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COVER STORY P 2



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The end of an era for Western Saws

AFTER more than six decades in the timber industry, 78-year-old Bill Lambert is closing Western Saws, the band and circular saw manufacturing and repair business he built in Melbourne's western suburbs (North Altona). Starting at age 14 as an apprentice, Lambert dedicated his life to solving the complex problems of saw doctoring, cracking, running issues, and tensioning that keep sawmills productive. His journey reflects the rise and painful decline of Australia's hardwood timber sector.

Lambert's story began with early roles at Bruins and then Locky Wright's Jay Wright and Sons. In partnership with former saw doctor Ron Salamito, he helped meet demand from Asab Steel (later Udall Home) and co-founded Custom Saws. The boom in Oregon cutting for housing drove explosive 20% annual growth over a decade. He sold his share and, with his wife handling paperwork, relaunched as Western Saws. His son Owen joined straight after school and stayed 31 years, qualifying as a saw doctor in South Australia.

Western Saws specialised in manufacturing and servicing band saws, from small 3-inch by 19-gauge blades to massive 14-inch by 13-gauge head rig saws. Key milestones included supplying Dormit Timber (run by Tim Gilder and Dave Rowe), which scaled from pallet material to full sawmilling. Orders grew from an initial 12 saws to blanket monthly commitments. Lambert supported A.G. Brown sawmills in the Warragul area, Slacks Hardwood in Gayndah,



Western Saws specialised in manufacturing high quality band saws and circular saws for hardwood sawmills Image: Bill Lambert

Queensland (fixing problematic imported saws and providing tutoring), recycled timber operators, and pallet makers. He even travelled to Papua New Guinea to set up saw shops and manufactured saws across Australia (except the Northern Territory).

The business employed up to six people at its peak, including long-term staff like Steve Archer and ex-AKD saw doctor Adam Montague. Lambert took pride in mentoring others, including teaching Melissa at A.G. Brown and watching Owen develop. "I've always stood up for the challenge to fix damaged saws," he reflected.

The downturn accelerated in recent years. The Victorian government's decision to end native forest logging, announced in 2023 and brought forward

to 1 January 2024, six years ahead of the original 2030 schedule, devastated hardwood-dependent operations. Mills like A.G. Brown closed rapidly. Customers shifted to less suitable blue gum or disposable blades, while recycled and pallet work dried up. Lambert first noticed slowdowns around 2022; by late 2023, survival became impossible. He avoided price rises for nine years to support the industry, but external pressures proved insurmountable.




Lambert believes the industry faces a broad skills crisis – specialised knowledge in tensioning, stellite tipping and wheel grinding risks vanishing. Lambert worries about future timber supply, fire risks from overgrown logging roads, and increasing reliance on imports. "In another 10 years, where will building supplies come from?" he asks.

To younger people, he advises focusing on the pine sector (e.g., companies like AKD), where opportunities remain. Hardwood, he says, is largely gone. Policymakers, he believes, underestimate the quiet expertise in long-standing family businesses like his.

Now selling equipment and preparing to retire with his wife of 53 years, Lambert looks forward to time at their Murray River holiday home, golf and retired greyhounds. Yet the sadness lingers: "It's such a shame what the government did... Timber itself is a beautiful product."

Western Saws' story marks the quiet erosion of specialised manufacturing knowledge and a way of life tied to Australian hardwood.

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AFPA chair questions hardwood import practices

RADIO host Mark Levy from 2GB Sydney interviewed Australian Forest Products Association chair Steven Dad at the Sydney Royal Woodchopping and Sawing Competition during the 2026 Sydney Royal Easter Show at Sydney Olympic Park.

Steven shared that the event is known as the Wimbledon of woodchopping. He noted its history and growth into an international sport, saying, “we’ve got seven world championships here, three series tests, [and] test series against the Kiwis.”

Steven described the timber industry as far more than a weekend sport for many competitors. “The timber industry is obviously the backbone of so many regional economies. It provides invaluable resource to our housing industry at a time of great crisis,” he said. He added that everything grown in the sector “is renewable, sustainable, and represents sequestered carbon in the built environment.”

However, Steven expressed concern that the industry “is under threat” and that “the way of life of those hard workers out in the communities all around the country is increasingly challenged.” He suggested activism rather than science now drives much government policy, stating, “government across all layers have just stopped listening to that science.”

Steven pointed to positive data, including the United Nations state of the forests report that identified Australia as one of the hotspots for reforestation, with “four million hectares of new forest” recorded via Landsat satellite imagery. He also referenced the recent CSIRO koala survey, noting “there’s close to a million koalas in Australia.”

Mark observed that despite Australia managing its forests with strict standards, access restrictions have led to increased imports of hardwood. Steven confirmed this shift, saying, “Australia is rapidly becoming an import economy for timber



Steven Dad highlights how Australia is steadily increasing its reliance on imported timbers when Australia has top standards for forestry care globally.

Image: Shutterstock

products.” He described it as “really quite sad” that the country imports from nations “with less forests than us and much worse environmental standards.” Even for softwood used in housing, “30 per cent of that is actually imported,” he added.

For hardwood the situation is starker, Steven explained. “Most of our decking, a lot of our furniture grade timber, really high value stuff is all coming in from countries like Indonesia, other tropical countries, including the Congo and South America.” Yet he noted that Australia operates “a really sustainable and well managed forest industry” with less local supply available for construction.

Mark highlighted the environmental contrast, pointing out Australia has “the strictest rules anywhere on planet earth” while importing from countries with lower standards. Steven recalled a television report labelling the practice “carbon colonialism,” adding that Australia sources “the backbone of the housing industry” from overseas despite its own high standards and scrutiny.

Mark mentioned major projects such as the Melbourne metro and the new Sydney Fish Market, both built with overseas timber. “We should be proud of what we’ve got in this country, but we can’t use it. That does my head in,” he said.

Steven agreed it was “very sad.” He recalled earlier eras when local hardwood

featured prominently, such as the brush box lining the Sydney Opera House interiors supplied by his company and the original decking on the Sydney Harbour Bridge. “Those projects are not going to happen anymore with local timbers. We’ve become an import economy,” he said.

On government engagement, Steven noted the strong role of politics and “noisy” activists in inner city electorates. While many politicians understand the industry’s importance, “the easiest path is to shut it down,” he observed.

Steven’s direct message to policymakers was to engage more openly. “Come out and talk to the people who work in that industry. You will find ... these are passionate conservationists,” he said. He encouraged leaders to examine the built environment and housing challenges with balance, and to “listen to experts, not activists.”

Mark suggested listening also to farmers facing “green tape” when trying to manage land for bushfire protection. Steven concurred, noting the forest industry is often first called during fires because “these guys here ... know the bush intimately” and have the heavy equipment needed. He warned that regulatory burdens are increasing, including dual approvals for private landowners and upcoming changes under the EPBC Act from July next year that will require new layers of legislation. “The green tape is becoming a massive burden on industry,” Steven said.

Mark expressed gratitude for the conversation, noting many listeners were shaking their heads in disbelief. He suggested Australia should “start utilising what we’ve got in this country, including the beautiful hardwood and softwood” for major projects rather than apologising for its resources.

Source: 2GB Sydney featuring Mark Levy (2GB) and Steven Dad (AFPA)

Ash forest threatened species decisions lack evidence

AFPA has questioned the decision to list two native tree species as endangered under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act).

Ignoring the latest scientific evidence and feedback, the Federal Government has agreed to the Threatened Species Scientific Committee's recommendation to include Alpine Ash and White Ash forests in Australia as endangered, which came into effect on 20 March 2026.

AFPA Chief Executive Officer Diana Hallam said: "This decision raises serious questions about the evidence presented to the Minister, as the science does not support the listings.

"It's very disappointing that the Threatened Species Scientific Committee has ignored the feedback from highly respected forest scientists, with the final declaration simply replicating the initial consultation documents.

"Experts responding to the consultation process were quite unequivocal in their feedback, asserting that the Alpine Ash species was not at risk of extinction given its very large, intact distribution of 720,000 ha throughout south-eastern Australia and the species' resilience following fire.

"To quote the Government's own consultation document on Alpine Ash: 'since 1750 there has been less than a 5 per cent decline (outright loss) in the distribution of Alpine Ash forests of mainland Australia.'

“THE FUTURE OF THE ASH FORESTS DEPENDS ON ACTIVE MANAGEMENT



With less than 5 per cent decline since 1750, AFPA and industry experts are questioning the government's decision to list the two native ash tree species as endangered. . Image: Shutterstock

In other words, 95 per cent of pre-1750 Alpine Ash Forest communities are still intact and far from extinction.

"Ultimately, both the White Ash and Alpine Ash species are at greatest risk from fire, and we fear the decision to list both is likely to lead to worse outcomes for these communities and ecosystems.

"We fear that if conservation agencies take a minimalist approach to preparing for and managing fire in their jurisdictions, Alpine Ash will be at even greater risk. The future of the Ash forests depends on active management, including seed collection and prescribed burning, amongst other activities. The majority of Alpine Ash communities are already within protected areas."

Marana Auditorium reopens after major refurbishment

THE Hurstville Entertainment Centre's Marana Auditorium officially reopened on 1 April 2026 following a major upgrade.

The refurbishment, which ran from 1 January to 31 March 2026, has delivered significantly improved accessibility, comfort, and an enhanced experience for both performers and audiences.

Georges River Mayor Elise Borg said the upgrades reflect Council's commitment to improving community facilities.

"These improvements mean the Marana Auditorium is now more inclusive and versatile for our community."

"Marana Auditorium has always been one of our most important community venues.

"These upgrades ensure it remains a welcoming and accessible space for everyone, whether they are attending a performance, running an event, or celebrating a special occasion."

The refurbishment improvements include:

- Floor replacement of the main hall
- New stage flooring across the stage
- An extended stage built over the



Georges River Council Mayor Elise Borg inspecting the Hurstville Entertainment Centre's Marana Auditorium after the major upgrade.

Image: Georges River Council

former orchestra pit

- Updated side of stage stairs
- Wheelchair-access lift to the stage
- Tactile indicators on stage stairs
- A fully DDA-compliant ramp at the back of the stage
- New, modern seating for audience comfort.

BOTH THE MAIN AUDITORIUM AND STAGE NOW FEATURE HARDWOOD BRUSHBOX NATURAL

The flooring upgrades were carried out by contractor Relyon Constructions, using materials and specifications provided by the project architects. Both the main auditorium and stage now feature hardwood brushbox natural, a strong, durable native Australian hardwood valued for its warm tones, fine grain, and excellent wear resistance, making it an ideal choice for a high-traffic performance venue.

The new auditorium flooring is non-sprung and sits on 20 mm yellow tongue sheet flooring, supported

by 70 mm x 35 mm structural pine battens fixed to the existing joists and bearers. The new stage flooring is also non-sprung and laid directly on the existing joists and bearers. This approach provides a stable, high-quality performance surface while preserving the building's original structure.

By selecting a premium native Australian hardwood such as brushbox, the project highlights the quality and longevity that well-chosen local timber can bring to community infrastructure.

To book Marana Auditorium or other Council venues, visit Council's Hire A Venue, Park or Sportsfield webpage.

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territories for our industry here in Enews. Our connection might be available to assist you with eligibility criteria, grant writing, application process and

lodgement. They have a high success rate, so contact us if you would like to make an appointment. Contact: editors@timberandforestryenews.com

Victorian Freight Decarbonisation Co-Investment Program

THE Victorian Government is working to decarbonise the freight sector as part of the Victorian Freight Plan.

The \$8 million Victorian Freight Decarbonisation Co-Investment Program aims to help the freight industry reduce emissions, with grants of up to \$300,000 ex GST.

Eligibility

Small to medium freight operators who move goods by road or rail can apply for a grant. To be eligible applicants must:

- hold an Australian Business Number (ABN) since 30 June 2022
- employ 200 or fewer full-time equivalent employees
- be registered and operating in Victoria
- be financially viable and not insolvent, with no directors who are undischarged bankrupts

Eligible projects

To be eligible for funding, projects must support the shift to zero and low emissions freight vehicles and cleaner technologies.

Eligible activities include:

- buying or leasing low or zero emission freight vehicles
- fit outs /retrofits that customise a new vehicle for its freight task (e.g. refrigerated bodies, tail lifts, specialised equipment)

- installing charging or refuelling infrastructure (e.g. electric chargers, depot upgrades)
- the cost of charging or refuelling new low or zero emissions vehicles
- adopting low carbon liquid fuels such as renewable diesel or biodiesel
- trying new technologies or innovative business ideas that reduce emissions
- other proposals that contribute to program objectives which support reducing emissions

Low Emissions Freight Vehicle (LEFV)

A LEFV is a freight vehicle that demonstrates material reductions in tailpipe CO₂e emissions compared with an equivalent Euro VI diesel freight vehicle, achieved through one of the following pathways:

- plug-in hybrid electric freight vehicles (PHEVs), which can operate in pure electric mode and are recognized nationally as low emission technologies rather than zero emission.
- hybrid electric freight vehicles (HEVs, non-plug-in), where the applicant provides evidence of reduced CO₂e relative to Euro VI diesel, noting that HEVs still rely primarily on fuel and offer limited electric-only operation.

Alternative fuel or renewable fuel freight vehicles, including hydrogen combustion engines,

hydrogen/diesel dual fuel systems, and vehicles certified to operate on renewable diesel, biodiesel blends, biomethane or other low carbon fuels.

Available funding

Applications must meet all project milestones within 18 months of contract signing.

- maximum grant amount: \$300,000 (ex GST)
- minimum co contribution: 1:5 For example, applicants can request a grant of \$300,000 (ex GST) only if they co-contribute a minimum of \$60,000 (ex GST) towards their project.
- co contributions must be cash (not in kind)
- government funding from another program cannot be used as the co contribution

Program purpose

We're offering grants to help the freight industry transition to zero and low-emissions vehicles. Short-term objectives of the program are to:

- support the land freight industry to decarbonise
- gather insights on the opportunities and challenges transport operators face in reducing emissions
- promote the adoption of emerging technologies and build industry capability.

The longer-term outcomes of the program are to:

- reduce emissions from freight transport
- encourage small and medium-sized operators to adopt low and or zero-emission freight vehicles
- enhance understanding of the opportunities and challenges in using these vehicles in the freight industry
- boost long-term productivity by supporting next generation vehicles and infrastructure, while reducing operating costs.
- improve community amenity with cleaner air, quieter streets, and more pleasant neighbourhoods along freight routes.

Important: register your expression of interest

The Expression of Interest (EOI) phase helps Freight Victoria gauge interest in the program and confirm eligibility.

GRANT DETAILS

Provider: Victorian Government

Amount: Up to \$300,000 ex GST

Round 1 Closes: 22 April 2026

Location: VIC

Who Can Apply:

Businesses

Co-Contribution Required:

Yes

<https://www.vic.gov.au/vfdc#available-funding>

APRIL

29-30: Sydney Build Expo 2026 – Sydney. Australia's largest construction & design show that includes timber, designers, building and lots of international booths. For more information or to register visit <https://www.sydneybuildexpo.com/>.

MAY

15: Victoria & Tasmania Timber & Hardware Industry Awards – Arts Centre Melbourne, 6.30pm - 11.30pm.

Join us in celebrating the Victorian/Tasmanian Timber and Hardware Industry. For more information, visit <https://www.ntha.com.au/eventdetails/37604/2026-victoria-tasmania-timber-hardware-industry-awards> or contact Tahlia at events@ntha.com.au

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.

23: SAVE THE DATE: AFPA members dinner – QT Hotel, Canberra, 6.30pm - 9.30pm.

Further information, including speakers and registration details coming soon.

JULY

18: Queensland Timber & Hardware Industry Awards – Rydges South Bank, Brisbane 6.30pm - 11.30pm.

Join us in celebrating the Queensland Timber and Hardware Industry. For

more information, visit <https://www.ntha.com.au/eventdetails/37606/2026-queensland-timber-hardware-industry-awards> or contact Tahlia at events@ntha.com.au

SEPTEMBER

4: New South Wales & ACT Timber & Hardware Industry Awards – Doltone House, Sydney 6.30pm - 11.30pm.

Join us in celebrating the NSW Timber and Hardware Industry. For more information, visit <https://www.ntha.com.au/eventdetails/38006/2026-new-south-wales-act-timber-hardware-industry-awards> or contact Tahlia at events@ntha.com.au

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/>

NOVEMBER

18: SAVE THE DATE: 2026 SIM-PAC Sustainability Awards – Castlereagh Boutique Hotel, Sydney.

The Awards recognise practical leadership in decarbonisation, circular economy, and sustainable industrial practice across the Asia-Pacific region. Further information will be available soon on the Awards website <https://www.sim-pac.live/2026-awards>

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The words holding back Australia's sustainable forestry future

By **NICK STEEL**

WORDS shape perception. They carry weight far beyond their dictionary definitions - especially when it comes to environmental issues.

Right now, one of the most misunderstood terms in Australia is native forestry. For many outside of our industry, it conjures images of old-growth forests being flattened by chainsaws, habitats destroyed, and irreversible damage done to ecosystems.

But here's the kicker: we know that mental image is decades out of date. What we now call native forestry bears little resemblance to those critical practices of the past.

In reality, our industry is now built on sustainability, science, and long-term stewardship.

Which is why it's time we start calling it what it really is: managed regrowth.

Let's unpack why this shift in language isn't just semantics - it's honesty.

Think about how we view other industries. We don't call modern farming "slash-and-burn agriculture," even though humanity once relied on it.

We don't describe modern fishing as whaling, even though early fisheries did plenty of damage. Language evolves as practices improve, and forestry deserves the same treatment.

The term native forestry is clunky, outdated, and misleading. It suggests that people are cutting down untouched, pristine forests, when in truth the majority of today's operations take place in areas that have already been harvested and have regrown - sometimes many times over.

By calling it managed regrowth, we highlight two essential truths. Firstly, it's managed - meaning it's regulated, monitored, and grounded in science. Secondly, is regrowth: meaning we're not clearing virgin land, but working with forests that have been regenerated after careful harvesting.

Here's where reality diverges from the myths. Apart from selected trees, old-growth logging has been largely phased



Nick Steel is the CEO of the Tasmanian Forest Products Association. Image: TFPA

out across Australia. What we're dealing with now are forests that regenerate naturally and are actively managed to ensure biodiversity, soil health, and future supply.

In most cases, less than one per cent of a state's native forest is harvested each year, and every hectare harvested is required by law to be regrown.

Our industry uses selective harvesting (some clear fell is undertaken), rotation cycles, and strict environmental safeguards to ensure that the forest is not only sustained but often improved for habitat and resilience.

It's a cycle more akin to farming: harvest, regenerate, repeat. Except instead of crops that take months, these forests grow over decades, contributing to a long-term, renewable supply of timber while locking up carbon and supporting ecosystems.

Language isn't just about marketing - it's about accuracy. The word regrowth acknowledges the living cycle of these forests.



OUR INDUSTRY IS NOW BUILT ON SUSTAINABILITY, SCIENCE, AND LONG-TERM STEWARDSHIP

Unlike a mined resource, which once removed is gone forever, forests rebound. They reestablish under the watchful eye of professionals whose job is to balance human needs with ecological health.

And make no mistake, regeneration is not an afterthought. It's built into the framework of how forestry operates today.

For example, in Tasmania, native forestry is conducted under our Regional Forest Agreement that impose strict rules for biodiversity protection, waterway buffers, and soil conservation. That's not logging in the old sense—it's a carefully managed cycle of regrowth.

So why stress the word managed? Because regrowth on its own isn't enough.

Left unchecked, regrowth forests can face higher risks of catastrophic bushfires, pest outbreaks, and disease. Active management helps reduce these risks while maintaining habitats and ensuring a steady, renewable supply of timber.

Modern forestry plans don't just measure logs, they track soil health, monitor species populations, and plan for fire resilience.

Forestry workers collaborate with ecologists, Indigenous land managers, and government regulators.

The result? A working landscape that produces materials we all rely on - housing timber, paper, biofuels - without sacrificing ecological integrity.

So here we are, stuck with an outdated label that does no one any favours. The term native forestry belongs to the past. The present, and the future, is managed regrowth.

This isn't a plea for spin. It's a demand for accuracy. Australians deserve to know that the timber in their homes is a product of renewal. They deserve to know that forests can be both used and preserved. And they deserve a debate based on facts, not ghosts from the past.

Words shape perception. Perception shapes policy. And policy shapes the land we all share. It's time to call forestry what it really is... managed regrowth.

Disaster recovery grants for QLD small businesses

QUEENSLAND small businesses affected by the Monsoon Trough, Cyclone Koji, Cyclone Narelle, and severe weather since December 24, 2025, can now apply for Exceptional Disaster Assistance Recovery Grants.

The grants provide up to \$50,000 per business to cover clean-up, repairs, replacement of stock, and essential equipment to resume operations.

To be eligible, applicants must be small business owners with an active ABN at the time of the disaster and have suffered direct damage in the defined disaster area.

Businesses outside the disaster zone may qualify if they operate in the affected area and have damaged plant or equipment. Applicants must demonstrate responsibility for costs claimed and intend to continue operating in the area.

Grants are released in two stages. An initial payment of up to \$5,000 covers urgent recovery costs such as deposits or minor repairs. Subsequent applications of up to \$45,000 can be made once



Queensland has been hit by several major weather events further exacerbating existing challenges businesses are currently experiencing. Image: Shutterstock

evidence of payment, including invoices and receipts, is provided. Businesses can apply multiple times until the full grant is accessed.

Eligible expenses include clean-up equipment and materials, extra labour, disposal of damaged stock, repairs to buildings and essential plant, safety inspections, and equipment hire or purchase. Insurance details and claim

outcomes must be provided, as QRIDA may delay grant approval until insurance matters are resolved.

Applicants must provide supporting documentation, including rates notices or lease agreements, 5–10 photos of damage, tax invoices or quotes for initial applications, and proof of payment for subsequent claims. QRIDA Client ID numbers should be included if previously applied, and original documents should not be mailed.

Applications are assessed in order of receipt, and QRIDA may request additional information. The grants are designed to deliver fast, practical financial support to help small businesses recover and resume operations after Queensland's severe weather events.

Applicants can refer to QRIDA's grant guidelines and apply here.

Source: with thanks to NTHA

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Data reveals direct correlation between fuel spikes and insolvencies

Businesses need to watch their trade debtors, cashflow and business risks.

NEW analysis released by Halo Advisory has identified a stark correlation between global oil prices and the rate of corporate insolvency appointments in Australia. The findings, drawn from ASIC insolvency records, RBA cash rate data, and ABS statistics, suggest that the current volatility in the Middle East could be the "tipping point" for thousands of SMEs already struggling with inflationary pressures.

The report highlights a consistent trend spanning over two decades: as the price of a barrel of oil (bbl) climbs, business failures follow in a predictable wave. This analysis identifies that each of the three major oil price surges of the past 25 years (the 2000 spike to \$28.50/bbl, the 2006-2008 run to nearly \$97/bbl, and the sustained \$108-\$111/bbl period from 2011 to 2013) was accompanied by a meaningful rise in Australian insolvency appointments in the same or immediately following year.

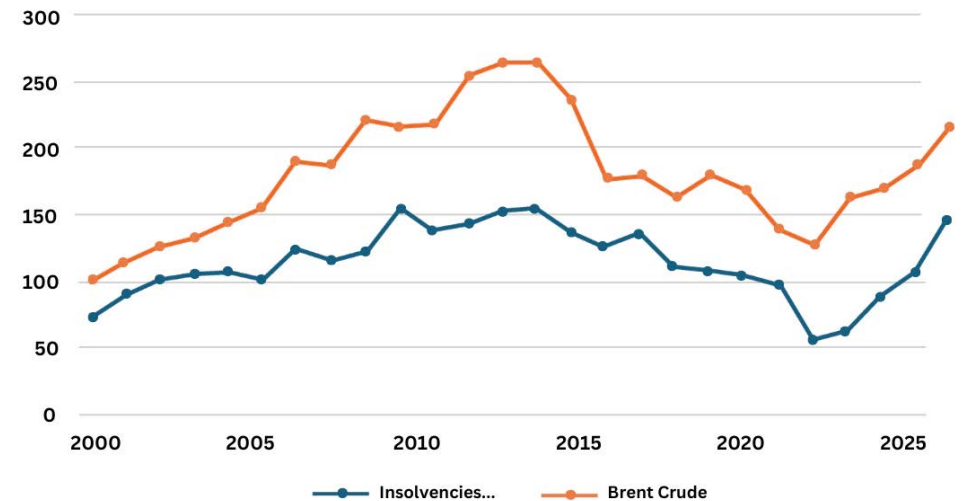
THE 2026 "MULTIPLIER EFFECT"

While the record 14,722 insolvencies in 2024-25 represent the highest figure in the 25-year dataset, the surge was primarily a "COVID hangover" rather than oil-driven. During 2020-22, insolvency volumes were artificially suppressed to historic lows by JobKeeper, ATO debt forbearance, and safe harbour provisions. The current surge represents a "catch-up" of deferred failures now meeting the reality of higher interest rates and intensified ATO enforcement.

However, with oil prices projected to remain at \$90-\$100 USD per barrel over the coming months, Brent Crude is set to become the primary "multiplier effect" on top of these existing pressures.

"The data doesn't lie. Every major peak in oil prices has preceded a surge in business collapses," says Greg Bartels, Director of Halo Advisory. "We are currently seeing Brent Crude jump from a 2025 average of \$71.91 to a forecasted \$85.00+ in 2026. This isn't just about

INSOLVENCY SURGE TRENDS



Insolvencies have historically risen in response to oil price jumps. Businesses need to carefully manage trade debtors as they weather this storm. Image: UR Digital

the cost of filling up the delivery van; it's about the massive inflationary shock that ripples through the entire supply chain".

WHY OIL IS THE "LEAD INDICATOR" FOR FAILURE

According to Bartels, oil is a "non-discretionary" cost driver that transmits almost immediately into business cash flows, unlike interest rates which operate with a lag of 12 to 24 months. The mechanism works through four simultaneous channels:

- **Transport and logistics:** Freight and delivery companies pass on fuel surcharges almost immediately, raising input costs for every business in the supply chain.
- **Raw material and input prices:** Oil is a base component for plastics, packaging, chemicals, and fertilizers.

A sustained price spike flows through to virtually every manufactured good within weeks.

- **Consumer spending contraction:** As households absorb higher fuel costs at the pump, discretionary spending on retail, hospitality, and services contracts; directly cutting revenue for the SMEs most represented in insolvency data.
- **Interest rate pressure:** Rising oil prices serve as a primary driver of headline inflation, which can force central banks to maintain or increase high interest rates to curb rising costs, further squeezing business margins.

"Small businesses are the 'Canaries in the Coal Mine' of the economy, and they're beginning to show signs of real stress," adds Bartels. Specifically, the construction and food services sectors, which accounted for over 40% of all external administrations in 2023-24, face structurally higher fuel exposure relative to their margins.

THE "TRIPLE THREAT" AND GOVERNMENT ACTION

Australian SMEs are currently facing a

“OIL IS A "NON-DISCRETIONARY" COST DRIVER THAT TRANSMITS ALMOST IMMEDIATELY INTO BUSINESS CASH FLOWS

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"triple threat": the unwinding of pandemic-era support, persistently high interest rates, and now a geopolitical fuel spike. Halo Advisory acknowledges the Federal Government's recent announcement to halve the fuel excise and reduce the heavy vehicle road user charge to zero for three months as a positive step in the right direction. However, while this provides immediate relief, the underlying data suggests that fuel prices are likely to remain elevated well beyond this short-term window.

To mitigate the long-term crisis, Halo Advisory urges the Government to look beyond this temporary measure and consider further targeted responses:

- **Extended or trigger-based relief:** Moving towards relief measures that activate automatically during sustained

“ AS THE PRICE OF A BARREL OF OIL CLIMBS, BUSINESS FAILURES FOLLOW IN A PREDICTABLE WAVE

KEY FACTS

- Research shows strong correlation between global oil prices and Australian corporate insolvencies over the past 25 years
- Record 14,722 insolvencies in 2024-25 primarily attributed to COVID hangover rather than oil prices
- Oil price projections of \$90-100 USD per barrel expected to create a Multiplier Effect on existing business pressures
- Oil impacts business failures through four channels: transport costs, raw material prices, reduced consumer spending, and interest rate pressure
- Government's temporary fuel excise cut deemed insufficient for long-term crisis management, with calls for more sustained support measures

price spikes to provide ongoing certainty for transport-dependent SMEs.

- **ATO forbearance and interest reform:** Finding a middle road between enforcement and collecting the \$34 billion in outstanding SME tax debt. This includes potentially reintroducing tax deductibility for interest charges on ATO tax debts.
- **Addressing director liability:** In 2024-25, 85,000 Director Penalty Notices (DPNs) were issued, a 136% increase on the previous year, making directors personally liable for business debts.

"While the excise cut provides a temporary breather, the 'cushion' of cash flow will disappear again the moment it expires if global prices remain high," Bartels concludes. "We expect the remainder of 2026 to be one of the most challenging periods for SME survival on record".

To access the full report and its findings, click here.



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New Timber Framing Carbon Calculator

Strengthening confidence in timber's role in low-carbon construction

FOREST & Wood Products Australia (FWPA) and WoodSolutions have launched a new Timber Framing Carbon Calculator, giving builders, designers and customers a simple way to understand the carbon impact of timber framing choices in residential construction.

The Timber Framing Carbon Calculator allows users to estimate the carbon benefits of using timber framing compared with alternative materials.

It highlights two key factors that make timber unique: the ability of wood products to store carbon and the potential to reduce emissions associated with more carbon-intensive materials.

By presenting this information in an accessible format, the tool helps industry professionals communicate the environmental benefits of timber in a way that their customers can easily understand.

"What's often missing is a clear way to communicate that carbon benefit to clients. The Carbon Calculator turns an existing construction choice into something tangible - proof that can support sales conversations and build client confidence." says Christine Briggs, Renewable Timber Framing Campaign Manager

FOR BUILDERS

The calculator is designed to support practical conversations on site, in sales meetings and during project planning. Rather than relying on general sustainability claims, builders can now



FWPA is grateful to all their funding partners for supporting the Timber Framing Campaign. Image: FWPA

demonstrate the carbon implications of timber framing, specific to each project. This can help differentiate their projects and communicate their company's commitment to reaching climate goals in a competitive market.

FOR CONSUMERS

Importantly, the tool also builds customer confidence. Many homeowners are increasingly aware of climate impacts but are unsure how building material choices influence the overall footprint of their home. The calculator provides a straightforward explanation of how timber contributes to lower-emissions construction, helping customers feel more confident in selecting timber framing systems.

FOR INDUSTRY

For the broader forest and wood products sector, the Timber Framing Carbon Calculator represents another example of how voluntary industry investment is delivering tangible benefits. Developed through the WoodSolutions Timber Framing campaign, the tool translates complex

carbon data into relatable facts that help communicate the benefits of building with timber framing. This is critical in ensuring the industry remains competitive, as expectations to reduce emissions continues to increase across the construction supply chain.

Initiatives like this are designed to strengthen the industry's position by supporting demand for wood products. By equipping builders with information and tools, the

sector is better able to demonstrate the role timber can play in reducing the environmental impact of Australia's growing housing needs.

THE WOODSOLUTIONS TIMBER FRAMING CAMPAIGN

The Timber Framing Campaign gives Australian builders the tools to turn timber's performance and sustainability benefits into clear, compelling messages for their clients. Funded through voluntary contributions and coordinated by Forest and Wood Products Australia, the campaign provides fact sheets, brochures, carbon calculators, social assets, posters, and banners - helping builders demonstrate real environmental impact, showcase energy efficiency and durability, and build trust with homeowners, while positioning their business at the forefront of sustainable construction.

Learn more here: [Timber framing | WoodSolutions](#)

Thank you to our funding partners.

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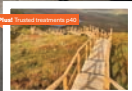


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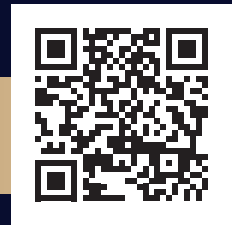


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Timberlink® becomes official licensee of the Australian Made Campaign

Timberlink Australia & New Zealand is pleased to announce that it has officially become a licensee of the Australian Made Campaign. This license applies to Timberlink's range of renewable plantation pine timber products, including Everdeck® wood composite decking, NeXTimber® Cross Laminated Timber (CLT) and Glue Laminated Timber (GLT).

Timberlink Chief Executive Officer, Paul O'Keefe, said, 'We're proud to display the Australian Made logo across Timberlink's product range. It provides our customers with the certainty that they are supporting Australian manufacturing and local jobs when they choose our products.'

Australian Made Campaign Chief Executive, Ben Lazzaro, said, 'We're excited to welcome Timberlink as a licensee of the Australian Made Campaign. By carrying the iconic green



The Australian Made logo helps customers identify products that were made in Australia and support Australian businesses and communities.
Image: Australian Made

and gold kangaroo logo, Timberlink's products give customers confidence they are choosing timber that supports Australian manufacturing, local jobs and a stronger national economy.'

Timberlink® will soon begin stamping the iconic Australian Made kangaroo logo on a range of timber products and

printing it on its timber pack wrap, seeking to promote the campaign on roads across Australia.

ABOUT TIMBERLINK

Timberlink® is a leading producer of Australian Radiata Pine timber products sourced from sustainably managed Australian pine plantations. It operates two large manufacturing facilities: one in Bell Bay, Tasmania and the other in Tarpeena, South Australia. Together, these sites produce a wide range of timber products for use in homes, commercial buildings, landscaping and industrial applications, including NeXTimber® Cross Laminated Timber (CLT), Glue Laminated Timber (GLT) products and Everdeck® wood composite decking. In FY25 Timberlink employed over 600 people. Supporting regional communities is core to Timberlink's business.

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Urine from revellers and runners to grow threatened British trees

SCIENTISTS are saving under-threat British trees using something rather unusual: human urine.

The sustainable science startup NPK Recovery transforms urine into a safe and effective fertiliser during events like Boomtown Festival and the London Marathon.

Now, the fertiliser - which doesn't smell - will be used to grow 4,500 native trees like beech, in a project backed by a £435,000 grant from the Forestry Commission.

A Scots pine seed was just planted in Bannau Brycheiniog (the Brecon Beacons National Park), marking the start of the three-year project. It was planted at a nursery run by NPK Recovery's project partner, 'Stump Up For Trees', a charity boosting tree diversity around the national park.

It comes as fertiliser prices have soared due to the Iran war, leaving farmers struggling to make ends meet and sparking fears that the cost of food could rise.

Multiple studies have shown that NPK Recovery's fertiliser is just as effective as commonly used alternatives (view here), which are typically made abroad using energy-intensive processes. This is the first time their fertiliser has been trialled on trees.

Lucy Bell-Reeves, NPK Recovery Co-Founder, said: "Using a waste product to grow trees is a circular solution that can revitalise our struggling native species.

"We need to stop flushing crop and tree-growing nutrients down the loo, and start using them to increase our fertiliser



1/ The Stump Up For Trees nursery in Bannau Brycheiniog
2/ L-R: Lucy-Bell-Reeves, George Barnsley and Olivia Wilson from NPK Recovery.
3/ NPK Recovery Junior R&D Scientist George Barnsley testing the soil at the nursery. All images: NPK Recovery

security. After all, we're not about to run out of urine any time soon.

"I love the idea that by the end of this three-year project, revellers and runners will have created a fledgling Welsh forest, which could flourish for

hundreds of years."

Based in Bristol, NPK Recovery takes its mobile laboratories to events across the country, transforming the nitrogen and other nutrients in eventgoers' urine into fertiliser as the event runs. Processing it at source eases the burden on sewage systems and reduces chemical use.

The fertiliser can then be used to revitalise the event site and grow crops and trees in the surrounding fields.

Author, journalist and round-the-world cyclist Rob Penn co-founded Stump Up For Trees to increase tree numbers and species variety in the national park he calls home. He and his nature-loving volunteers have planted 500,000 trees - revitalising nature, reducing flood risk and boosting biodiversity.

Rob said: "We are very excited to be involved in this ground-breaking project, which has implications for the future of sustainable forestry.

"As a small charity, collaboration is essential and we are chuffed to be working with NPK Recovery, who are bringing innovation to an area of industry that needs it."

Pests, pathogens and invasive species have decimated native tree populations. Today, just 7% of Britain's native woodland is in good condition, causing a 37% fall in numbers of woodland birds over the past 50 years, according to the Woodland Trust.

The project was made possible by a £435,627 Forestry Commission grant awarded via the Tree Production Innovation Fund.

For more information, click here.

Consulting your employees

Is 'consultation' being redefined?

By **PETER MAGUIRE**

WE are long used to having obligations to consult employees on matters that affect them under Workplace Health and Safety laws and under modern awards and in other jurisdictions but, in recent years, the focus on consultation has intensified and has become more complex than employers have been used to. Plus, with

the introduction of positive duties, the lines are getting a bit blurred between jurisdictions. So, what does that all mean going forward?

OUR TRADITIONAL CONSULTATION OBLIGATIONS

For decades, awards have required employers to consult employees on matters that affect them like restructures and introduction of new technology and, more recently, a specific obligation to consult employees about variations to hours of work has been introduced.

Similarly, Workplace Health and Safety laws, regulations and codes of practice have imposed obligations on "Persons Conducting a Business or Undertaking" to consult workers about matters that might affect their health and safety.

These duties were largely interpreted as meaning that it is necessary to:

1. Inform people about a proposed change, why it is happening and what the potential effects on people are.
2. Recognise any representative that employees might have like a Health and Safety Representative or a Union Representative.
3. Listen to what the employees/workers and/or their representatives had to say



Gone are the days when you could just treat consultation as a tick box exercise.
Image: Shutterstock

and consider their views.

4. Having done so, make a final decision and advise people of the outcome and reasons for it.

The duties also extended to responding to any concerns that people or their representatives might raise via WHS Issue Resolution Procedures or workplace relations dispute settlement procedures.

So, what has changed?

In short Lots!

FAIR WORK REFORMS

In recent years, the following changes have been made by the current Federal Labor Government:

- In relation to requests for flexible working arrangements for designated eligible employees under s65 of the Fair Work Act 2009 and for requests for extension of parental leave beyond 12 months, new consultation obligations and a passage to the Fair Work Commission (FWC) for determination in the event of a dispute.
- Similar obligations re consultation and avenues for dispute resolution in respect to the new FWC jurisdiction regarding "the right to disconnect."
- Increased scrutiny of the genuineness of consultation in enterprise agreement

making, especially in relation to employees properly understanding the effects of approving the enterprise agreement (i.e. how it will affect them) and the employer's obligation for full disclosure.

POSITIVE DUTIES

Essentially, these up the ante on what were already obligations to protect people from risks of injury and illness from sexual harassment and gender-based behaviour and psychosocial hazards.

The positive duties arose from a series of investigations and studies

that showed these risks were common and having serious effects on people's psychological, emotional and physical wellbeing. Associated with that were ballooning costs in Work Cover claims and escalating demands on systems and resources for treatment of psychological injuries and illnesses.

As a result, we now have much more defined obligations regarding what we must do to protect people from those risks and an increased regulator focus on those areas of risk with additional resources to prosecute them.

The other element is that there is a blurring of the lines in the sense that, with respect to certain matters such as the management of change or issues around sexual harassment (to name a couple), they can be prosecuted in multiple jurisdictions.

THE DECISIONS

Governments make changes and then courts and tribunals decide how they should work.

There have been several cases that have been instructive in this regard:

1. SafeWork NSW intervened in a restructuring program at the University

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- of Technology Sydney that was initiated to reduce costs and involved the potential loss of 150 jobs. On 2 September 2025, a Safe Work Inspector issued a prohibition notice in the belief that UTS workers would be exposed to a “serious and imminent risk of psychological harm” as a result of UTS’s Academic Change Proposal, in contravention of the Work Health and Safety Act and the Work Health and Safety Regulation. They had to pause the process and go through a process of adjustments to convince SafeWork NSW that they were going through an appropriate process.
- At around the same time, the Finance Services Union lodged a dispute with the Fair Work Commission over extensive job cuts at ANZ and the consultation process associated with them putting a similar matter into a different jurisdiction, but with the union referring to psychosocial hazards around poor change management being in play.
 - In another case, Westpac was found wanting relative to a request for a flexible working arrangement from an eligible employee under s65 of the Fair Work Act 2009 in that they didn’t have genuine business grounds, they didn’t consult properly (in considering the employee’s compromise proposal) and they didn’t comply with their statutory obligation to respond to the request within 21 days.

“WE NOW HAVE MUCH MORE DEFINED OBLIGATIONS

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS?

There are quite a few takeaways:

Psychosocial hazards are a hot issue for WHS regulators and the positive duty on employers means that you have to be able to show that you are actively managing them and properly consulting people, not just reacting when something happens.

- The lines between different jurisdictions are becoming increasingly blurred and people will access the one that they feel offers the best avenue for a win for them as has happened with the WHS pathway in the UTS case and the FWC pathway in the FSU/ANZ case.
- Gone are the days when you could just treat consultation as a tick box exercise, rather than as an active, inclusive and genuine consideration with real employee voice and wellbeing components.
- When implementing significant change in your business which affects people’s roles or the way that they perform their duties, ensure that you plan and execute the changes carefully, understanding the real effects for people and allowing adequate time and proper consideration of employees’ questions and views.
- You should also have due regard for employees’ wellbeing, your consultation obligations under both WHS and workplace relations law (and any other relevant jurisdiction) and how you support people individually and collectively through the change process.
- Change is complicated and it is something that you should get professional assistance with from

someone who understands the legal obligations in the various jurisdictions and is also adept in communicating with employees and helping the business, managers and people through the process.

One of the key challenges for large employers is how they reintegrate their HR and WHS functions to manage relevant matters consistently across jurisdictions and with their management teams and workforce in general. Establishing an ongoing Workplace Consultative Group to deal with these matters collaboratively is a good option and one that is recommended by some regulators.

For smaller businesses, it is how they manage the expectations of multiple jurisdictions in a practical and effective way within their businesses and resources. The focus should be on keeping it simple in process, active in education and communication and having access to professional support to do that and deal fairly and quickly with any issues that arise.

The positive duties also extend consultation obligations to contractors and their employees, so you need to include them as well.

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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