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ADMARES unveils new smart factory to tackle housing crisis

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Soil security: the unsung root of Australia's forests and cities

WORLD Soil Day on 5 December served as a vital reminder that beneath our feet lies the bedrock of life, literally. This year's theme, "Healthy soils for healthy cities," spotlights how urban expansion threatens soil vitality, yet it also underscores soils' indispensable role in fostering resilient communities. For Australia's forestry sector, healthy soils aren't just an urban concern; they're the foundation for sustainable timber production and ecosystem stability.

At the University of Sydney, researchers are leading the charge to elevate soil's profile. Professors Alex McBratney and Budiman Minasny, the institution's top-cited scientists, have pioneered digital soil mapping and pedometrics, tools that decode soil landscapes with machine learning and spectroscopy. Their innovations provide real-time data on soil carbon, water, and biodiversity, informing decisions that safeguard food security, climate resilience, and land productivity. McBratney, who coined "soil security" in 2014,

emphasises its five pillars: capacity, condition, capital, connectivity, and codification. This framework ensures soils sustain humanity while buffering planetary threats like erosion and contamination.

To mark World Soil Day, the duo's Aroura Soil Security Think Tank unveiled a creative gem: an anime-inspired video featuring original songs like "The Ground Beneath Our Feet" and "Soil: Soul of the City." Crafted with generative AI by McBratney and animator Daniel Park, the production entered the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation's global contest. It vividly illustrated urban soils as "phenosols", human-shaped hybrids in parks and gardens that filter water, store carbon, and cool cities amid rising heat. "Soils are the soul of our cities," McBratney noted, urging a shift from sealing surfaces with concrete to embracing permeable designs and green infrastructure. PhD student Julia Feeth, studying microplastics in soils, and postdoctoral researcher Sandra Evangelista, probing urban soil threats, contributed insights, highlighting how



Soil is an essential part of forestry and life in general. It is important to take care of our soil as we move into the future. Image: FAO

pollutants from roads and waste imperil these vital layers.

Aroura's work reveals soils' dual role in urban and rural realms. In cities, unsealed soils prevent flooding and boost biodiversity; in forests, they anchor tree roots, regulate moisture, and cycle nutrients for growth. PhD student, Marliana Tri Widyastut, has created an AI-driven soil moisture map for Tasmania that integrates satellite and probe data for daily, high-resolution insights down to 80 centimetres. Tailored for agriculture, it

also aids foresters in timing fuel-reduction burns and fire planning, mitigating drought risks in eucalypt woodlands.

Integrating soil security into urban planning is essential. Innovations like Tasmania's map exemplify scalable solutions: optimising irrigation to conserve water, enhancing pasture

health, and protecting forested catchments from erosion.

Ultimately, World Soil Day invites us to dig deeper. For foresters, it's about nurturing the ground that grows our timber empires; for city dwellers, it's reclaiming soils as allies against climate woes. As McBratney urges, "Let's secure our soil before it's too late." With leaders like Sydney's researchers, Australia's path to sustainable cities and thriving forests looks fertile indeed.

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ADMARES establishes Australian operations

Launching smart factories to address national housing shortage.

ADMARES, a global leader in industrialised home-manufacturing technology, has announced the establishment of its Australian subsidiary, Admares Australia Pty Ltd, headquartered in Brisbane, Queensland.

Damian White, previously Group CFO at ADMARES and a key contributor to the development of the company's Smart Factory solution, has been appointed CEO of the new entity. This expansion marks a major step in ADMARES' mission to deliver scalable, technology-driven solutions to address Australia's housing challenges.

"Technology is the only way to meaningfully address the global housing shortage," said Mikael Hedberg, Group CEO and Founder of ADMARES. "Our Smart Factories will produce homes at scale, with the highest quality and lowest cost, finally beginning to reduce the housing deficit."

ADMARES' Smart Factories will use automated and robotised production lines to produce significant numbers of high-quality, affordable homes quickly and efficiently without relying on skilled construction labour. The company is exploring opportunities to deploy multiple Smart Factories across the country, with the first facility expected to be located in Queensland, addressing both the national shortage of skilled construction labour and the shortage of affordable homes.

The Smart Factory concept has been developed in partnership with Porsche Consulting, MHP – A Porsche Company, EDAG Group,



1/ ADMARES single-family smart home.

2/ ADMARES terrace homes. All images: ADMARES

and Siemens. Each factory includes 141 robots across 26 production lines and is capable of producing a completed home every 22.5 minutes. Siemens product and production digital twin software and industrial AI are used to optimise every stage of manufacturing.

"Porsche Consulting has been supporting ADMARES since 2018 in developing the Smart Factory concept. ADMARES' vision of mass-producing building units in an industrialised and digitised environment is fully aligned with our view of the future of construction." Matthias



Damian White, CEO of Admares Australia

Moehrke, Associate Partner at Porsche Consulting said.

Skilled construction tasks such as welding, cutting, tiling, and carpentry are automated, allowing remaining tasks to be completed by assembly-line workers who can be trained quickly to operate various stations.

A single Smart Factory will

bring significant employment opportunities for Australians, with each Smart Factory employing approximately 3,000 assembly-line workers across three shifts, supported by 220 white-collar staff.

Each factory, spanning nearly 310,000 square meters, is capable of producing the equivalent annual output of around 50,000 skilled construction workers on traditional construction sites while using 95% less labour than conventional construction methods.

"Having been part of this journey since 2019, we are excited to guide the overall digital ecosystem, contributing to bringing ADMARES' vision in Australia to life." Maximilian Sander, Partner at MHP said.

EDAG Group, which designed all production and logistics equipment for the Smart Factory, will also lead installation and production ramp-up.

"We are excited to be part of the ADMARES Smart Factory project and to actively support the realisation of this innovative production facility." Dirk Keller, Member of the Board at EDAG Production Solutions GmbH & Co. KG said. "With our expertise in designing production equipment, logistics and performing the integration in the Industrial Metaverse as well as leading installation and ramp-up processes, we look forward to contributing our skills to make the Australian Smart Factory a great success."

On the cover: ADMARES smart factory visualisation. Image: ADMARES

Celebrating our platforms to bring you industry news

A note from the Publisher

IT has been exciting to watch our Jobs board page growing. Last week we had 8 positions listed in Enews with a 9th on the website for positions vacant across NSW, VIC plus a large range of exciting opportunities across QLD. The page is run at cost and is for all industry and related positions. By 'related positions' we are referring all those office support roles your business might need, which could include but is not limited to Administration, IT, Marketing and Accounts. We are also happy for you to post Board positions. Contact us

for any clarification. <https://timberandforestrynews.com/jobs/>

Our sister publication, Timber Trader News has just celebrated a remarkable milestone - its 40th anniversary. Since the first edition hit mailboxes in 1985, TTN has grown from a Victorian forestry-focused newspaper into a nationally respected publication, serving the diverse and evolving timber and hardware industry across Australasia.

Timber Trader News's legacy has been built by passionate industry voices,

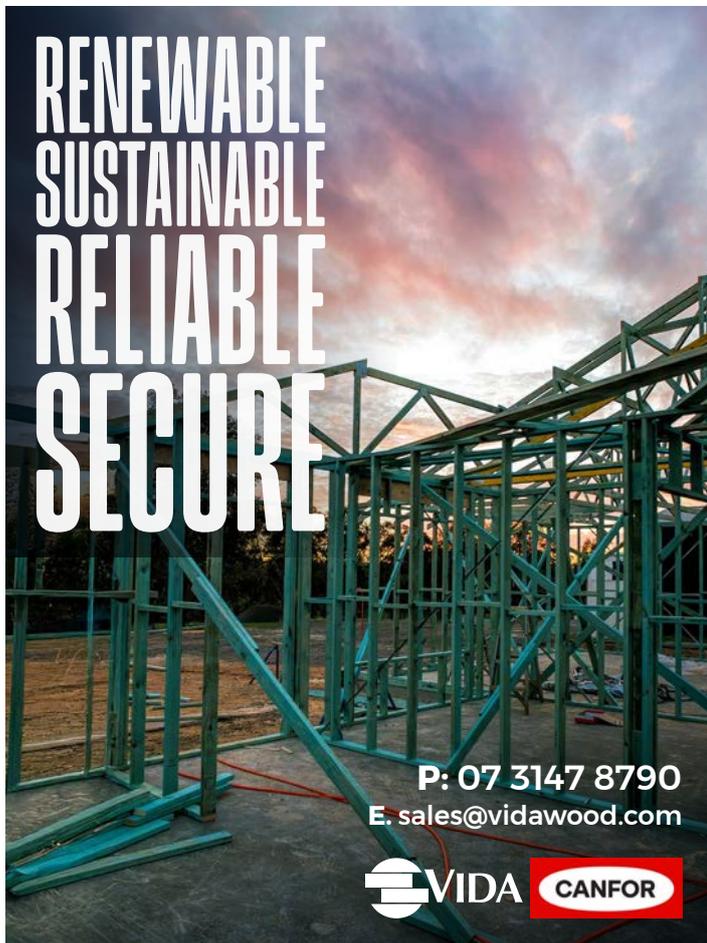
including founders Greg King and the late Bob Grant. Today, Timber Trader News remains an independent, industry-first publication, printed on high quality FSC-certified paper, with insightful features, in-depth profiles, and expanded coverage including New Zealand content.

As part of its' 40th anniversary celebration, we invited industry leaders to share their thoughts on recent developments and where they see the industry heading in the near future. A diverse mix of manufacturers, fabricators, timber suppliers, and

association representatives offer their insights in the special feature.

You can download a free copy of the November/December 2025 issue from our website or contact us to purchase a copy of the printed 56-page magazine. <https://timbertradernews.com/Magazine/>

Timber Trader News looks forward to our continued coverage of industry developments and serving our growing readership for the next 40 years.



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Big River Group expands WA trade network with acquisition of John's Building Supplies

BIG River Industries Ltd (Big River, ASX:BR1), a leader in the manufacture and distribution of timber and building products, announced it has acquired the business and assets of John's Building Supplies, one of Western Australia's most established trade-focused building materials suppliers.

The acquisition strengthens Big River's national trade network and expands its presence in the high-growth Western Australian construction market. John's Building Supplies services builders, subcontractors and commercial customers across structural timber, engineered wood, cladding, lining and interior fit out categories.

Founded more than 40 years ago, the company has built a strong reputation for service, reliable supply and long-standing customer relationships. Its operations align closely with Big River's strategy of growing scale in resilient trade-focused segments and increasing its presence in key regional markets.

Big River CEO, John Lorente said the acquisition represents

an important strategic milestone for the business.

"John's Building Supplies is a high-quality Western Australian business with deep relationships and a long track record of supporting the trade," Lorente said. "This acquisition broadens our presence in a key growth region and strengthens our offering across the structural timber, panels and building materials categories. We have great respect for the business John Lindsay and his family have built, and we look forward to welcoming the team into the Big River Group."

John Lindsay, representing the owners of John's Building Supplies, said joining Big River marks a natural next step for the company.

"Our family has always focused on providing trusted service, quality products and dependable supply to the WA trade market," Lindsay said. "Big River shares those same values. Becoming part of Big



"Others talk trade... we just do it"

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johnsbuildingsupplies.com.au 9362 4744

1/ **Big River Group is continuing to expand. With 24 sites, they are able to provide a massive range of products and support to several industries across Australia and New Zealand.**

2/ **John's Building Supplies is excited about the acquisition as it ensures their customers continue to receive the personalised service they love but also get the added benefits of scale, range and the national strength that Big River Group brings.** All images: supplied

River ensures our customers will continue to receive the personalised service they rely on, while benefiting from the scale, product range and national strength of a larger group."

Existing customers and supplier partners will continue to be serviced without interruption, with both businesses working together to ensure a smooth transition. The existing management team will remain in place to support continuity for staff and customers.

Completion of the acquisition is expected on or around 15 December 2025, subject to customary conditions. John's Building Supplies will continue to operate from its Western Australian site under the Big

River network.

Western Australia remains one of Australia's strongest construction markets, supported by ongoing population growth, infrastructure investment and a robust resources sector. The acquisition positions Big River to capture additional demand and further strengthen its service capabilities in the region.

Big River has been operating for more than 120 years and manages 24 sites across Australia and New Zealand, supporting the commercial, residential, civil and infrastructure sectors with an extensive range of timber, plywood, panels, formwork and building products.

For more information, visit <https://bigrivergroup.com.au>.

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2026**MARCH 23-24: SAVE THE DATE: DANA – 2026 Special event. Global Natural Capital Investment Conference – Melbourne.**

Topic: *Why Oceania so popular with investors.*
For full details of keynote addresses and speaker topics, visit <https://danaevents.co.nz/2026melbourne/programme>

25: Conference Field Trip – Melbourne. Follows on from the 'Global Natural Capital Investment Conference' in Melbourne. Includes visits to Eucalyptus and Pine Nursery, Pine Sawmill Log Yard/mill, Pine Plantation/Harvesting, Eucalyptus Plantation/Harvesting, Mature Redwood Plantation, Midway Wood chipping and Export Operation

followed by dinner @ 3030 Restaurant - Werribee South. For more information, visit <https://danaevents.co.nz/2026melbourne/fieldtrip>

MAY 17-19: SAVE THE DATE: Professional Woodworking Expo – NEC, Birmingham, UK. Dedicated event for woodworking professionals, the Professional Woodworking Expo is the essential platform for joinery and installation businesses. For more information, contact Jess Hardisty: jess.hardisty@montgomerygroup.com

MAY 18-19: FTMA National Conference – Sunshine Coast Convention Centre, Novotel Twin Waters, QLD. The conference theme, At the Crossroads – Reframing for Growth, reflects the

pivotal decisions facing our sector as we navigate a rapidly evolving housing market, new technologies and changing material preferences. Delegates will hear from internationally renowned futurist and best-selling author Michael McQueen along with long-time industry expert, Tim Woods, who will provide his comprehensive housing and market update. For more information, contact kersten@ftma.com.au

MAY 20-21: SAVE THE DATE: 5th 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

JUNE 9-11: SAVE THE DATE: Woodex Trade Exhibition – Gallagher Convention Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa. Africa's premier trade exhibition for timber, woodworking machinery, tools, and forestry. WoodEX for Africa has evolved into a true international event, consistently attracting visitors and exhibitors from more than 20 countries. Visit www.woodexforafrica.com for more information.

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NZ durable eucalypts: provide foundation for a robust tree breeding program

PART ONE. By MICHAEL SMITH

NEW Zealand Dryland Forests Innovation (NZDFI) is looking to develop a multi-regional hardwood industry by planting 60,000 hectares of durable eucalypts sustained over 25-30 years.

Crucial to this development has been the NZDFI's testing and breeding programme to achieve high quality nursery stock with genetic gain. The result is XyloGene®-branded improved seed currently in commercial production and for sale to nurseries and growers.

In a recently released technical paper (Selection and deployment of elite *E. bosistoana* for short rotation hardwood forestry), NZDFI's manager Paul Millen (et al.) noted that, annually, the scale of regional planting programmes will require the establishment of around 2,000 ha and national production of 2-3 million seeds.

"Growers need to have confidence that their investment in new planting is going to be economically rewarding.

"Before NZDFI's breeding programme began, durable eucalypts planted in New Zealand were unimproved, i.e. they were grown from seed collected from natural



Milwaukee MP18CPD cordless drill mounted with coring tool used to collect core samples within 2012 *E. bosistoana* progeny trial. Image: NZDFI

Australian forests or were the progeny of early New Zealand plantings."

Eucalyptus bosistoana, coast grey box, was selected by NZDFI for genetic improvement, and has shown to be suitable/adaptable in many regions. It produces strong Class 1 durable timber with an expected in-ground service life of 25-plus years.

"The tree breeding cycle can take up to 20 years from testing a new forestry species through to commercial production of first-generation improved seed."

The technical paper adds that "progeny testing is the fundamental activity in tree improvement ... to calculate the breeding values of individual families and therefore identify the best genetics for

further development and deployment."

NZDFI planted more than 70,000 trees in a network of progeny trials between 2009 and 2012 to establish a first-generation, broad-based breeding population. "The *E. bosistoana* family seedlots deployed in these trials were sourced from mother trees growing across the natural range of the species from the central coast of New South Wales and south to coastal southeastern Victoria."

“IF A SPECIES IS MISIDENTIFIED, THERE IS A RISK OF UNINTENTIONALLY INTRODUCING GENETIC VARIABILITY

The aim was "to provide the foundation for a robust tree breeding programme that applies well-proven scientific methods – combined with innovative technology – to deliver genetic gain across tree growth, form and wood quality traits for *E. bosistoana*".

An important focus of NZDFI's breeding programme is "to improve durable eucalypts suitable for plantations that produce small sawlogs, poles, posts and

veneers on 15-to-20-year rotations. Some stem criteria are common across these products – for example, straightness and heartwood."

Essential to progress is determining the taxonomic identity of the species to ensure genetic purity. "If a species is misidentified, there is a risk of unintentionally introducing genetic variability from another species or hybridisation, which can compromise the integrity of the breeding programme."

CLONAL SEED ORCHARDS

Mr Millen says commercial seed production is a critical step in realising genetic gains from the programme. "Increasing improved seed

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production is best achieved through establishing clonal seed orchards (CSOs). CSOs are established with the top-ranked progeny-tested individuals (ortets) by collecting scions from these trees and grafting these onto root stock.

“This cloning process preserves the more mature physiological state of the scion and thereby promotes faster flowering in the orchard.”

A three-hectare CSO has been progressively established from 2016 by Proseed NZ at its Amberley (South Island) site – and the first crop of seed was collected from this orchard in 2020.

“Future production of improved *E. bosistoana* seed from Proseed’s clonal seed orchard will increase as flowering on the ramets in



A recent thinning operation in one of NZDFI’s 2012 *E. bosistiana* progeny trials following a full growth and form assessment. Image: NZDFI

the orchard is enhanced by chemical application and from the addition of new selections from the 2010 and 2012 breeding populations.”

He adds that a recent evaluation of the 2012 progeny trials for growth, form and wood quality traits has identified the top-ranked 24 families among the 87

families established in the trial.

“This has been our main piece of work this year – and the next step will see Proseed grafting these families to expand NZDFI’s clonal seed orchard and ensure a high-quality XyloGene® seed supply to nurseries and forest growers. Proseed will collect

scion material this month and graft new individual trees for planting in its Amberley clonal seed orchard in spring of next year.”

WEBINAR

Paul Millen (NZDFI’s Manager) and Ruth McConnochie (tree breeding consultant) recently hosted a webinar ‘Markets and tree breeding for short rotation durable eucalypt

forestry’, and discussed the Australian hardwood market opportunity for NZ durable eucalypt growers and provided an update on NZDFI’s tree breeding program.

To see the presentations, click here.

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Young trainees and apprentices thrive under committed host employers

IN today's fast-changing workforce, employers face a growing challenge: generational differences. Young workers bring different communication styles, expectations, and learning preferences. For many, these differences feel like barriers but for those who persist, the rewards can be extraordinary.

This is the story of Zane, NTHA Trainees & Apprentices, and GCD Architectural, and how the perseverance of a young apprentice and his employer transformed a career

THE EARLY DAYS

Zane began his Joinery apprenticeship with NTHA in November 2021, hosted by GCD Architectural, a business specialising in doors, timber, and hardware. His love for timber began in childhood, inspired by his grandfather, who created intricate wood pictures, and his mother, a furniture designer.

In the first six months, owners Jacqui and Orkun Evren noticed Zane struggled to make eye contact. While some might have seen this as defiance, they recognised a young man battling confidence and trusted that,



Zane with Orkun and Jacqui Evren after successfully completing his Certificate III in Joinery. Image: courtesy NTHA

with time and support, he would find his footing. Their belief changed everything.

BEHIND THE STRUGGLE

Zane's journey was not easy. He changed schools ten times, faced bullying and assault, and lives with ADHD and dyslexia, which made traditional classroom learning

challenging.

At TAFE, he initially struggled, failing early units, not from lack of effort, but because the learning environment did not suit his needs. With support from NTHA, his parents, and Queensland TAFE, Zane received tailored strategies that helped him grasp trade theory and understand his

strengths. Slowly, things began to change.

Zane credits his turning point to the consistent belief Jacqui and Orkun showed long before he believed in himself. Their patience and encouragement helped him find his confidence. Supervisors Eddie and Tony also continued to guide him, and one of his proudest moments was completing his first bi-fold door in his first year, a task he once thought impossible.

Zane often says, "There are not enough words to describe the support and kindness" he received. Jacqui affectionately calls him the company's "Framing Gun," a testament to his growth.

After four years, Zane has been offered a permanent Joiner position with GCD Architectural, with gratitude to Darren Hooper at NTHA and TAFE Queensland for their role in his success.

“ZANE CREDITS HIS TURNING POINT TO THE CONSISTENT BELIEF JACQUI AND ORKUN SHOWED

From uncertain to unstoppable: How ITI Australia and NTHA transformed Marcus Hallam's future

WHEN 17-year-old Marcus Hallam began his traineeship at ITI Australia, he was quiet, unsure of himself, and still carrying the weight of a childhood marked by instability. Moving between housing commission homes, changing schools, and living

with financial strain were constants in his early life. With his mother battling addiction, Marcus often shouldered responsibilities far beyond his age.

"Nothing ever stayed the same for long," Marcus said. "It felt like I was always

restarting, always catching up."

By Year 11, he left school to support himself. Like many young people facing hardship, he struggled to see a clear future—until a traineeship opportunity through NTHA gave him a way forward.

SEEING POTENTIAL IN AN UNCERTAIN EMPLOYEE

Starting out in ITI Australia's warehouse, Marcus quickly learned the

From P 10

importance of reliability and the value of being trusted with responsibilities. Although Marcus initially doubted himself and was unsure of his career path, ITI Australia and NTHA recognised his potential and invested in his development through patience and consistent support. NTHA Field Officer Michael D'Agostino also provided ongoing mentorship, guidance, and reassurance.

"He always helped me with all my questions and always answered the phone even though I know he has got a lot of students to look after," Marcus said. "He was happy to answer even the simple questions and reassure me. He is always enthusiastic every time he visits, which encouraged me too."

ITI Australia also gave Marcus practical support to help him succeed academically. When he struggled to keep up with studies outside work, the team provided a laptop, allocated dedicated study time during work hours, and facilitated industry learning opportunities, including site visits to sawmills and MDF production facilities.

As Marcus progressed, his determination and capacity for growth became clear after he completed additional Certificate IV units in Leadership and Management.

"My Cert IV units for Leadership and Management within the course challenged me the most because a lot more work and research was



Marcus Hallam, winner of the NSW & ACT Trainee of the Year with David Little, NTHA CEO. Image: AEN Awards photographer

required to complete these units," he said.

ITI HR Manager Tiarnna McNamara said that after recognising his initiative and potential, Marcus was entrusted with full responsibility for managing ITI's Hardware & Tools section.

"In this role, he successfully managed inventory, oversaw customer dispatches, and introduced a smart, sustainable packaging solution, reusing leftover plastic wrap and cardboard instead of purchasing bubble wrap. This simple but effective initiative reflected Marcus's growing confidence, resourcefulness, and commitment to environmentally responsible practices."

Operations Manager Xavier Prime highlighted that Marcus's sustainable approach "reduced waste and assisted with improved safety on site," helping lower clutter and minimise trip hazards.

Marcus's leadership potential was further recognised when he was chosen to mentor a new cadet. Under his guidance, the cadet successfully took over the Hardware & Tools section, allowing Marcus to move into an internal sales role.

ITI AUSTRALIA AND NTHA RECOGNISED HIS POTENTIAL AND INVESTED IN HIS DEVELOPMENT

A YOUNG LIFE TRANSFORMED

Marcus recently completed his Supply Chain Traineeship through NTHA and is now working in internal sales at ITI Australia. He has begun planning further study in product management and marketing, something he once thought impossible.

Incredibly Marcus was also recently recognised at the prestigious 2025 Apprentice Employment Network (AEN) Awards, where he was named NSW & ACT Trainee of the Year.

"I am now really keen to get into product management and marketing now, and I actually want to keep studying, which is crazy, because 18 months ago, I never would have thought that was even on the cards for me."

"Back then, I didn't see marketing or more education as something I'd ever do. But thanks to the support and encouragement from the team at ITI Australia and NTHA, I've realised what I'm capable of and started setting real goals for my future."

Today both Marcus and Zane are living proof what can happen when a young person with potential is met with patience, persistence, and structured guidance. ITI Australia and NTHA saw the potential Marcus didn't see in himself, supported him through challenges, and gave him the tools to grow into a confident employee, mentor, and emerging leader.

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Credibility builds trust

Inside the independent audit process.

INDEPENDENT auditing is central to the integrity of Responsible Wood certification. By verifying that sustainability requirements are met in practice, audits allow businesses to demonstrate credible claims and enable end-users to trust the products they're buying.

To understand how this credibility is built on the ground, Responsible Wood caught up with independent auditor and environmental health consultant, Wayne Tibbits, to explore the meaning, impact and value of audits within the certification process.

"I like to describe certification like how you get a driver's licence," said Wayne. "No one is making you get a driver's licence... You choose to

pursue it because you want to be able to move yourself around."

"Certification is the same. You choose to pursue it because you want the authorisation that says you've met a set of defined requirements, assessed by someone competent to make that decision."

Like trust, certification is earned. Businesses voluntarily submit to a formal, independent assessment because they want to demonstrate responsible forest management and supply-chain integrity, and because the



Responsible Wood auditors don't just sit behind desks. They're out on site, boots in the dirt, verifying sustainable management happens in practice. Image: Shutterstock

transparent and credible, and certificate holders meet the standard.

Rather than simply reviewing documents and ticking boxes, auditors physically visit forests and facilities. They walk operations, inspect practices, speak with forest workers and contractors and, importantly, engage

directly with a wide range of stakeholders for that third party confirmation.

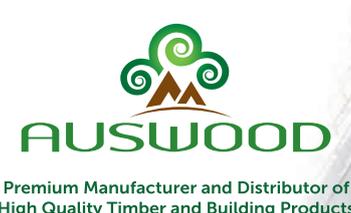
"We don't park ourselves in an office and go through a pile

market increasingly expects it.

EVIDENCE, NOT ASSUMPTIONS: WHY AUDITING MATTERS

Auditing provides third party assurance that Responsible Wood certification is both

Cont P 13



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From P 12

of documents... We put real effort into meeting the people involved."

This boots-on-the-ground approach ensures certification isn't theoretical. It reflects how forests are actually being managed, day to day, and gives meaning to claims made by Responsible Wood certification holders.

"Certification demonstrates that you go the extra mile. You go beyond legal compliance, you voluntarily choose to follow a suite of requirements that require you to continually improve, which means next year, in some way, you'll be doing better than this year in terms of the way that you're sustainably focused."

WHEN DOING GOOD ALSO DOES GOOD FOR YOUR BUSINESS

"One of the benefits of certification is that you can

make a claim on your products or the services that you provide, and there are certain trademarks and logos that are associated with that."

The Responsible Wood label enables certification holders to communicate their responsible practices visually to customers. This is becoming ever more important as consumers are increasingly conscious of the impact of their buying decisions.

The label also enables these businesses to demonstrate their commitment to sustainable development and corporate social responsibility, as well as highlighting engagement with sustainable forest management.

"There are formal definitions



Responsible Wood certification sees beyond timber: living forests that safeguard biodiversity, water, heritage and community recreational spaces. Image: Shutterstock

for sustainable forest management. I like to think of it this way: forests have been here for a long time and we're to steward those forests in a way that's responsible to our generation and to future generations, so that economic, social, environmental and cultural benefits will continue to flow into the future."

Certified sustainable forest management recognises that forests are more than tree

farms – they're living systems that deliver diverse economic, environmental, cultural, and social benefits, like soil and water conservation, biodiversity, habitat protection and cultural heritage and, in some locations, key recreational amenities for the local community

like mountain bike, bush walking or horse riding trails.

For the Responsible Wood scheme, auditing is central to credibility. It reinforces the integrity of the standard, builds confidence across the market and gives end-users clear assurance – creating a genuine win-win where responsible practice strengthens business outcomes.

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Stealth Group's game-changing buy of HBT

Three new directors will bring insights and fresh energy to the board.

PERTH-based Stealth Group Holdings (ASX: SGI) has pulled off what many are calling the most significant shake-up in Australia's hardware and industrial supplies market in decades. On 10 November 2025, the company completed its \$22 million cash acquisition of Hardware & Building Traders (HBT), instantly transforming itself from a solid mid-tier distributor into the country's clearest alternative to the two giants that have long dominated the sector: Wesfarmers (owner of Bunnings and Blackwoods) and Metcash (IHG and Total Tools).

For years, independent hardware and industrial stores have faced a tough choice: join one of the big two buying groups or try to go it alone. HBT has been the largest privately owned counterweight, supporting roughly 1,165 mostly family-run outlets with collective buying power of around \$700 million a year. By bringing HBT into the fold, Stealth has effectively merged its own wholesale and distribution strengths with HBT's vast independent network, creating a national platform that no other player can easily copy.

The numbers tell the story. Overnight, Stealth's purchasing muscle jumps from about \$100 million to more than \$800 million annually. Its physical footprint explodes from 32 company-owned or affiliated sites to over 1,200 locations coast to coast. Supplier

relationships more than double to around 1,300. In a \$93 billion market that remains highly fragmented, this scale is a genuine moat.

Stealth chief executive Mike Arnold described the deal as "transformational in scale and perfectly timed". He stressed that the merged group will give independent retailers and trade-focused businesses the tools, pricing and product range to compete head-on with the majors, while offering suppliers a meaningful third channel that isn't controlled by Wesfarmers or Metcash.

What makes the model particularly potent is its capital-light design. Unlike the big-box chains that carry heavy property and inventory costs, Stealth and the HBT network operate with a largely variable cost base. Most stores are independently owned, so growth does not require huge bricks-and-mortar investment. At the same time, Stealth's owned warehouses, logistics and digital platforms can now service the entire expanded network.

The financial uplift is immediate. Stealth says the deal is earnings-accretive from day one and



1/ **Stealth Group Holdings – from mid-tier player to \$800m+ national distribution heavyweight.**

2/ **HBT National Buying Group – 1,165 independents now united under Australia's rising third force.** Images: supplied

strongly cash-flow positive. Management expects to extract about \$8 million a year in profit synergies by FY27 through better buying terms, consolidated logistics, rebate growth and back-office streamlining. Longer term, they see more than \$200 million of extra revenue flowing into the group by FY28.

That confidence has led to a sharp upgrade in guidance. Where Stealth previously targeted FY28 revenue above \$300 million, the new goal is now north of \$500 million. EBITDA margins are

forecast to widen to 8-12 per cent (from 8 per cent) and net profit margins to 5-8 per cent (from 5 per cent). Perhaps most importantly for investors, the company expects wholesale and own-brand sales—historically its highest-margin activity—to leap from around 10 per cent of the mix to 35-40 per cent as Stealth's exclusive lines and tool-hire programs roll out to the full 1,200-plus store network.

Behind the scenes, integration is moving fast. Within 60 days, Stealth plans to fold its existing smaller buying groups (United Tools, Industrial Supply Group and others) into HBT, centralise supplier contracts and begin ranging its private-label products nationally. The H Hardware & Industrial banner, already used by 50 stores, is tipped to grow significantly as members opt for a stronger national identity.

For Australia's independent hardware and industrial trade, the message is clear: there is now a genuine third force with the scale, systems and ambition to take on the duopoly. For shareholders, Stealth has delivered a textbook bolt-on acquisition that accelerates its strategy by years and promises materially higher earnings and cash flow. In a single stroke, a mid-cap distributor has become a serious national heavyweight.

For more information, click here.

“STEALTH'S PURCHASING MUSCLE JUMPS FROM ABOUT \$100 MILLION TO MORE THAN \$800 MILLION

Federal Government confirms funding for Territory apprentices in Darwin visit

"THE Housing Industry Association (HIA) is pleased to welcome Minister Andrew Giles to the HIA NT Skills Centre in Darwin, providing an opportunity to showcase the Northern Territory's training pipeline and discuss the continued challenges facing the local residential building industry," HIA Executive Director Northern Territory, Luis Espinoza, said.

"The visit highlights the importance of ongoing support for apprenticeship pathways and programs that help grow the NT's skilled workforce. We were pleased to host the Minister at the HIA NT Skills Centre and show him firsthand the work being done to bring more young Territorians into the building industry.

"The continuation of programs like the Key Apprenticeship Program (KAP) and the Priority Hiring Incentive is critical. These schemes help employers take on apprentices, support those completing Cert III training, and ultimately strengthen the Territory's capacity to meet housing demand."

During the visit, Minister Giles toured the carpentry training workshop, met apprentices undertaking their practical Cert III training, and spoke with HIA trainers about the Territory's workforce needs. HIA also briefed the Minister on its pre-apprenticeship programs, youth outreach initiatives and the broader state of the NT housing market.

"The Territory's housing



Luis Espinoza (HIA Executive Director NT) recognises the extreme importance of continuing to build the skilled workforce in the NT through apprentices and trainees to continue tackling the housing shortage. Image: Shutterstock

challenges are directly tied to workforce shortages," Mr Espinoza said.

"Having a strong pipeline of local workers is essential if we're going to boost supply, deliver new homes efficiently and support the Territory's growth. [The] visit was a valuable opportunity to outline

these issues and discuss how government and industry can keep strengthening these pathways.

"I would like to thank Minister Giles for engaging directly with Territory apprentices and reaffirming the Commonwealth's commitment to

skills development and housing supply.

"Our apprentices are the future of the NT building industry, and continued support for training programs ensures they get the best start to their careers," concluded Mr Espinoza.

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ABARES highlights role of imports on forestry

A new ABARES Insights report (Issue 7, November 2025) outlines that Australia's structural sawnwood market remains robust because domestic plantation production is deliberately kept stable and short-term demand peaks are reliably met through diversified international trade.

Prepared by ABARES forest economists Al Ergashev and Stephanie Black, the analysis underlines that the softwood plantation sector – worth around \$1.4 billion annually and accounting for 60 per cent of Australia's total log harvest value – focuses on supplying high-quality structural sawnwood for house framing and trusses. Over the past decade, apparent consumption has averaged 2.5 million cubic metres a year, moving in step with residential building activity.

Domestic mills produce a steady 2.0 million cubic metres annually. Because quality sawlogs require 25–35 years to grow, local supply cannot quickly expand when housing construction surges. Instead, imports rise to fill the gap, as occurred during the 2017–18 and 2020–21 booms, then ease when activity returns to normal. This deliberate strategy of producing slightly below average demand gives the industry flexibility during downturns and avoids dependence on export markets to clear surplus stock.

A key strength identified in the report is import-source diversification. When demand spikes, Australia draws from a wider range of supplying countries, lowering market concentration (as measured by the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index) and delivering multiple benefits: additional volume



Stable domestic log supply from Australia's softwood plantations underpins the structural sawnwood market, while diversified imports seamlessly meet demand peaks – creating a resilient system for the construction sector. Photo: shutterstock

without extreme price jumps, competitive pressure on suppliers, access to a broader product range, and reduced risk from any single logistics disruption.

The COVID-19 period provided a real-world test. Stimulus measures such as HomeBuilder and record-low interest rates lifted private house approvals by 80 per cent between mid-2020 and early 2021. With

domestic output unable to respond quickly, imports of structural sawnwood and related products surged in 2022. Despite global freight chaos – costs rose 646 per cent on some routes and import prices reached \$933/m³ – diversified supply chains ensured material kept flowing. Both imported and domestic prices later returned to long-term levels once conditions normalised.

Looking ahead, the report cites global studies indicating that log availability should remain ahead of industrial roundwood consumption until at least 2050, supported by expanding intensively managed plantations and continuing innovation in engineered wood products.

ABARES concludes that the combination of steady domestic plantation supply and flexible, diversified imports has created a resilient system that supports confidence in structural sawnwood as a reliable and cost-competitive building material for Australian homes – now and into the future.

For more information, click here.

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Image: AKD

WoodSolutions™ launches new website

WoodSolutions™ has launched its redesigned website, providing a more user-friendly digital experience for built-environment professionals and consumers seeking reliable timber guidance.

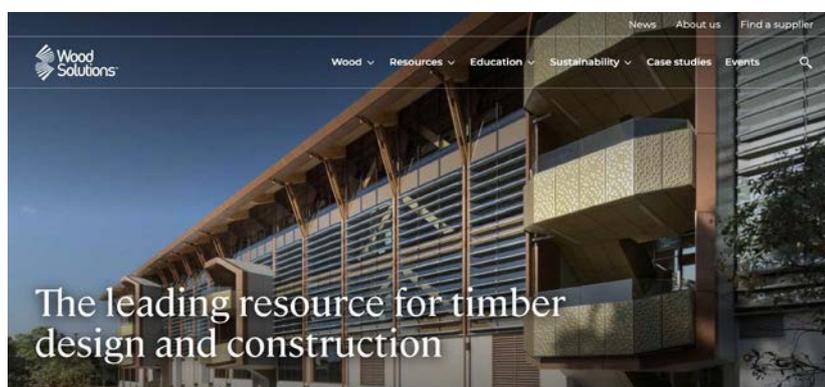
The refreshed site features improved navigation, a cleaner interface, and faster load times, making it easier for visitors to access the organisation's comprehensive technical resources. Architects, engineers, and builders can now quickly find design guides, technical specifications, case studies, and best-practice resources to help them apply timber effectively.

"As the built environment evolves, so too must the way we deliver technical knowledge and support," said Kevin Peachey, Head of Built Environment Programs at Forest & Wood Products Australia (FWPA).

"This new website is an investment in the future of timber, ensuring the research and resources we provide remain accessible, reliable, and easy to navigate, supporting the industry for years to come."

BUILT FOR AN INDUSTRY THAT VALUES STRONG FOUNDATIONS

The website redevelopment focused on modernising site architecture and improving the user experience, informed



WoodSolutions new website makes it even easier for visitors to find priority content and dive deeper into learning. Image: supplied

by industry insights and user behaviour data. By understanding what visitors search for, where they click, and the resources they use most, the team has streamlined access to priority content and highlighted related resources contextually, helping users explore complementary information seamlessly.

Key updates include:

- A more intuitive content structure reflecting user needs and behaviour
- Better-linked pages and related content suggestions to support deeper exploration and learning
- A cleaner, more accessible interface optimised for both mobile and desktop
- Faster load times and overall performance improvements
- Integration of the WoodSolutions™ CPD webinar platform, allowing direct access to educational sessions that support ongoing learning and practical application in timber design and construction

The redesigned website no longer requires a log in, making WoodSolutions™ extensive resources more

accessible than ever. Visitors can easily explore technical guides, case studies, and best-practice information without barriers, while also having the option to subscribe to receive regular updates. Subscribers will be kept informed about the latest timber research, industry news, educational resources, CPD opportunities, and upcoming events, ensuring they stay connected with developments across the built environment.

CHAMPIONING TIMBER THROUGH EDUCATION

Since its establishment in 2010, WoodSolutions™ has provided independent, non-proprietary technical information, education, and resources about timber and wood products to support professionals and companies in building design and construction. The launch of the new website reinforces the organisation's commitment to championing timber through accessible, high-quality education and guidance.

Visitors can explore the new website at <https://woodsolutions.com.au>.



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