressing industry challenges, such as decarbonising the economy, increasing domestic fibre processing, and improving fibre yield. By partnering with UniSA, it will bring together local, national, and international experts in forest and wood fibre innovations. The Centre will also house key entities like the National Institute for Forest Products Innovation (NIFPI),

alongside UniSA, the Green Triangle Forest Industries Hub, Tree Breeding Australia, and the Logging Investigation and Training Association. This collaborative approach will consolidate best-practice research, future-proof the sector, and develop highly skilled employment pathways for the next generation.

The State Government's commitment extends beyond the FCoE, with a total of \$30 million invested in forest and timber industries. This includes a jointly funded, purpose-built research facility for Tree Breeding Australia, aimed at improving productivity and protecting against biosecurity threats. Minister for Forest Industries

Clare Scriven has been instrumental in this progress, earning special acknowledgment from SAFPA for her vision and dedication to forestry's future.

The Centre's design reflects its ambitious goals. Its façade mirrors a forest plantation, with natural materials, exposed timber, and a terracotta colourway creating a strong, memorable space. The brand identity, featuring abstract trees in a vibrant lime hue paired with deeper tones, symbolises innovation, prosperity, and trust. The interwoven loops of the logo spell out "F-C-O-E," embodying the industry's collaboration and connection—from seedling to final product.

As the world demands more fibre and the industry seeks new efficiencies, the FCoE is poised to lead the way. South Australia's Minister for Primary Industries, Regional Development, and Forest Industries, Clare Scriven, noted, "This year marks 150 years of innovation and experience in growing and producing world-class forestry products in South Australia, and the work and research that will emerge from this advanced facility will ensure the industry is well placed for the next 150 years." With Mount Gambier solidifying its status as a forestry innovation hub, the Forestry Centre of Excellence is a bold step toward securing the sector's future for generations to come.

“THE CENTRE WILL TACKLE DECARBONISING ECONOMY AND FIBRE YIELD

ITI Australia welcomes SA Pine Sawmills into operations

Acquisition ensures high-quality timber product availability

ITI Australia has embraced a meaningful opportunity with the acquisition of SA Pine Sawmills, announced on April 10, 2025. This strategic step ensures continued access to the high-quality timber products SA Pine is renowned for, reinforcing ITI's commitment to a reliable distribution network for timber and building products across Australia.

For years, ITI Australia and SA Pine have nurtured a strong partnership, built on trust and a shared dedication to quality. When SA Pine's owners decided to retire, ITI welcomed the chance to integrate their operations, preserving the continuity of SA Pine's products through ITI's distribution channels. "This acquisition underscores our commitment to delivering exceptional timber products and services to our customers," said ITI Australia CEO Germano Tomassetti in a letter to stakeholders.

The move aligns with ITI Australia's core values



SA Pine Sawmills joins ITI Australia's trusted timber family. Image: SA Pine Sawmills

of providing high-quality, ethically sourced products while expanding its offerings to meet customer needs. By integrating SA Pine, ITI strengthens its ability to navigate industry challenges, such as fibre supply reliability, and ensures consistent service delivery nationwide. This acquisition reflects ITI's broader goal of supporting sustainable timber solutions that benefit both the industry and the environment, a

principle that has guided the company's operations across Tasmania, Victoria, South Australia, and Western Australia.

ITI Australia is prioritising a seamless transition for suppliers and customers as they take over SA Pine's operations. Ian Robinson, part of SA Pine's current leadership, will remain to assist during the handover, while a new General Manager will join the business on May

5, 2025, with further details to be announced soon.

"Our team is committed to ensuring a smooth integration," Tomassetti noted, encouraging stakeholders to reach out with any questions.

The acquisition also honours SA Pine's legacy. ITI expressed gratitude to the retiring owners for their dedication, which built SA Pine into a reputable name in the industry. "We wish them all the best as they embark on their well-deserved retirement," Tomassetti added.

This acquisition signals a stable, ongoing partnership in Australia's timber sector. By preserving access to SA Pine's quality products, ITI Australia is well-positioned to support the industry's growth, ensuring that high-quality, ethically sourced timber remains available for construction, housing, and other essential needs across the country.



ITI Australia ensures quality timber through SA Pine acquisition. Image: ITI Australia

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Local wood first

Pauline Hanson's One Nation commits to timber jobs and homegrown supply

AS the Federal Election campaign continues, the Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA) welcomes One Nation's suite of policies, aimed at supporting Australia's forestry and forest products sector and securing the nation's timber future. AFPA Chief Executive Officer, Diana Hallam said, most of the Pauline Hanson's One Nation commitments closely align with AFPA's own election platform – Australian Timber. Australia's Future – and demonstrate One Nation's recognition of the critical role the sector plays in Australia's economy and regional communities.

One Nation's forestry policy commitments include:

- Opposing any further native forest lockups of areas that are available for sustainable harvesting
- Supporting Country of Origin labelling – informing

“FORESTRY SECTOR VITAL FOR ECONOMY AND JOBS



1/ **Senator Pauline Hanson, One Nation.** Image: Parliament of Australia
2/ **Diana Hallam, AFPA Chief Executive Officer.** Image: AFPA



consumers about where the timber they buy, comes from

- Extending plantation establishment grants to assist planting of an additional 18,000 hectares annually
- Supporting development of a National Fire Response Plan for Australia's forests
- Supporting a summit to develop policies around incentivising the adoption of modular and prefabricated timber housing

One Nation has also committed to a 'local wood

first' policy for government procurement, exempting building materials (including timber) from the GST for five years for homes up to \$1 million, cracking down on illegal timber imports, supporting the delivery of forestry tertiary education, and changing National Electricity Market rules to reduce electricity costs for timber and wood-fibre manufacturing businesses by 20 per cent.

"On behalf of Australia's forest industries, I welcome One Nation's comprehensive and practical policy agenda,"

Diana Hallam said.

AFPA also acknowledged One Nation's pivotal role in moving an amendment in Parliament last year to remove an unintended tax burden on the plantation forestry sector – an outcome that protected critical investment and jobs.

"Last year, Senator Pauline Hanson and One Nation were instrumental in removing a \$20 million per year tax impost that would have undermined investment in new plantations – vital for securing timber for housing and essential products," Diana Hallam said.

AFPA represents forest growers, harvesters, and manufacturers of timber and paper products.

"We encourage all sides of politics to commit to our Australian Timber. Australia's Future Election Platform in full this campaign. Only with the support of the next Government and Parliament, will our sector be able to realise its potential for the economy, jobs, environment and communities," Diana Hallam concluded.

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7-8: Sydney Build 25 – ICC, Sydney. Australia's largest construction and design show. For more details visit <https://www.sydneymbuildexpo.com>

13: EUDR Insights Workshop – FWPA office, VIC and online. Lunch - 12.00pm. Workshop 12.30-4.30pm. To register, please email info@responsiblewood.org.au

14: AFCA Mid-Year Forum & Dinner – Gold Coast, QLD. The Forum will feature a tailored workshop on Chain of Responsibility for forest services businesses as well as a session on operator training and assessment requirements. To register, visit <https://afcaevents.zohobackstage.com.au/events/>

11-17: Japanese Wood Architecture Tour – Japan. Tour the world's oldest and most impressive wooden buildings. From Hōryū-ji, the world's oldest wooden building to the World Expo in Osaka - home to the world's largest wooden ring building. For more information and

view the program, visit <https://www.woodsolutions.com.au/events/woodsolutions-sponsors-tda-japan-study-tour?>

26-30: LIGNA 25 – Hannover, Germany. The world's leading trade fair for woodworking and wood processing plant, machinery and tools. For more details visit <https://www.ligna.de/en/for-visitors>

30: NTHA SA/NT/WA State Awards – National Wine Centre, Adelaide. Join us in celebrating the SA, NT & WA Timber and Hardware Industry. Contact Tahlia at events@ntha.com.au

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. For more information visit <https://www.wcte2025.org/event/df0d5655-c16d-47df-b4a6-457a7dc63d96/wcte-2025>

29-JULY 2: 5th International

Conference on Timber Bridges – Rotorua, New Zealand. The focus is on timber bridges and the current need for resilient infrastructure to support thriving communities. For more information and to register your interest, visit <https://ictb-conference.org/2025/>

SEPTEMBER

2-3: Timber Queensland Biennial Conference "Doing Timber Business in Queensland" – Brisbane. For more information, email admin@timberqueensland.com.au

OCTOBER

13-14: Timber Construct 2025 – Melbourne. To register your interest, visit <https://timberconstruct.org/>

20-22: International Woodchip and Biomass Seminar and Networking Event – Singapore. For more information visit <https://danaevents.co.nz/2024singapore/home>

20-23: Forestry Australia 2025 Conference

– Adelaide Convention Centre, Adelaide. The conference theme is 'Restoring forests and landscapes to secure Australia's future' and aims to develop both local and national collaboration. For more details visit <https://www.forestry.org.au/2025-conference/>

22-23: Melbourne Build 25 – MCEC, Melbourne. Victoria's largest construction and design show. For more details visit <https://melbournebuildexpo.com>

23-24: Field Trip – Vietnam. (Follows on from the woodchip and biomass seminar in Singapore.) For more information visit <https://danaevents.co.nz/2024singapore/fieldtrip>

24: GTTIA – The Barn, Mt Gambier, SA. Nominations are now open for 2025 Green Triangle Timber Industry Awards. Nominate online: <https://gttia.com/nomination-form/> For full details on award categories and submission guidelines, visit: <https://gttia.com/2025-award-categories/>



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HBT group continues to thrive

HBT CEO Greg Benstead has much to celebrate as he leads the growing HBT group.

SPEAKING

exclusively with the National Timber and Hardware Association (NTHA), Greg Benstead was happy to report record growth within the HBT group, with the group expanding to over 1,200 members in just a few months. Greg believes the tail end of 2024 was all about growth and strategic partnerships for HBT, particularly after the group significantly increased its membership after partnering with stores from the AgLink group.

While Greg reiterated the importance of consolidation and attracting independent stores throughout his interview, he also emphasised, “the importance of having a strong voice as independents to compete against the big box.”

“A few years ago, a group called TGT Hardware in Mareeba, in Far North Queensland, joined us and they are also part of another agricultural group. They mentioned to AgLink that they had good dealings with us and soon after AgLink reached out to discuss how we could work together. They have since joined us with around 200 member stores.”

“Within a short period of time we grew from under 1,000 members to now 1,200 members. A lot of these are smaller businesses and this



Greg Benstead, CEO of the HBT Group. Image: HBT Group

is what HBT is all about. We are now attending their conferences to connect with their members and see how we can be of service to them. It's encouraging that there are still great growth opportunities in the marketplace,” Greg said.

While the group's growth is impressive, so is its sales with Greg saying HBT has achieved a record number of purchases from members and plenty of positive feedback from their annual conferences and State meetings.

“For now, it is ‘steady as she goes’ but it all depends on the location of the business. Our Western Australian members continue to do well. Tasmania is positive. Victoria is the one that is struggling the most due to the economic landscape at this point. Both Queensland and South Australia are showing good numbers.”

When discussing the ‘year that was’ Greg said another positive to come out of 2024 was the HBT National

Conference held in August, with excellent feedback from both suppliers and members. He believes the secret to HBT's ongoing success is continuing to be a low-cost operation focused on doing things that matter to the membership.”

“We are finding that prospective members seek us out typically after discussions with HBT. Suppliers are our greatest

advocates and the best to comment on how we work as a group,” he said.

In the last few years, some large corporations have been buying up various businesses and buying groups to expand their portfolios. Metal Manufactures Pty Ltd, owned by Black Friars (private equity), purchased Synergy Business Systems and Building & Industrial Supplies Group/ CSS in the last few years. The United Group was also bought by Stealth Group Holdings and Greg believes this trend of business buy-outs will continue to grow.

“Many independent stores that join large groups have found that these bigger organisations often prioritise their company-owned outlets. This shift has led

some independents to seek alternatives, and many have chosen HBT because it allows them to maintain their independence. This growing interest has created new opportunities for us.”

“Our strategy has been straightforward: we stay focused on our core strengths, maintain our low-cost model, and continue delivering value. By sticking to these principles, we've seen genuine independent stores naturally gravitate toward HBT, Greg said.

MARKET SEGMENT GROWTH

The building supplies, hardware, and timber sectors are all demonstrating growth this year and HBT continues to work closely with suppliers in these segments to identify areas where deals can be improved for members.

“Industrial tools are recovering following changes made by manufacturers to warranty times and a slowdown in new product development and innovation. As previously stated, sales performance is state and site-specific. It is all cyclical and history shows us that softer sales normally recover in time.”

Government regulations and policies have also impacted the construction sector recently.

“This led to an inflationary impact on construction costs, affecting both government and private projects. Recent change in several state governments has led to the

“SUPPLIERS ARE OUR GREATEST ADVOCATES”

From P 8

withdrawal of some of these regulations which should help reduce future costs across the board,” Greg said.

VISION FOR GROWTH

While HBT celebrates the recent expansion of members due to collaboration with other groups, it will also continue to

look for other opportunities to increase the volume that allows it to negotiate improved buying outcomes for members.

“The best way to compete as independents and have a strong voice against the corporate giants is to come together and show our strength in numbers. Suppliers

also need to understand that they cannot put all their eggs in that one basket. When they do this, they are just one category review away from going under,” he says.

Greg also reiterated the importance of having a strong enough volume as independents, so that suppliers can offer a deal

to the group that is equal to the corporates and the marketplace.

“Then independent businesses can focus on ranging, service and pricing, knowing that they can compete in the highly competitive market that we are trading in now,” he concluded.

Silvopastoral systems: global insights for Queensland’s future

FOLLOWING our coverage in issues #811 and #827, Timber and Forestry eNews brings fresh updates on silvopastoral systems (SPS) research. The Silvopastoral Trials of Commercial Pine Systems in North Queensland project, previously detailed, showed SPS can deliver positive impacts through higher financial returns, income diversification, and climate

resilience. Now, a collaborative study tour in Paraguay, Argentina, and Uruguay—supported by Meat & Livestock Australia, Department of Primary Industries (Queensland), Timber Queensland, and Forest & Wood Products Australia—has provided new insights.

The tour, joined by beef producers, explored pine

and eucalypt plantings, local processing of pruned logs, and the benefits of SPS for timber supply and cattle productivity. Key findings revealed SPS can deliver higher net returns per hectare while providing business resilience through joint beef and timber production, plus future carbon markets. Practices like rotational grazing, wide pasture alleys, pruning, and

high-quality tree genetics were highlighted as critical, with local producer networks sharing over 20 years of expertise.

As SPS gains traction globally, these learnings will help Queensland and Australian producers expand plantation forestry while mitigating GHG emissions on site.



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Softwoods Working Group welcomes \$1 billion investment

Local roads and community infrastructure will be strengthened.

THE Softwoods Working Group (SWG) applauds the Coalition's commitment to strengthening regional communities through its \$1 billion investment in local roads and community infrastructure. This funding will provide much-needed support to councils across Australia, especially regional and rural areas in the Southwest Slopes of NSW, ensuring they can prioritise and deliver critical infrastructure projects tailored to their communities' needs.

The revitalised Local Roads and Community Infrastructure (LRCI) Program will be delivered through two dedicated funding streams, each worth \$500 million:

- Resilience and Community Infrastructure Stream – open to all councils, this stream will help strengthen communities against natural disasters and



Better roads make a huge difference for regional communities and timber transport. Image: Pricob Loan, Unsplash

fund essential infrastructure to support local growth.

- Roads Stream – targeted to regional councils to fix potholes, maintain, and improve local roads.

SWG Chair Dean Anderson welcomed the announcement, stating: "Reliable infrastructure is the backbone of our regional economies. This investment

will not only improve road safety and resilience but also support the forestry and timber industries by ensuring efficient transport routes for timber and related products."

Executive Officer Carlie Porteous expressed her support for the funding: "The members of the Softwoods Working Group consider

efficient roading infrastructure and support of its Local Government members as its key priority and focus. Not only does it deliver efficient transport solutions and ensure industry competitiveness, but it also keeps our local communities safe in the process."

"The forestry and timber industries play a vital role in regional economies, supporting jobs and supplying key materials for future housing needs" Mr Anderson stated.

The SWG looks forward to working with local councils and industry stakeholders to maximise the benefits of this investment and ensure regional infrastructure continues to support sustainable growth and economic prosperity.

Honouring International Mother Earth Day

INTERNATIONAL Mother Earth Day, marked on 22 April since its United Nations (UN) proclamation in 2009, underscores the urgent need to protect Earth's ecosystems. It addresses threats like deforestation and climate change, urging a sustainable economy that benefits both people and the planet. Forestry plays a pivotal role, and Australia is leading the charge with world-class sustainability practices.

Australian forestry sets a global benchmark through innovation and responsibility. Organisations like Forest and Wood Products Australia (FWPA) drive cutting-edge research into carbon

sequestration and sustainable harvesting, while Responsible Wood ensures rigorous certification, guaranteeing timber comes from ethically managed forests. These efforts position Australia at the forefront of sustainable forestry, balancing ecological health with economic growth.

Timber, the ultimate renewable, shines in this context. When sourced from Australia's sustainably managed forests, it reduces



Sustainable forestry is a crucial part of supporting a healthier Earth for all. Image: Elena Mozhvilo, Unsplash

carbon footprints, with trees regrowing naturally to sequester more carbon. Individuals can get involved by supporting local reforestation projects,

advocating for sustainable timber use, or joining UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration initiatives.

Properly managed forests, a cornerstone of Australia's approach, deliver immense benefits. Environmentally, they store carbon, regulate climate, and protect biodiversity—vital as 2025 marks the International Year of Glaciers' Preservation. Economically, they sustain jobs and regional communities, showcasing forestry's dual impact. By championing sustainable practices, Australian forestry not only honours International Mother Earth Day but also sets a global standard for a healthier planet.

Voters in key seat of Lyons value forestry

NEW UComms polling conducted for the Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA) in the Tasmanian federal electorate of Lyons shows voters in the seat want all sides of politics to back in Tasmania's native, plantation and downstream forest industries this Federal Election campaign, Chief Executive Officer of AFPA, Diana Hallam said.

Key findings from the polling of 712 Lyons residents conducted in the first week of April, include:

- 8 in 10 respondents either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that Tasmania should maintain its sustainable native timber industry.
- 9 in 10 respondents either 'agreed' or strongly agreed' that timber and timber products sold in Australia should be labelled with their



Lyons' forests and plantations highlight need for political support in forestry .
Image: Mo, Unsplash

country of origin, whether it's Australian or from overseas.

- Almost 60 per cent of respondents 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' that forestry plantations should be subject to any special new tax.
- More than 80 per cent of respondents either 'agreed' or strongly agreed' that Tasmania should grow more timber production trees to help fight climate change and

help secure national timber supply.

- More than 60 per cent of respondents said they'd be 'more likely' to vote for a local candidate or political party with strong policies to strengthen Australia's forestry and timber industries.
- More than 80 per cent of respondents believe forestry and timber industries are important for local Tasmanian jobs and the economy.

The polling also suggests that Labor candidate Rebecca White will win the electorate over the Liberals' Susie Bower in a cliffhanger – with a 50.94 (Labor) to 49.06 per cent (Liberal) two party preferred result returned in the poll.

Diana Hallam said, "The results of this poll speak for themselves. They clearly demonstrate that voters in Lyons want a local MP and Federal Government that supports one of the electorate's most critical providers of jobs and economic activity, in our sustainable forestry sector.

"Ahead of the election, AFPA calls on all sides of federal politics to commit to our Australian Timber. Australia's Future Election Platform in full – so our sector can realise its potential for the country and the world," Diana Hallam concluded.

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Will first home buyer election pledges help the housing crisis?

BOTH major parties have unveiled policies to tackle the Australian housing crisis. Labor has proposed a shared equity scheme to reduce deposit requirements while the Coalition would allow larger loans for first home buyers. But would the schemes actually work?

Liam Davies, research fellow and lecturer in Sustainability and Urban Planning at RMIT, comments, "At its core, these proposed policies don't necessarily make housing cheaper, but they do make it easier for middle income earners to become first home buyers, through greater access to finance.

"High-income earners will not qualify due to income and

purchase price limits, and for low-income earners the deposit is going to be too big a hurdle for them to enter the market. So, we are really looking at the middle chunk of the income distribution who will benefit the most from these policies.

"There's nothing necessarily wrong with helping people to access home ownership while not dealing with affordability, as long as you've got other mechanisms to help people at different income levels.

"There is a real opportunity for governments to expect more of these schemes - particularly the Labor proposal - and use them to shape urban development, providing more family flats in areas with good access to transport, jobs and



Dr Liam Davies is an expert in the fields of social housing policy and urban planning. Image: RMIT

services.

"There is definite precedent with both Labor and the Coalition to building housing and making that accessible to families across the income spectrum, but what's really important to think about, is

to ask what we get for that investment. One problem is that these dwellings will only be more accessible and cheaper to finance for the first person that buys it, but after that the house will become 'full price', with gains in value flowing to the original purchaser.

"With both these policies there are winners and losers - if we're going to have systems with losers, we need to know how we take care of those people."

Dr Liam Davies is a lecturer in RMIT's Centre for Urban Research and an expert in social housing policy and urban planning. His research looks at state and commonwealth government policies that affect affordable housing in Victoria, Australia.

Major parties' housing promises fail to tackle urgent crisis

EVERYBODY'S Home has called on the major parties to present more ambitious housing policies to Australians ahead of the election, warning that the current announcements fall short of what is needed to end the country's deepening crisis.

The Coalition is expected to propose a policy that would allow first home buyers of newly built properties to deduct their mortgage interest payments from their taxable income.

Meanwhile, Labor is proposing to allow all first home buyers to purchase a home with a five per cent deposit to avoid lenders' mortgage insurance and will commit \$10 billion to build 100,000 new homes for them.

Everybody's Home

spokesperson Maiy Azize said, "The promises made by the major parties fall well short of what's needed to address the housing crisis - in fact, some elements could make it even worse.

"The Coalition's proposal to allow mortgage payments to be tax deductible for first home buyers is a form of negative gearing for non-investors, a move that will give more help to people on high incomes and could push home prices even higher. To make housing more affordable, we need to get rid of tax breaks when it comes to property, not create more.

"Labor's home deposit support for first-home buyers will also add to demand. Building 100,000 homes is a good step, but they aren't guaranteed to be affordable. Australia doesn't just need new



Everybody's Home has a clear message for the Australian Government - social housing is essential, we must ensure there is affordable homes for all Australians. Image: Ben Allan, Unsplash

homes; we need homes that people can actually afford.

"To turn the housing crisis around, the next federal government must invest

significantly in building more social housing; low-cost rentals that are guaranteed to be affordable and won't drive up demand and house prices. We have a social housing shortfall of 640,000 homes in this country and it's growing.

"In this election, Australians are seeking bold, visionary policies that will make housing affordable for everyone. Parties and candidates who are vying for votes must step up and deliver the policies that will shift the dial on the housing crisis.

"We continue to call on the federal government to end the social housing shortfall, scrap investor tax breaks for property investors, increase Centrelink payments and protect renters from unfair rent hikes," Maiy Azize concluded.

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New tourism gems in Bago State Forest

ON April 1, 2025, the Snowy Valleys community celebrated the grand opening of new tourism facilities in Bago State Forest, near Tumut, Batlow, and Tumbarumba. The 'Enhancing Nature Based Tourism' project, completed by Forestry Corporation of NSW (FCNSW) and its partners, has delivered new and upgraded visitor facilities serving as a drawcard for the regional tourism industry. Bago State Forest covers over 50,000 hectares, consisting of pine plantations and native forests managed for timber production, conservation, and visitor experiences. FCNSW is an active part of revitalising the region post the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires, blending nature-based tourism with environmental care.

NEW AND UPGRADED VISITOR FACILITIES

The program of works includes exciting additions across Bago State Forest. The new Sugar Pines visitor area features a stand of Sugar Pine trees planted to replace the iconic Sugar Pine Walk lost to the 2019-2020 fires, complemented with other conifer plantings to create a new forest grove. The trees will take decades to mature and will benefit generations to come. The area also includes a nature-based playground, wedding arbour, performance space, and short walking trails.

The new Wellness Walk at Pilot Hill Arboretum is a walking track with six activity stations designed to facilitate mindfulness and engagement in nature, developed with Connective Co. and NSW Murrumbidgee Local Health District. The 'sky seat' and 'sound pod' are features of this track. Visitors can also enjoy the reinigorated Alpine

Ash Walk, a short, 1 km easy grade walk through a stunning Alpine Ash forest, invigorating the senses.

The new Bago Sculpture Forest, part of the Snowy Valley Sculpture Trail, is a key feature, with sculptures at the Sugar Pines site, Pilot Hill Arboretum, and Alpine Ash Walk. Stephen King's Sculpture Grid Study IV at Sugar Pines was funded by the project. Sculpture by the Sea Founding CEO & Artistic Director David Handley AM said, "The Bago State Forest and the Ash Walk are places locals will want to visit and share with their friends. We welcome visitors from near and far to wander the three sites in Bago Sculpture Forest to experience artworks by artists from Iceland to England and the Czech Republic to around the corner in Batlow." He added, "The feedback we are getting from visitors and locals about the sculptures has been really positive with a considerable increase in visitation."

Upgrades also include improved signage, picnic and toilet facilities, a bird hide, and caravan parking at Lochinvar Rest Area on Batlow Road in Green Hills State Forest. Pilot Hill Arboretum received upgraded picnic and toilet facilities, walking tracks, and signage. New directional and informative signage for Bago State Forest facilitates improved visitor access, especially for first-time visitors.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMUNITY BENEFITS

The project enhances visitor experiences at Paling Yards and Paddys River Dam while prioritising environmental protection. At Paling Yards, FCNSW has improved horse rider access, amenities, and



A map of the Bago State Forest (west). Image: FCNSW

facilities, including timber horse yards and signage, and introduced a new horse-riding trail named Haenigs Horse Track. This area is also used for camping and to access 4WD routes and the Hume and Hovell walking track. At Paddys River Dam, upgrades include picnic shelters, horse rider access, amenities, fishing site access, and signage, making it a hub for camping, picnics, fishing, and swimming.

A strong focus has been commencing environmental restoration of the Paling Yards and Paddys River Dam visitor areas, in the upper reaches of the Paddys River. FCNSW Senior Manager Country and Community Kathy Lyons said, "We started planning back in 2019 to improve protection of significant peatlands and threatened species, while still enabling an iconic and educational visitor experience for bushwalking, horse riding, fishing, and camping." She added, "We have proudly delivered new standards in protective fencing for peatlands, armoured stream

crossings and timber walkways, high-quality timber horse yards, the first horse riding trail on state forest, upgraded camping facilities, interpretive signage, and a beautiful new camping hut at Paddys Dam." This includes measures to protect the Montane Peatlands Endangered Ecological Community (EEC).

FUNDING AND PARTNERSHIPS

Forestry Corporation received \$2 million in grants under the Regional Growth – Environment and Tourism Fund and contributed significant in-kind resources. Minister for Agriculture, Regional NSW, and Western NSW The Hon Tara Moriarty MLC said, "The NSW Government is committed to delivering tourism projects and infrastructure that unlock growth in our regions by building on regional visitor economies. The Bago State Forest project is one of these important projects, delivering tourism and environmental outcomes designed to build the Snowy Valleys visitor economy."

FCNSW CEO Anshul Chaudhary said, "The forest and timber industry has always been an important part of the local community in the Snowy Valleys. Our pine plantations and Alpine Ash forests were devastated by the Black Summer Bushfires, and together with our staff, the timber industry, partners, and community, we have rebuilt and reinvested in our forests. This program of



1/ The nature-based tourism project in Bago State Forest, funded by the NSW Government, has been completed by Forestry Corporation and its partners.

2/ The Snowy Mountains Sculpture Trail, a major drawcard for the region, incorporates artworks throughout Bago State Forest.

3/ A new visitor area and pine walk has replaced the iconic stand of Sugar Pines that were lost in the Black Summer Bushfires five years ago.

4/ (L-R) David Handley AM, Sculpture by the Sea Founding CEO & Artistic Director, Member for Albury Justin Clancy MP, Mayor of Snowy Valleys Council Julia Ham, Forestry Corporation's Senior Manager Country and Community Kathy Lyons, Forestry Corporation Tourism and Partnerships Manager Louise Faulkner, Forestry Corporation Visitor Experience Manager Brendan Grimson and Forestry Corporation Chief Executive Officer Anshul Chaudhary

5/ David Handley with artist Mark Nixon from NEON and the sculpture Shiver House V4 by NEON.

6/ Forestry Corporation staff, Wendy Sheather and Peter Haenig on horseback. All images: FCNSW

From P 14

forest-based environment and tourism works has helped the community to reposition as a regional tourism destination and has brought visitors back to the beautiful Snowy Valleys."

Partners in the project include Sculpture by the Sea, The Connective Co., NSW Murrumbidgee Local Health District, The Mulloon Institute, Planet Ark, and the Tumut Brungle Local Aboriginal Land Council. FCNSW Tourism and Partnerships Manager

Louise Faulkner said, "A Masterplan was developed with all partners and launched in 2023, providing the roadmap for the development of these new visitor facilities. We thank the many community representatives who helped us build these incredible attractions, which have been so well received by visitors to the region. These new visitor facilities will help grow tourism in the Snowy Valleys, attracting further investment, creating regional livability, and growing community."

Snowy Valleys Council Mayor Julia Ham added, "Snowy Valleys Council is delighted with the outcome of the work in Bago State Forest, the initiatives and vision to make our natural assets popular places to visit. The collaboration with the council, Sculptures Snowy Valleys, and Forestry Corporation is a great partnership generating tourism in our region."

FCNSW Visitor Experience Manager Brendan Grimson said, "A significant amount of work has been completed

in Bago State Forest over the past five years, and we look forward to seeing the community and visitors to the region make the most of the new facilities. As for all NSW State Forests, these upgraded forest facilities are free for the public to use." With its blend of nature-based tourism, environmental restoration, and community collaboration, the Bago State Forest project is set to draw visitors to the Snowy Valleys for years to come, showcasing the region's natural beauty and resilience.



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Sydney's housing crisis

New report finds over-regulation and excessive taxes are crippling housing delivery.

SYDNEY'S housing affordability crisis is being directly fuelled by excessive government regulation, the highest property taxes in Australia, and complex planning requirements, according to a new research paper released by Urban Taskforce titled 'What Makes Housing So Expensive?'

The comprehensive study reveals NSW leads the nation in fees, taxes, and charges on new property development, while simultaneously imposing the most stringent state-based building regulations and design review processes in Australia.

"NSW is effectively taxing itself out of the housing market," said Tom Forrest, CEO of Urban Taskforce. "There are many drivers of cost in housing supply, and governments have a large role in pushing them up or down.

"Productivity in the home building sector in NSW - which is critical to our economy - is catastrophically low.

"Overregulation, and the creation of oversight bodies like the Building Commission all add to the cost of financing a project and the time taken to deliver them, especially when compared to Victoria or Queensland where many of these measures are not in play.

"As a result, we're watching our best and brightest young professionals move interstate simply because they can't afford to buy a home here. This isn't just a housing crisis - it's becoming an economic crisis."

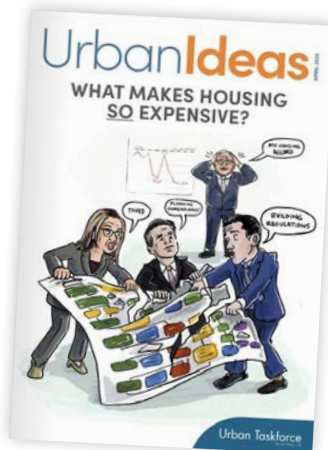
Key findings from the research paper include:

- NSW imposes the highest fees, taxes, and charges on new property development in Australia

- Planning and building regulations are more complex in NSW than in any other state
- The current Planning Act fails to mandate housing supply that meets population growth
- Costly design competitions and review processes are adding unnecessary burden to development
- Government spending on major infrastructure projects across Australia has contributed to a shortage of skilled construction workers, which further adds to the cost of housing.

Mr Forrest said while recent initiatives like the Housing Delivery Authority have made progress in reducing planning red tape, local councils continue to face significant hurdles in streamlining housing assessments.

"Both major parties have committed to bipartisan reforms, but we need action now," Mr Forrest added. "This



Urban Taskforce report reveals taxes and red tape driving Sydney's housing costs. Image: Urban Taskforce Australia

isn't a book club meeting - it's a housing crisis that's reshaping our state's future."

The research paper demonstrates that without significant reform, Sydney risks continuing to lose essential workers - including teachers, nurses, police officers, and aged care workers - again because they can't afford to live in the communities they serve.

The Urban Taskforce report calls for immediate action in NSW, including:

- Cutting overregulation
- Making housing supply a legislated objective of the planning laws
- Reduction in property taxes and development charges
- Abolition of Stamp Duty
- Streamlining of design review processes

"The solution is clear: we need to wind back the regulatory rulebook and create housing that meets all price points in all suburbs. Rather than taxing property buyers to fund affordable housing, we should be freeing up planning and design rules to allow the housing marketplace to work effectively," Mr Forrest said.

To learn more click here.

The Urban Taskforce Australia is a property development industry group, representing Australia's most prominent property developers and equity financiers.

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Image: AKD

Applications for TQ's Growth Scholarship Program now open

TIMBER Queensland has launched its 2025–2026 Growth Scholarship Program, inviting early and mid-career professionals and skilled workers across the forest and timber industry to apply for financial support to pursue tailored learning and professional development opportunities.

Designed to elevate industry capability and retain skilled talent, the Growth Scholarship is providing funding for innovative learning projects that will strengthen individual career pathways and support the long-term growth of Queensland's forest and timber sector.

Clarissa Brandt, Timber Queensland's Strategic Relations and Communications Manager, said the initiative plays a critical role in Queensland's workforce development and sector innovation.

"The Growth Scholarships support practical, purpose-driven learning, recipients from previous years have obtained formal qualifications, undertaken short courses, participated in overseas study tours, organised secondments to other businesses and attended conferences and expos," Mrs Brandt said.



2/ 2024 – 2025 DTM Award Winner Kristiina Marquardt Training to obtain a Remote Pilot Licence.

3/ 2024 – 2025 Kennedy's Award Winner Trinh Huynh at the Noble Research Institute on her US study tour. Images: Timber Queensland

"Applications are open to people across all parts of the supply chain—from forest management and harvesting to sawmilling, design, manufacturing, building, and sales. We're particularly keen to support emerging leaders and technical specialists committed to strengthening the sector's future."

Scholarship categories for 2025–2026 include:

- Kennedy's Timber Award – \$10,000
- HQPlantations Award – \$5,000

“APPLICATIONS ARE OPEN TO PEOPLE ACROSS ALL PARTS OF THE SUPPLY CHAIN

- AKD Award – \$5,000
- DTM Timber Award – \$2,500

"We're proud to have Kennedy's Timber as our Foundation Partner, alongside HQPlantations, AKD, and DTM Timber as key supporters," Mrs Brandt said.

"Their investment in workforce development reflects a shared commitment to lifelong learning and industry resilience."

Michael Kennedy, CEO of Kennedy's Timber, emphasised the importance of nurturing individual ambition to fuel collective industry growth.

"More than 70 years ago, my grandfather began his journey as a timber apprentice. The Kennedy's Timber Award continues this tradition of investing in people and ensuring that passion and expertise remain central to our industry's evolution," Mr Kennedy said.

Applicants must be aged 18–45 and either working in or studying towards a career in Queensland's forest and timber industry. Proposed projects must demonstrate clear professional development outcomes and benefits to the broader sector. For full eligibility criteria and to apply, click here.



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