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COVER STORY P 3



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Victoria's bushfires show the need for smart, coordinated approaches to fire

By DR MICHELLE FREEMAN

VICTORIANS are living through another black summer, with fires burning through more than 400,000 hectares of forest and farmland and leaving communities from Natimuk to Walwa confronting loss. The scale of the damage underscores the need to continue evolving how we manage our landscapes to better prepare for fire.

Across my career, one lesson has remained consistent: fire is an unavoidable part of Australian ecosystems, but the extent of its impacts is shaped by how we prepare for and manage it. Effective fire management requires coordinated action across all land tenures – public and private land.

Preventing damaging fires must be prioritised. We should not rely on emergency response and recovery as our primary fire management strategy. Vegetation management, appropriate building design and land use planning that reflects local risk can significantly reduce exposure. This work should occur 365 days a year, long before a fire starts, giving communities a better chance of avoiding severe impacts.

The strategic use of "good fire" is also essential

Prescribed burning, cultural burning led by Traditional Owners and mechanical fuel reduction, when applied appropriately in the right locations and at the right



Controlled burns used in a strategic manner make a massive difference to the intensity of fires. Image: Shutterstock

scale, can help reduce landscape risk. A substantial body of Australian research supports this. The former Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre produced extensive studies showing that well-planned prescribed burning reduces fire severity and improves suppression opportunities. Research from the University of New South Wales, the University of Melbourne and the CSIRO shows that fuel reduction activities reduce the likelihood of fires escalating into uncontrollable events.

These treatments are most effective when coordinated across tenures. The Walwa fire, which has damaged farmland, timber plantation and public land, illustrates that fire does not recognise boundaries. As a result, a landscape scale approach is essential to prepare for and

mitigate fire spread.

Rapid detection and initial attack are critically important once a fire does start. Effective response systems are vital to reducing the likelihood that a small ignition will become a major fire. Evidence from Australia and overseas shows that shorter detection to response times significantly improve the probability of containing new fires and that even short delays in response can materially change suppression outcomes.

Adaptive management must underpin all aspects of fire management. This includes integrating Traditional Owner knowledge, monitoring ecological outcomes and ensuring that treatments remain effective under a changing climate. Research from Charles Darwin University's Fire and Savanna Research program and studies published in the *International Journal of Wildland Fire* highlight the value of adaptive programs that respond to shifting conditions.

As Victoria faces challenging conditions, the focus must remain on evidence based approaches. Fire will always be part of Australia, but with a coordinated, science informed approach, its impacts can be better managed.

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Australian bushfires update

Industry response to recent fires in Western Australia and Victoria.

Australia is currently experiencing significant bushfire activity across multiple states, with devastating impacts on communities, homes, and plantation estates. As the fire season intensifies with highs of 48 degrees in Victoria on Tuesday, the forest products industry has and continues to play a crucial role in supporting firefighting efforts and managing supply chain disruptions. This update highlights recent incidents in Western Australia around the Australia Day long weekend and ongoing fires in Victoria.

Fires near Boddington Pine Plantation, Western Australia

Brad Barr, Resource Manager at Wespine Industries shared about the Australia Day long weekend that many experienced near the Boddington pine plantation.

"Lightning ignited multiple fires across the district, five burning concurrently, at a time when State firefighting resources were already extremely stretched. These fires threatened homes, community infrastructure and plantation assets.

"From Thursday through the night and into the following days, crews from the Forest Industries Federation Fire Managers Cooperative turned out in force.

"People gave up their long weekend plans, worked long shifts, and stayed on the fire line building and holding containment lines until the fire was brought under control, working alongside volunteer crews.

"This is a quiet but powerful expression of Australian values: mutual support, voluntary service, practical competence, and stepping up when it matters.

"Without the commitment of industry crews, it is unlikely the fire threatening plantations would have been contained when it was.

"The response brought together people and organisations who know these landscapes intimately and who understand that responsibility doesn't stop at a fence line.



Firefighting crews are essential in the quick suppression of bushfires. Australia is blessed to have some truly incredible crews all across the country who fight hard to protect our land and communities. Image: Shutterstock

"Australia Day is often discussed in abstract terms. Out on the fire ground, it looked very concrete: cooperation, endurance, professionalism, and people looking out for one another under pressure.

"To everyone who held a hose, cut line through the night, or supported crews behind the scenes, thank you," he said.

The fire containment crews included Wespine, WAPRES, Bunbury Fibre Exports, Western Forest Management, Forest Products Commission, United Land Protection, and Gnaala Karla Booja Impact Rangers.

Bushfires impacting Victoria's plantation estate

The Victorian Forest Products Association (VFPA) has expressed their deep concerns for the communities affected by the recent bushfires across Victoria.

The loss of homes and disruption to local communities has been extensive. While the human and community impacts must remain the priority, there has been significant damage to parts of Victoria's plantation estate, particularly softwood plantations in Northeastern Victoria.

"These plantations support the manufacture of paper and packaging, and structural timber products used in framing, trusses and other core components of homes and are a critical part of Victoria's housing supply chain," said VFPA Chief Executive Officer Andrew White.

"Our plantation sector is resilient and well-established, and industry is working closely across the supply chain to manage the impacts of the fires while continuing to support housing delivery," he said.

Mr White commended the extraordinary efforts of emergency services in bushfire response and recovery. In particular, he recognised the importance of Forest Fire Management Victoria and the CFA, inclusive of Forest Industry Brigades.

"Forest Industry Brigades are an integral part of Victoria's fire response capability, bringing local knowledge, specialised equipment and experience in plantation fire behaviour, supporting protection of timber assets and the broader community.

"Plantation managers from Victoria, across Australia and internationally are working together to coordinate people, equipment and expertise to support ongoing firefighting efforts.

"VFPA continues to engage closely with government agencies and industry stakeholders to understand the full impact of the fires, support recovery efforts, and ensure plantation forestry's contribution to housing supply and regional employment.

"Our thoughts remain with everyone affected by these fires," Mr White said.

These incidents underscore the vital role of the forest industries in both direct firefighting support and broader recovery efforts. Industry crews and brigades, drawing on specialised knowledge and equipment, have been essential in protecting assets, communities, and critical supply chains for housing and other timber products. As fires continue to challenge multiple regions, the commitment shown by volunteers, professionals, and organisations highlights Australian resilience and community spirit in the face of adversity.

On the cover: Summer bushfires are back but Australian firefighting crews are working hard to hold the line. Image: Shutterstock

SAFPA highlights forestry's proactive commitment to fire readiness

THE South Australian Forest Products Association (SAFPA) plays a key role in South Australia's fire prevention and response efforts, particularly across the Green Triangle region, a major plantation forestry area spanning South Australia and parts of Victoria. SAFPA shared, "Fire readiness is embedded in every stage of our forest management strategies and begins long before fire season.

"The design of plantation estates, the planting of seedlings, and the ongoing management of tree growth and fuel loads throughout the life of a plantation are all carefully planned with fire prevention and risk reduction in mind.

Supporting this work are 9 forest



SAFPA is dedicated to proactive fire management and has trained firefighting teams ready to jump into action during fire season. Image: Shutterstock

"Their expertise, readiness, and commitment play a critical role in protecting forests, infrastructure, and surrounding communities," SAFPA explained.

Fire readiness is essential in Australia. "With extreme temperatures expected over the weekend, our FIBs are on 24/7 alert, prepared to act alongside other emergency responders," SAFPA shared in the lead up to the Australia Day long weekend.

With bushfires breaking out across Victoria and lightning strikes that started five fires quickly in Western Australia, teams like those in the Green Triangle, Victoria, and Western Australia show how readiness, skill and training, make all the difference when fires ignite.

companies investing and training their Forest Industry Brigades (FIBs) across the Green Triangle. These specialised firefighting teams are staffed by dedicated forestry employees who operate 24/7 throughout the fire season.

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Native tree study, a New Zealand first

A NEW Zealand-first native tree study has highlighted the Bioeconomy Science Institute's position as a forestry research leader.

Its work to improve propagation and increase the production of indigenous species in nurseries was the focus of a journal article published in 2025. This work investigated the impact of container grade size on the survival and field performance of 12 key native species – to better understand the link between containers and post-planting seedling survival and growth performance.

The study saw the Bioeconomy Science Institute team raise seedlings from the selected species in different container sizes and test how they performed in good-, average- or poor-quality sites. It was a collaborative effort with Te Uru Rākau – New Zealand Forest Service, Minginui Nursery, CNI Iwi land Management, the Tumunui Land Trust, Timberlands, Rotorua Lakes Council and the Tipu Waiariki Charitable Trust (Tipu Wai), which provided the sites and helped with preparation and planting.

Industry-standard pots used for natives were compared with bigger containers such as 7cm and 8cm paper Ellepots and smaller forestry-grade pots. The effect of differences in the type of container were monitored to determine the impact on survival rates and tree growth across sites. Programme lead David Siqueira says results showed variable patterns depending on tree species, container size and the quality of the respective planting sites. "Some species, such as manuka (*Leptospermum scoparium*), survived



1/ **The root systems of two tī kouka seedlings grown in different containers.** Photo: Bioeconomy Science Institute

2/ **Seedlings being raised in different containers (close to dispatch time)** Photo: Bioeconomy Science Institute

and grew well (>75%), even when raised in small containers, while others such as

kowhai (*Sophora microphylla*) had low survival rates (< 25%), even when raised in revegetation container grade sizes."

Other species such as cabbage tree (*Cordyline australis*) and totara (*Podocarpus totara*) appeared to depend more on site quality. "The results show the importance of aligning the choice of container grade size to the needs of individual species and planting purpose," David says.

"Nursery container systems for raising New Zealand native plants should be chosen based on the biology of the species, nursery management practices, quality of the planting site and a balance between cost and benefit for each situation."

Nurseries have traditionally used large containers to successfully establish native species, but this means the trees take longer to grow – making this approach costly and labour-intensive at the planting stage. It also limits the rate of establishment.

"The conventional approach of sowing native seed, setting out and then growing in containers takes 12-36 months, adding significantly to native tree establishment costs over typical New Zealand-grown exotic forest trees," David says. "By enhancing our understanding of how container size affects native tree growth when planted in sites of varying qualities, we hope this research will result in more fit-for-purpose natives being raised in nurseries to generate our thriving future forests – conserving New Zealand's biodiversity and contributing to the mitigation of climate change."

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2026 call for projects now open

Projects to support farm forestry and agroforestry in Australia.

FORESTRY

Australia is seeking proposals for projects that will support farm forestry and agroforestry in Australia. The funding is made available through the Forestry Australia's Grower Reserve Fund, with up to \$10,000 available per project.

The purpose of the Grower Fund is to support projects that meet one or more of the following criteria:

- Benefit Forestry Australia's forest grower members, particularly those engaged in small to medium scale enterprises including farm forestry and agroforestry.
- To provide resources, produce educational information or undertake projects to support forest growing.
- To support Forestry Australia members and branches to conduct field days, mini-conferences, seminars on forest growing.
- To increase the number of grower members of Forestry Australia and,
- To support and encourage Australians to grow more trees.

PROJECT PRINCIPLES & SELECTION CRITERIA

Applications for projects supported from the Grower Reserve Fund will be considered according to the following principles:



Forestry Australia has a fund for projects that support Forestry Australia members and private grower interests including resource availability, networking and growth.

Image: Shutterstock

- Clearly promoting the interests of private growers and advocating for improvements in legislation, policy, codes of practice and other instruments that affect tree growing and private forestry.
- Encouraging interaction and communication between members and the development of expanded networks.
- Enabling growth in grower membership of Forestry Australia.
- Being accessible to a broad range of members, while recognising the need to cater for diversity in regional settings and grower interests throughout Australia.
- Providing longevity of benefit to members by making information available through stable and secure platforms such as websites, searchable databases and bibliographies.
- Opportunities to maintain and grow the fund will be pursued to the extent that resources allow and where

these are consistent with the principles of Forestry Australia.

Please note: The Grower Reserve Fund will generally not be used to cover expenses that could reasonably be expected to be met from other sources – e.g. catering or food costs for meetings and events that can be recouped via an event cover charge.

Proposals will be evaluated by the Forestry Australia Grower Committee and Board on the basis of the following selection criteria:

- Demonstrated experience and expertise in Farm Forestry
- Outcomes and value of the project to forest growers
- Capacity to deliver
- Demonstrated understanding of the reserve fund criteria

PROPOSAL

Please provide a proposal of no more than 4 pages that includes the following elements:

- A project plan that includes:

- Details of the project
- It's expected outcomes and deliverables
- Key dates
- How it links to the reserve fund purpose

- A detailed budget including a proposed schedule for the release of the funds.
- Key personnel involved in the project. Will the project be undertaken by a company, organisation or individual?
- Declarations of interest
- A statement that endorses your commitment to Forestry Australia's Code of Conduct

- Will public liability insurance be covered by the applicant? Noting that Forestry Australia Branch activities are covered by Forestry Australia's public liability insurance

PROJECT GOVERNANCE

Forestry Australia's Board will approve all projects and Forestry Australia's Grower Committee will consider and provide oversight to all projects.

A final project report including budget expenditure will be required at the conclusion of the Project, with brief written progress updates provided to the Grower Committee every quarter.

For information or queries please contact Lauren Hayward, Growers secretary at growers@forestry.org.au

SUBMIT TODAY!

CLOSES: Monday 2 February

SUBMISSION ADDRESS: growers@forestry.org.au

FEBRUARY**3: WoodSolutions Webinar – ONLINE.**

Topic: *One Man Builds House: Timber, Tradition and DIY*. Registration is free and open to all interested in timber-based building and owner-builder approaches. [CLICK HERE](#) to register.

MARCH**23-24: DANA – 2026 Special event.****Global Natural Capital Investment**

Conference – Melbourne. Topic: *Why Oceania so popular with investors*. For full details of keynote addresss 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>

30-31: Forestry Australia Forest Valuation Summit – Rendezvous Hotel, Melbourne (includes summit dinner on day one). Topic: *Valuing and Reporting Sustainability in our Forests*. For full details of speaker topics and to register interest, visit <https://www.forestry.org.au/2026-forest-valuation-summit/>**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

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

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.

OCTOBER**7-9: Forestry Australia 2026 Symposium – Rex Hotel, Canberra.**

This Symposium will explore how the forestry sector can articulate and share its values and engage constructively with diverse audiences and stakeholders – from local communities and Traditional Owners, to politicians and policymakers, the media, and the wider public. For more information visit <https://www.forestry.org.au/2026-symposium/>

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The crystal ball of sales hiring

How to attract, recruit, and retain the best salespeople, without guesswork.

By JASON HOWES

THE challenge of attracting and keeping strong sales talent is real. Tenure is falling, professionals are moving on, and poor hiring choices can hurt your bottom line significantly."

Again and again, leaders kept asking me the same thing:

"Why is it so hard to find salespeople who are motivated, and can genuinely sell?"

That question inspired my debut book, *Crystal Ball Recruiting*, a practical guide for leaders who want to attract, recruit, and retain the top 20% of sales talent using clarity, data, and structured decision-making rather than luck or gut feel. It's also the foundation of the recruitment, assessment, and training system my team and I use to help organisations build high-performing sales teams.

THE REAL COST OF TRADITIONAL RECRUITMENT

Most leaders are balancing operations, customer pressure, compliance, budgets, and supply chain chaos. Recruitment becomes rushed, reactive, and inconsistent, and the outcomes reflect it.

Around 50% of sales hires fail, some studies even higher. With a salesperson costing more than \$200,000 a year, a wrong hire impacts far more than wages. It affects culture, client experience, pipeline health, margin strength, and long-term growth.

I describe it like this.

The problem?

Too many hiring decisions are made on industry experience alone.

But product knowledge doesn't prove someone can prospect, negotiate, build trust, or win a dream client. And it certainly doesn't tell you anything about motivation, resilience, mindset, or the ability to sell value rather than discount.

THE CHALLENGES THAT INSPIRED THIS METHOD

"I constantly hear from leaders":

- "We can't attract quality candidates."

- "We don't have time to recruit properly."
- "We need someone who knows our product, we don't have the time to train them."

These pressures lead to rushed decisions, and costly outcomes.

Crystal Ball Recruiting offers a reliable, repeatable system that removes guesswork and gives leaders confidence before they invest in a salesperson. The approach aligns directly with the recruitment, assessment, and onboarding services we deliver to clients.

A MODERN SYSTEM FOR BUILDING A STRONGER SALES TEAM

1. Attracting the top 20% of sales talent

Top performers rarely apply for roles. Attracting them requires a compelling employee value proposition and a workplace where high achievers can win. When leaders strengthen culture, clarity, and systems, their organisation becomes a destination for elite sales talent—not a stepping stone.

2. Removing bias from recruitment

Leaders naturally gravitate toward candidates who "feel familiar." But familiar doesn't equal capable. Crystal Ball Recruiting introduces proven methods to objectively measure mindset, commitment, prospecting ability, and coachability, using data, not instinct.

3. Selecting talent with confidence

Resumes can now be AI-written. Candidates have mastered interview theatre. That's why Crystal Ball Recruiting introduces assessments backed by millions of sales evaluations, helping leaders predict whether someone can truly sell before hiring them. It's the closest thing to a crystal ball that exists in sales recruitment.

4. Onboarding that drives early success

A salesperson's success starts long before their first call. Clarifying expectations, setting territory plans, and providing structured support dramatically accelerates results. The book includes

a best-practice 30/60/90-day plan, the same framework we implement in our onboarding programs for clients.

5. Retaining your strongest people

Top performers are often overlooked because they're self-sufficient. Yet a small improvement in a high achiever delivers a massive ROI. The book shows leaders how to keep these people growing, engaged, and rewarded.

A NEW WAY FORWARD

Sales recruitment is changing as rapidly as technology itself. Crystal Ball Recruiting gives leaders a faster, more predictable model that replaces instinct with insight and sets a new standard for how top salespeople are hired.

In a market where relationships, reliability, and margin control matter more than ever, leaders who recruit with precision will outperform those relying on familiar habits.

EVERY HIRE SHOULD BE BETTER THAN THE LAST

If each new salesperson isn't stronger than the one before, it's time to change your recruitment approach.

Crystal Ball Recruiting is more than a guide, it's a call to action for leaders to recruit with clarity, confidence, and strategy. When you understand the ROI behind every hire, recruitment becomes a competitive advantage, one that compounds year after year.

Adopt a crystal-ball mindset and you don't just hire salespeople.

You build a legacy.

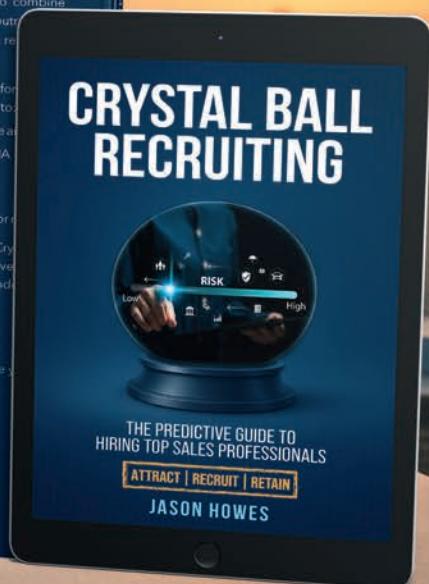
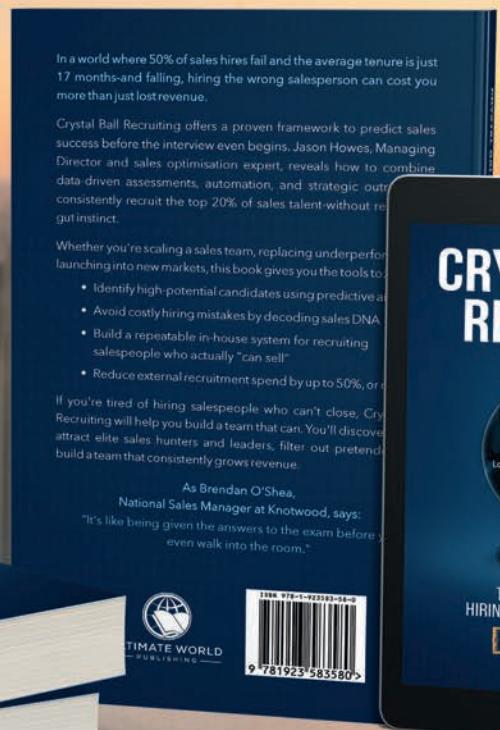
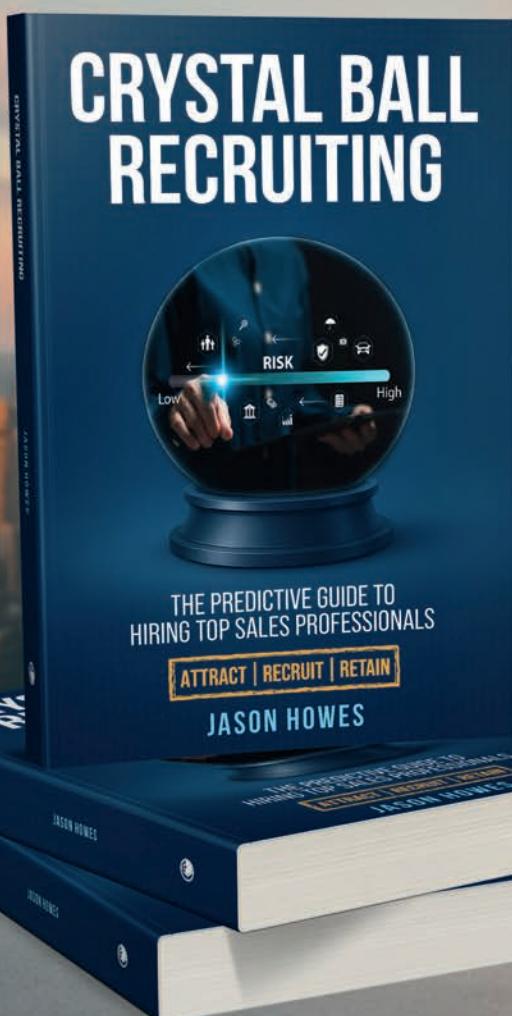
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A new fire forwarder

Strengthening plantation fire protection in southern NSW.

A NEW all-terrain firefighting vehicle, commissioned by Forestry Corporation, has boosted firefighting capability in southern NSW's pine growing regions over summer.

The purpose-built Komatsu Fire Forwarder, funded under the NSW Government's \$13 million Plantation Fire Protection package, has already been used on firegrounds in the Snowy Valleys since being delivered to the region late last year.

The Fire Forwarder, with high flow pumped water distribution, carries 19,000 litres and is engineered to operate in rugged terrain that is inaccessible to conventional fire tankers.

Developed in Bombala by Rodwell Logging in partnership with Komatsu, the prototype integrates an Australian designed and built tank and additional firefighting components into a Komatsu forwarder.

Forestry Corporation's regional manager Tumut, Roger Davies shared, "The fire forwarder is an excellent piece of machinery in terms of firefighting capability and firefighter safety and will also enhance our ability to reduce fuel loads during hazard reduction operations, and suppress fires, lowering the severity of wildfire across the region and increasing our capacity to undertake operations in difficult and sensitive areas."

"As an investment, this machine has already stopped one fire in Tumut from escalating into a large plantation event and has proven its value and offered profound benefits to the local economy in the Snowy Mountains.

"We have tested the unit and used it in blacking out and mopping up operations on an active fireground as we determine how and where the fire forwarder can best be used. Currently, we have two accredited operators and there are plans to expand



1 *The new Komatsu Fire Forwarder in action in southern NSW, delivering 19,000 litres of high-flow water to rugged pine plantation terrain inaccessible to standard fire tankers.*

2 *Forestry Corporation crews and partners observe the all-terrain Fire Forwarder during operations, showcasing its enhanced safety and capability to suppress fires and reduce fuel loads in the Snowy Valleys region.* All images: FCNSW

on this capacity across the forest industry," Mr Davies said.

The vehicle was funded through a \$1.53 million grant delivered by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) under the Minns Government's \$13 million Plantation Fire Protection package of which 15 local projects across the Murray shared in funding to deliver enhanced fire prevention, detection and response.

Additionally, FCNSW received \$100,000 for the provision of two trailer-mounted

quick fill water pumps, which will facilitate rapid refilling of bulk water transport trucks and larger capacity fire tankers and \$456,000 for two semi-trailer tankers for delivery of bulk water for firefighting operations.

Forestry Corporation's stewardship and fire manager Tumut, Charlie Taylor shared, "These assets will deliver large volumes of water to firefighters working in difficult terrain improving response times and firefighter safety."

"You can't deploy the water transport equipment as quick as a fire tanker because they have to be moved with a low-loader truck and transported to the fire, but because of their all-terrain capability they can access areas that can't be accessed with fire tankers.

"It's about being able to get high volumes of water where you need it to support fire tankers and other firefighting equipment," Mr Taylor said.

A host of other projects have been funded under the State Government's Plantation Fire Protection package, including upgraded fire trails and aerodrome water supplies and installation of fire detection cameras and weather stations.

Together, these initiatives will build resilience in the softwood industry while protecting communities and strengthening firefighting capacity across the South West Slopes.

The NSW Government package represents a collaborative effort between local government, the NSW Rural Fire Service, National Parks and Wildlife, Forestry Corporation and private forestry companies, coordinated by the Softwoods Working Group.

KOMATSU

Komatsu 895



The Komatsu 895 Firefighter, the game changer for fire management

Komatsu 895 Forwarder fitted with the demountable RL21 firefighting unit integrated into the log bunk including;

- 20,000 Litre custom designed water tank
- 3,000 Litre emergency reserve tank
- Two water cannons delivering 450 L/min up to 40m range

The 895 ready to fight fires or back to work in under two hours

One man's timber house journey

Practical lessons from DIY timber building

WE often discuss timber in terms of its sustainability, efficiency, and aesthetic appeal. But what happens when these concepts move from theory into applied reality, especially when a single person designs and builds their own home?

In the free WoodSolutions webinar titled "One Man Builds House: Timber, Tradition and DIY," architect and owner-builder Jiri Lev reflects on the practical realities of this hands-on journey. Drawing from his multi-year exploration—particularly his Tasmanian House projects—Lev shares insights gained while largely working alone, using simple tools and maintaining a strong focus on material honesty.



Lev, architect and home builder is set to openly share his experiences and insights. Image: Shutterstock

Lev's approach challenges conventional divisions between architect, builder, and occupant. He details how timber performs structurally, materially, and spatially across his projects, covering framing

strategies, sequencing, detailing, durability, and long-term performance. Rather than idealised results, he candidly discusses the trade-offs imposed by real-world constraints of time,

budget, and labour, as well as the collisions between architectural specifications and on-site realities.

This session provides designers, engineers, and builders with a rare, ground-truth perspective on timber construction through lived experience. It highlights what timber enables, where it demands respect, and how thoughtful design decisions can make small-scale, high-quality housing both achievable and repeatable.

Join the webinar on Tuesday, 3 February, from 11:00 am to 12:00 pm AEDT. Registration is free and open to all interested in timber-based building and owner-builder approaches.

[Click here to register.](#)

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Leadership and HR review

Does a changing world need new solutions?

By PETER MAGUIRE

We are going through an incredible period of change with the emergence of AI in automation of tasks and the rise of positive duties that organisations must apply to ensure psychologically safe and gender-inclusive workplaces.

AI has started to replace "human resources" in workflows and that has significant implications for roles in business especially at lower levels and related job opportunities for people. That also raises significant societal questions that we must think about and design solutions for.

The positive duty factor points to the fact that traditional compliance-driven approaches to HRM and WHS haven't worked (otherwise, we wouldn't need the positive duty). Plus, the continued push for HR to be seen as a data-driven valued contributor at the C-suite level has

created a growing gap between the HR function and the "human resources" in most organisations. There are few who get the balance right.

A CRISIS IN TRUST

There is a lot of public commentary about the lack of trust that workers reportedly have in HR and there have been so many failures of significant organisations in Australia to meet their wage and other statutory obligations to their employees. HR is often implicated in those.

If you look at regular employee engagement and wellbeing surveys like Gallup's, there hasn't been improvement of substance in employee engagement ratings for a long time (it might go up or down by a point or two) but stress and loneliness are up - consistent with the need for the positive duties.

So, the data should tell you that there is very good reason why there is a lack of trust in HR.

Which begs the question: do we fundamentally need to rethink what HR is for and what that should look like if it is to be more effective in the years ahead?

THE PARADOX

The advent of positive duties to eliminate or control psychosocial hazards and to prevent sexual harassment and gender-based behaviour presents a real opportunity to rethink how we manage the people stuff in businesses.

Unfortunately, the regulators are fixated on the traditional risk management model that has been used for physical workplace health and safety control and are applying that to

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psychosocial hazards.

That might generate some improvements, but it will not build trust or psychologically safe workplaces which cannot exist without trust. That is because it is still about compliance and risk control – not real cultural change.

AN EPIPHANY

About 15 years ago, I realised that traditional compliance processes were not effective in delivering necessary changes in workplace behaviours to provide psychologically safe and gender-inclusive workplaces.

I could see the damage being done to people, trust and engagement as well as productivity through risk driven blame cultures – investigate > find fault > punish. We needed to be more humane in dealing with human challenges.

Additionally, study after study has shown that employee engagement levels of employees have stayed much the same for years – roughly a third engaged,



The gap between HR and the 'human resources' is growing larger. The trust in HR in most organisations is dead and real cultural change is essential. Image: AI generated - Peter Maguire

a third not engaged and a third actively disengaged. Clearly, we weren't making progress there either.

I had also had the good fortune to be exposed to best practices in leadership and culture through my work as an Investors in People assessor.

All of that led me to explore positive psychology and to go on a global virtual search for interventions that would help organisations to:

- become more strategic, positive and people-focused in managing performance and development of organisation and people; and

- deal positively with change and the cultural transformations needed to enhance engagement, productivity and wellbeing in our workplaces.

A BETTER WAY

From that research and my 45 years' experience working in the field of HR/People and Culture, I constructed our HEART change model.

Here is how it works.

H is for HONESTY:

There are 2 components to this. Firstly, accept your obligations as an employer, learn what you need to do and commit to it. Then, take a good hard look at your workplace through the lenses of your:

- Policies – are your organisational settings, values and language geared to foster the right behaviours, inclusion and psychological safety?
- Practices – does the organisation practise what it preaches in the way that it applies policies and values everyday?

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- Processes - are jobs, process flows and work activities designed and managed to provide a psychologically safe and equitable working environment?
- People – starting with leaders, are your people walking the talk and who might be at risk as a perpetrator or as a victim of the wrong behaviours?

Identify your strengths and opportunities from that and start on a plan to build a better workplace.

E is for ENGAGEMENT:

Educate your people and give them a voice. Really engage everyone in the organisation in the conversation through a representative group (we call them "Better Workplace Teams") which acts as a collaborative management vehicle to manage the change process. Also have the conversations with those people who have been identified as risks and support them in areas that they need to work on and don't permit exceptions.

A is for ACCOUNTABILITY:

Hold everyone accountable for playing their part in the desired culture ensuring that the principles are applied to all

individuals and teams and with no bystanders. Where improvements are needed for anyone, make that a corrective action for them to take on board as part of their performance and development plan.

R is for REVIEW:

This isn't a compliance transaction. Ensure that there is constant vigilance and that you regularly consult and check in with people to verify what is working well and where there might be opportunities for improvement. Implement a coaching model which includes regular catch ups and discussion of relationships, values and behaviours – how they are going, what is working well and what could be better.

T is for TRUST:

Create an environment that is psychologically safe for people to put their hands up and seek an ear or a hand with any challenges that they are having – with someone else's behaviour or their own. Ensure that you are responsive and that people believe in the integrity of both the process and management.

CONCLUSION

The bottom line is that we need to change both leadership mindsets and organisational behaviour if we are going to solve the challenges of employee engagement and wellbeing and workplace productivity.

There is a wealth of research over decades that tells us this – there isn't anything new in what I have said here. Leaders and HR just haven't been listening or haven't known how to get started.

Perhaps assessing where you sit against the HEART way is a place to begin that conversation.

Peter Maguire is the owner and practice leader of Ridgeline HR, an award winning HRM consulting practice which he founded in 2000. Peter is an acknowledged expert in workplace relations compliance and a high-performance leadership coach with over 40 years' experience in HRM. Ridgeline HR's by-line is *Helping PEOPLE in BUSINESS* and that is essentially what Peter does – help business people with their people business.



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FIT Show UK: timber's decade of growth

SINCE its launch in 2013, FIT Show has evolved from a predominantly PVC U and aluminium showcase into the UK's most comprehensive meeting place for the fenestration, joinery and timber supply chain. That journey has mirrored the market's own shift: a renewed appetite for sustainable, high performance timber solutions, more specialist joinery content, and a growing international presence.

By 2025, FIT Show brought together 10,129 individual visitors and 5,325 companies over three days at the NEC, with 300 exhibitors spanning windows, doors, glass, hardware, roofing, smart tech – and, increasingly, timber. For joiners and carpenters, the show now offers more relevant content, more kit, and more connections than at any point in its history.

Timber demand on the rise

The 2025 Post Show Report highlights a clear uplift in visitor interest across material categories. While aluminium, PVC U and composite still headline, timber now accounts for over 9% of all material interests recorded, with "timber systems" representing more than 16% of systems related interest. That is a significant signal, particularly against a backdrop of tightening sustainability expectations, whole life performance considerations and end user demand for natural, low carbon solutions.

Nickie West, Event Director for FIT Show, sees this as a tipping point rather than a blip.

"Timber has always had a place in fenestration, but what we're seeing now is a real shift from 'niche' to 'necessary'",

she explains. "Visitors are actively seeking out timber windows, doors and façade solutions – not just for heritage or high end projects, but as part of mainstream, fabric first strategies. Our 2025 data shows that appetite clearly, and we're building on it for 2027."

International timber and new routes to market

Another notable shift between FIT Show's early years and its 2025 edition is the growth in international exhibitors and solutions. Visitors now travel from every part of the UK, alongside a growing contingent of overseas brands using FIT Show as

a launchpad into the British market. For joiners and timber led manufacturers, this means direct access to overseas suppliers of engineered timber, glazing systems, hardware, coatings and specialist machinery under one roof.

Building towards 2027

Andy Ball from The Joinery Network shared, "If you're serious about timber – whether that's traditional joinery, modern methods of construction, or hybrid windows and doors – you need to be part of the conversation at FIT Show. 2027 is shaping up to be the most timber rich edition yet, and it's a real opportunity for



1/ *The Timber Zone at FIT Show 2025.*
 2/ *The FIT Show has a wide variety of exhibitors including fire doors, and specialty glass*
 3/ *The 2025 Owen Dare Demo Zone where daily live demonstrations of timber window manufacturing occurred.* All images: FIT Show

joiners to both give and gain: share their expertise, and come away with new ideas, partners and products."

For timber, joinery and carpentry professionals, FIT Show 2027 represents a place where the sector's renewed commitment to sustainable, high performance timber can be seen, heard and, crucially, turned into viable, profitable work on the ground.

Ready to take your place at FIT Show 2027? Speak to the FIT Show team to find out how we can bring your brand to life at the NEC Birmingham, 18 - 20 May 2027.

For more information, click [here](#).



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