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Bigger, bolder and better: Sydney Build Expo 2026

COVER STORY P 2



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Sydney Build Expo 2026

With over 28,000 tickets issued, the bigger, better Sydney Build Expo was hailed an outstanding success.

By **CAMPBELL McINNES** and **CHRIS PARKER**

Timber and Forestry Enews in conjunction with our sister publication *Timber Trader News* attended this year's Sydney Build Expo in Darling Harbour. Sitting across two floors and covering six halls, ICC Sydney Exhibition Centre came alive with just over 700 stands (a few more than last year) and it was packed with colourful characters, meeting points, co-working hubs, 16 stages with seating areas, several very busy coffee outlets, a bar on each level and of course an extensive amount of people.

Local and international businesses were well represented and the list of consulates and international trade hubs continued to grow. This year it included the Arab chamber of commerce & industry, Brazil consulate general, Hong Kong trade development council, Hungry trade and consular office, Italian trade agency, Japan urban renaissance agency, Korea trade investment agency, Latvia investment and development agency, Malaysian business council, Philippines overseas construction board, Polish investment and trade agency, Spanish chamber of commerce, Thai trade centre, United States commercial service and Vietnam business council.

From the time the doors first opened



1/ **Chris Parker (L) and Campbell McInnes with Jason Shedden (R), General Manager of VueTrade.**

2/ **On display, Vue Trade's exciting new Blackout range.**




All images: Chris Parker and Campbell McInnes

at 9am, the atmosphere was alive and it was game on, with small mobile bands, DJs, dancing insects, elevated men on long leg poles with pretend security dogs and the smell of freshly ground coffee. As we walked around to visit each stand, talking to exhibitors and viewing their products and/or services, we found some exhibitors had extroverted individuals trying to grab your attention, engage eye contact and bring more people to their stand and generate additional excitement and presence.

Several Government and related bodies also had stands including; Australian Taxation Office, Building Commission of NSW, Cancer Council, Department of Home Affairs, Department of Planning, Fire & Rescue NSW, Housing and Infrastructure, Housing Industry Association (HIA), NSW Long Service Leave Corporation, NSW

Cont P 3

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From P 2

Small Business Commissioner, Safe Work NSW, and Service NSW all on hand to answer questions and provide information.

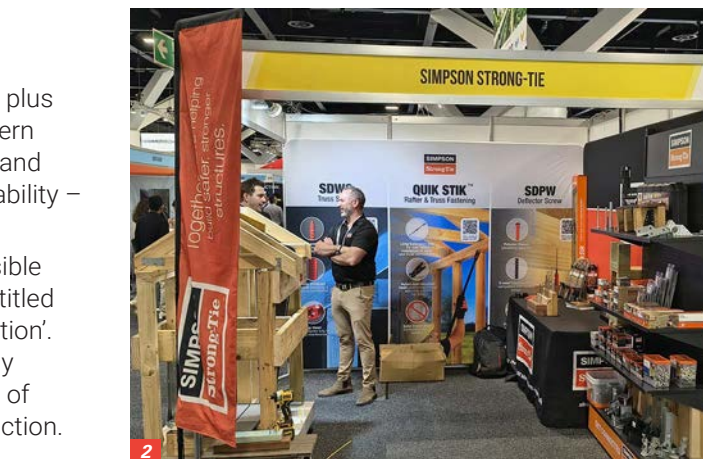
The 16 Stages were; AI & Digital Construction – plus a practical workshop area, Architecture & Design – plus a practical workshop area, Building Materials, Building Solutions, Construction wellbeing, Construction Workforce, Diversity, Inclusion & Reconciliation, Future Australia, Future Housing, Health & Safety plus International Construction, Modern Methods of Construction, Skills and Marketing and our own Sustainability – plus a practical workshop.

Matt de Jongh from Responsible Wood presented a workshop entitled ‘Sustainable Timber in Construction’. Matt’s presentation explored why certified timber is a cornerstone of sustainable, low-carbon construction. Timber products sourced from Responsible Wood / PEFC-certified forests are renewable, responsibly managed, and independently verified to meet rigorous environmental, social, and economic standards.

Matt highlighted how sustainably managed forests provide a continuous, renewable supply of timber while protecting biodiversity, supporting regional communities, and ensuring long-term forest productivity. He also explained the critical role certified timber plays in climate change mitigation, including carbon sequestration during tree growth and long-term carbon storage in wood products. ‘When timber is used in place of more emissions-intensive materials, it can significantly reduce embodied carbon in the built environment’.

The presentation also addressed the

“SUSTAINABLY MANAGED FORESTS PROVIDE A CONTINUOUS, RENEWABLE SUPPLY OF TIMBER



1/ The Sustainability Stage.
2/ From Quik Stik rafter fasteners to heavy-duty brackets, Simpson Strong-Tie displayed a full range of high-performance timber construction solutions at the Expo.
3/ Well-designed and highly engaging, the ITI Australia booth featuring the ‘ITI Solutions House’ proudly displayed their full suite of innovative timber products. All images: Chris Parker and Campbell McInnes

strength and performance properties of modern timber products, including their suitability for structural applications, design flexibility, and innovation in engineered wood systems. Attendees gained a clear understanding why certified timber is not only a sustainable choice, but a high-performance material essential to building a resilient, low-carbon future.

Some of the stand highlights were:

ITI AUSTRALIA

The ITI Australia stand was well represented, and it needed to be, with a constant flow of interested visitors asking a wide range of questions. The

backdrop featured a house titled “The ITI Solutions House”, which effectively showcased the breadth of ITI’s product offering across various building requirements. From the ground up, ITI provides solutions, including their Flamefix product for areas requiring BAL-rated materials in bushfire-prone regions.

VUETRADE

One of the standout features of the Vuetrade stand this year was the BLACKOUT range. This includes a variety of connectors such as post supports, joist hangers, pergola angles, subfloor vents and more. The BLACKOUT range is a sleek, modern connector solution available in both matte and gloss finishes. While still relatively new to the market, it is already gaining popularity and is definitely worth a look.

TIMBERLINK AUSTRALIA

Timberlink Australia proudly displayed its PEFC and FSC certifications, alongside its new Australian Made logo, recently featured in sister publication Timber Trader News. The stand attracted a steady stream of visitors keen to explore the range of Australian-made products on offer, including Everdeck composite decking, manufactured in Tasmania and distributed nationwide. The display highlighted Timberlink’s diverse product

Cont P 4

From P 3

range, spanning indoor and outdoor applications, as well as structural and engineered timber products. Their stand slogan summed it up well: "We transform responsibly sourced plantation pine into timber products."

SIMPSON STRONG-TIE

It was great to see Structural Timber Engineer, Matthew Smith, at the Simpson Strong-Tie stand again this year. Discussing new developments, Matt introduced the HDUE bracket, a heavy-duty hold-down designed for timber frames. What sets the HDUE apart is its pre-formed pilot holes, which guide fixings at an angle. This makes it an ideal solution for shear walls in timber structures requiring superior capacity and enhanced stiffness. The stand also featured a wide range of screws, connectors, and informative materials to engage visitors.



1



2

1/ Leopard print and big smiles – the compliments booth brought plenty of personality and good vibes to Sydney Build Expo 2026.

2/ A bird's-eye view of Sydney Build Expo 2026 in full swing. Over 700 stands across six halls at ICC Sydney Darling Harbour created a buzzing atmosphere packed with thousands of industry professionals. All images: Chris Parker and Campbell McInnes

AUSTRALIAN MADE

It was great to arrive at the Australian Made stand. Timber Media Australasia owns both *Timber* and *Forestry Enews* and *Timber Trader News* and we proudly display the Australian Made and Owned logo. Following a campaign across both publications during 2025 a large number of businesses are now registered to

use the Australian made logo and two of those, Vuetrade and Timberlink were both at the expo proudly displaying the bright green logo.

On the cover: Sydney Build Expo 2026: Bigger, busier and better than ever. Over 28,000 visitors packed Darling Harbour for Australia's premier construction event. Image: Chris Parker and Campbell McInnes

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news

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PAGE 8 VALE - CHRIS WOODHOUSE A GENERATIONAL LEGACY
PAGE 20 NEW ZEALAND UPDATE TIMBER DESIGN AWARDS
PAGE 30 BORG GROUP EXPAND THE PORTA RANGE

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Australian Forest Products Association

AFPA THE LEADING VOICE FOR AUSTRALIA'S FOREST PRODUCTS SECTOR

Potius joins the Prowood Group

Growing New Zealand's engineered timber future.

PROLAM, a New Zealand-owned leader in engineered timber solutions has announced its strategic partnership and investment in Potius, a specialist in prefabricated timber floor, roof and panelised wall systems for residential and commercial construction.

Continuing as a standalone company, Potius will retain its specialist focus on prefabricated timber building systems, with Prolam contributing additional engineering depth, manufacturing scale and operational support.

Prolam's Founder and Managing Director, John Woodman, said the partnership aligns strongly with Prolam's long-term commitment to Building Better Together, through timber-first construction and innovation in engineered timber.

"Potius has built a strong reputation in prefabricated timber systems," said John.

"Retaining its independence, while supporting Potius with Prolam's engineering and manufacturing capability, will allow Potius to strengthen its offering to designers, builders and clients."

This month's announcement marks an exciting step for both companies, and for New Zealand's design and construction industry.

"Together, Prolam and Potius offer one of New Zealand's most comprehensive engineered timber system ranges,



1/ Inside a Potius project, showcasing the precision and quality of New Zealand-made prefabricated timber systems.

2/ Potius prefabricated timber systems in action, delivering faster, smarter construction across New Zealand. All images: Prolam/Potius

combining engineered timber structural components with prefabricated floor, roof and wall systems that can work together as coordinated solutions."

Darren Stead, the new Operations Manager of Potius, will be responsible for the day-to-day operation and growth of the business, working closely with the Prolam team.

Darren said the focus would be on continuity, clarity and capability with Potius remaining a dedicated prefabricated systems provider, now complemented by Prolam's resources.

"The goal is to make working with engineered timber systems even more reliable and more straightforward for engineers, architects and builders," said Darren.

Potius Founding Owner Gavin Robertson and long-standing joint owner Andy van Houtte will remain closely involved in the business to retain knowledge and ensure a smooth transition.

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Why Australian architects are choosing PEFC-certified timber

ACROSS Australia's leading architectural projects, a clear trend is emerging: architects are not only choosing timber for its performance and aesthetic appeal but increasingly insisting on PEFC-certified materials. The 2025 Timber Design Awards, sponsored by Responsible Wood, the PEFC national member for Australia, highlighted how certification has become integral to delivering credible, future-ready architecture.

BUILDING CONFIDENCE THROUGH CERTIFICATION

At its core, the preference for PEFC-certified timber is about confidence and accountability. Architects are responding to growing expectations around sustainability, transparency, and compliance. Certification provides independently verified assurance that timber is responsibly sourced and traceable throughout the supply chain - critical in meeting ESG requirements and aligning with green building frameworks.

DESIGNING WITH ENVIRONMENTAL SENSITIVITY

For many projects, this decision is closely connected to environmental sensitivity and place-based design. At the Nebraska Residence on Bruny Island, certification was essential due to the site's ecological significance.

As Lara Maeseela explains, "Choosing certified timber was particularly important because of the site's high ecological value, surrounded by protected white gum forests and habitat for the Forty-spotted Pardalote. Using certified timber allowed the building to sit lightly within its environment, demonstrating that thoughtful design can coexist with conservation and protect natural habitats."

This reflects a broader shift: certification enables architects to translate environmental intent into verifiable action, ensuring design decisions support conservation outcomes.

SUPPORTING LOCAL SUPPLY CHAINS

Certified timber also strengthens regional supply chains and local industry. Projects such as KROSS HOUSE and the First



Boot Factory won the Australian Timber Design Award in 2025. Image: Peter Bennetts

Building at Bradfield City Centre prioritised locally sourced materials, supporting domestic forestry while reducing transport emissions.

At Bradfield, certification enabled scale and flexibility. As the design team notes: "We prioritised locally sourced timber, with the aspiration of using 100% Australian product, to help build capacity in the local industry."

Certification provided a framework to integrate both Australian and international timber within a single trusted framework - demonstrating how PEFC supports large, complex projects without compromising sustainability standards.

DELIVERING PERFORMANCE AND EFFICIENCY

Performance is another key driver. Certified timber is not selected at the expense of technical requirements - it enhances them. In projects such as Boot Factory, engineered timber systems improved structural performance, fire resistance, and acoustics, while enabling prefabrication and construction efficiency. Certification ensures materials meet both technical and ethical expectations, giving architects confidence in their specifications.

ADVANCING LOW CARBON CONSTRUCTION

PEFC-certified timber also plays a vital role in low-carbon and circular construction. Timber stores carbon, reduces embodied emissions, and supports prefabricated systems designed for disassembly and reuse. Certification ensures these benefits are grounded in responsibly managed forests, directly linking climate performance with sustainable forestry practices.

COMBINING SUSTAINABILITY WITH CULTURAL VALUE

Beyond performance, timber carries strong cultural and experiential value. In the Consulate General of Malaysia in Melbourne, it is central to the architectural narrative.

As Cheah and Saw Architecture explain, "Certified timber ensured the project's use of timber was both culturally meaningful and environmentally responsible, aligning this symbolic material with contemporary sustainability expectations. It ensured traceability, durability, and ethical procurement, reinforcing the project's broader commitment to long-term environmental stewardship."

Here, certification reinforces not only environmental outcomes, but also the integrity of architectural expression.

A GROWING STANDARD IN ARCHITECTURE

Together, these projects show that the choice of Responsible Wood/PEFC-certified timber is driven by a convergence of factors: verified sustainability, supply chain transparency, performance reliability, carbon accountability, and cultural relevance.

For Australian architects, certification is no longer optional - it is essential. As timber construction continues to scale, PEFC certification ensures this expansion remains grounded in responsible forest management, supporting a built environment where design excellence and environmental stewardship go hand in hand.

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@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

21: WoodSolutions Technical Seminar – Kedron Wavell RSL, Brisbane, 2.00pm - 6.00pm.

This seminar is for builders, architects, designers, engineers and certifiers who need clear, practical guidance on compliance, performance and future standards. For more information and to register visit: <https://www.timberqueensland.com.au/event-details/woodsolutions-presents-design-engineer-build-achieving-compliance-and-performance->

in-lightweight-timber-frames

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@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@ntha.com.au

12: SAVE THE DATE: 2026 WFTN Cocktails for Charity – Cloudland, Brisbane, 1.30pm - 6.00pm.

In support of Zephyr Education Limited. Further information, and ticket sale details coming soon.

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/>

30: SA, NT & WA Timber & Hardware Industry Awards – National Wine Centre, Adelaide, 6.30pm - 11.30pm.

Join us in celebrating the SA, NT & WA 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@ntha.com.au

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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Secure Communities Partnership Program - small businesses

Ideal for timber, hardware, forestry and related commercial businesses in Qld.

THE Secure Communities Partnership Program offers funding to support safety measures to deter crime against small and family businesses and create safer and more vibrant business areas.

The program aims to protect small and family businesses from crime and economic

losses, through the installation of vital safety and security infrastructure. This will create safer public commercial precincts and business strips and improve the operating environment for small and family businesses across Queensland.

Round 2: Small businesses and local councils (applications open: early 2026 - see other listing) can apply for funding to implement crime prevention measures.

Small and family businesses who have been significantly impacted by crime in the last 3 years can apply for grants of between \$5,000 and \$20,000 (excluding GST). You must



An opportunity for small businesses and family business to upgrade their security. Image: Shutterstock

co-contribute at least 50% towards total project costs.

At the time of applying, and for the duration of the funded project, your business must:

- Have less than 20 employees (by headcount)
- Have a turnover in the last financial year (2024–25) of \$10 million or less. 'Turnover' is aggregated turnover as defined in the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997
- Have been significantly impacted by crime in the past 3 years. Defined as when a police report and/or crime-related insurance claim has been made

- Be operating, and have an active Australian Business Number (ABN)
- Have a minimum trading history of 1 year
- Be registered for GST (as per your Australian Business Register (ABR) record)
- Have a registered Queensland headquarters location (as per your ABR record)
- Not be insolvent or have owners/directors that are currently bankrupt or undischarged from bankruptcy
- Not be a subsidiary of a group of companies that has 20 or more employees in total

GRANT DETAILS

Provider: Business Queensland

Amount: \$5,000 - \$20,000

Round 2 Closes: 30 June 2026

Location: Queensland

Who Can Apply: Businesses

Co-Contribution Required: Yes

<https://www.business.qld.gov.au/running-business/support-services/financial/grants/secure-communities>

Sports Club Grants

DURING all the interviews and discussions our team had across multiple businesses impacted by the proposed 'Not so great – Great Koala National Park' we discovered a significant number of you were actively involved with sporting clubs and suspect this will be the case across Australia. Your support was through sponsorship with financial contributions, active membership and/or family participation in the sport itself.

To that end when this grant came across our desk we thought it was appropriate to alert all our readers based on their sporting club involvement so feel free to pass it on.

THIS IS A SPORTS CLUB GRANT ONLY.

NATIONAL GRANT OPPORTUNITY: LIKELY TO OPEN AND CLOSE SAME DAY AND WILL BE FIRST COME FIRST SERVED.

- \$25K-\$100K no matching funding required.

- This grant will open on June 11 - however it is likely to close the same day.

AMOUNT: \$25,000–\$100,000 per club project, funding up to 100% of eligible costs; consortia can access up to \$1 million (small) or \$2 million (large), based on members.

ELIGIBILITY: Community focused, not for profit and affiliated community sports clubs, plus eligible lead organisations (such as companies, incorporated associations or Indigenous corporations) and some regional/remote schools or tertiary institutions that provide community access.

ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES:

Group 1: Energy efficiency and electrification

- Energy audits; solar PV and batteries; switchboard and roof upgrades for PV; LED lighting; efficient HVAC, heat pumps and appliances; building envelope improvements; electrification of gas cooking.

Group 2: Climate resilience and adaptation

- Climate plans and risk assessments; shading; drainage and stormwater upgrades; resilient turf and permeable surfaces; water saving measures; disaster ready structures and backup power; bike parking; circular economy initiatives; EV charging.

Group 3: Communication and education

- Simple educational signage and promotion directly linked to the funded upgrades and climate action messages.

Please reach out to Business Grant Advisors if you are interested in applying.

IT WILL BE ESSENTIAL TO SUBMIT YOUR APPLICATION ON THE DAY IT OPENS.

“ GRANT OPENS 11 JUNE - HOWEVER, IT'S LIKELY TO CLOSE THE SAME DAY

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Image: Shutterstock

Federal Government injects \$45 million to fast-track bilateral agreements

THE Albanese Government is providing more than \$45 million over four years to accelerate bilateral agreements with states and territories, aiming to slash red tape and deliver faster environmental approvals for major projects while upholding strong national safeguards.

The funding will encourage state and territory governments to prioritise progressing and signing new assessments and approval bilateral agreements with the Commonwealth. Once in place, these agreements will allow states and territories to handle assessments or approvals on behalf of the federal government, subject to the new National Environmental Standards.

This reform is designed to reduce duplication between federal and state processes, fast-tracking critical projects in energy, housing, and resources sectors. Strong environmental protections remain front and centre, with all projects required to meet Commonwealth standards. The new National Environmental Protection Agency, commencing on 1 July 2026, will provide independent assurance over the agreements.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese highlighted the dual benefits of the reforms.

“The landmark reforms we passed late last year are vital to protect our environment and to boost productivity in our economy,” the Prime Minister said.

“We strongly encourage state and territory governments to step up and sign up to a new bilateral agreement, to deliver a system that cuts red tape and duplication and delivers environmental laws that are clear and consistent. This investment will ensure the full benefits of the reforms can be realised as soon as possible.”

Minister for the Environment and Water Murray Watt said the funding demonstrates the Government’s commitment to both stronger protections and faster decision-making.

“The best way to speed [decision making] up is for state and territory



1/ **Australia's Prime Minister, The Hon. Anthony Albanese MP, member for Grayndler.**



2/ **Senator, The Hon. Murray Watt, Senator for Queensland.** Photos: Parliament of Australia

governments to sign up to a new and improved bilateral agreement, and this funding will ensure we can enter better and more enduring agreements sooner. We’re deeply committed to ensuring our national environmental laws are fit for purpose, and we expect state and territory governments to work with us to achieve this important outcome,” he explained.

The announcement has been welcomed by the Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA).

AFPA said the Federal Government’s \$45 million investment to progress bilateral agreements will help reduce red tape and duplication for the industry. The Association also welcomed the broader push to finalise National Environmental Standards, noting that clear and certain rules are essential for industry confidence.

The bilateral agreements form a key part of the Government’s implementation of the national environmental law reforms. By empowering states and territories to act under a consistent national framework, the reforms aim to create a more efficient, one-stop approval

process without compromising environmental outcomes.

Proponents stand to benefit from streamlined processes that combine federal and state requirements into a single pathway. This is expected to significantly reduce approval timelines for major infrastructure and resource projects while

ensuring compliance with the National Environmental Standard for Matters of National Environmental Significance (MNES).

The Government has emphasised that these changes build on the recommendations from the Samuel Review, creating a modern environmental approval system that delivers better certainty for business and stronger protection for Australia’s unique species, habitats, and heritage places.

The National Environmental Standards is currently undergoing its second public consultation and is open for feedback until 11:59pm on Friday 29 May 2026.

Further details on the Environment Protection reforms and how to give your feedback are available on the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water website.

With the National Environmental Protection Agency due to begin operations shortly, the \$45 million investment signals a clear push to turn the recently passed reforms into practical, on-the-ground improvements in approval efficiency.

Industry groups like AFPA view the funding and bilateral focus as a positive step toward delivering the certainty needed for investment and sustainable development in key sectors such as forestry and resources.

“ THIS IS EXPECTED TO SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE APPROVAL TIMELINES ”

Apprenticeships stack up financially for timber and hardware workers

FOR timber and hardware merchants investing in their people, new figures from the Housing Industry Association (HIA) highlight a simple reality—apprenticeships deliver real financial benefits from day one.

Unlike university pathways, apprentices and trainees earn while they learn. That means a steady income from the outset, often supported by fee-free TAFE, and no HECS-style debt hanging over them at the end of their training.

The numbers tell the story. While a university student can face annual study costs of around \$17,000, a carpentry apprentice can earn between \$39,000 and \$42,000 by their second year. Over a typical three- to four-year training period, that creates a financial gap of at least \$50,000 in favour of the trade pathway.

For workers in the timber and hardware sector, that is a strong incentive to take up or complete an



Melissa Clark,
General Manager
GTO and
RTO for NTHA.
Image: NTHA

apprenticeship—and for employers, it is a clear value-add when attracting and retaining staff.

The benefits don't stop once the qualification is finished. HIA data shows qualified tradespeople can go on to earn salaries in the \$80,000 to \$95,000 range, on par with many degree-qualified roles.

NTHA's General Manager for the GTO, RTO, Melissa Clark says the recent data

highlights exactly why apprenticeships are such a valuable pathway, offering people the chance to earn, gain real skills, and avoid significant debt while building a strong career.

“From my perspective, it reinforces the importance of employers continuing to invest in apprenticeships as a practical and sustainable way to develop and retain a skilled workforce, particularly in the Timber Industry,” Ms Clark said.

For merchants supporting apprentices through industry programs, including those aligned with NTHA, the message is clear apprenticeships aren't just good for skills—they make solid financial sense for workers.

In a market where skilled labour remains tight, offering a pathway that combines income, training and long-term earning potential is proving to be a smart move for both employees and the businesses backing them.

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Timber market outlook: what's changing - and how to stay ahead

The market is entering a new phase.

AUSTRALIA'S forest and wood products sector is entering a more complex and less predictable phase. Recent insights from Forest & Wood Products Australia (FWPA) suggest the industry is no longer defined by steady cycles, but by overlapping pressures, structural shifts and emerging opportunities. For businesses across the value chain, the challenge is not just responding to change, it's anticipating it.

Cost volatility is now structural

One of the most immediate pressures is cost volatility. Rising fuel prices are affecting every part of the supply chain, from harvesting and haulage through to processing and distribution. These increases are not occurring in isolation, they are tied closely to fertiliser, freight and broader logistics costs. At the same time, global oil market disruptions driven by geopolitical events are amplifying this volatility, making it clear that external forces can rapidly reshape domestic operating conditions.

The implication is straightforward: cost uncertainty is no longer a short-term disruption. It is a structural feature of the market. Businesses that recognise this and respond proactively through modelling

scenarios, margin stress-testing, and building flexibility into procurement and pricing, will be better positioned to navigate ongoing uncertainty.

Import competition is tightening margins

At the same time, competitive dynamics in international trade are intensifying. Import trends continue to place pressure on local producers, particularly in price-sensitive segments. While domestic sawn softwood consumption has remained relatively stable, a surge in lower-priced imports, such as plywood, is tightening margins and shifting competitive benchmarks. This creates a more challenging environment for domestic manufacturers, who must balance cost pressures with the need to remain competitive on both price and performance.

Demand is shifting with Australia's changing housing mix

Layered over these trends is a fundamental shift in demand. Australia's housing mix is evolving, with increasing activity in townhouses and apartments rather than traditional detached houses. This shift has direct implications for timber demand, not only in volume, but also in product type, specification and application. Businesses that remain overly

reliant on traditional housing segments risk missing where future growth will occur.

Despite these pressures, the outlook is not without opportunity. Growth is emerging in specific segments, such as timber packaging, while other areas of consumption are holding steady. The key takeaway is that growth is no longer broad-based, it's targeted. Success will depend on identifying these opportunities early and aligning products, capabilities and market focus accordingly.

Why better data matters more than ever

Taken together, these trends point to a more dynamic and data-driven industry. Decision-making based on instinct or historical patterns is becoming increasingly risky. Instead, businesses need timely, relevant and reliable data to inform strategy.

This is where FWPA's Industry Data Dashboard becomes a critical tool. By bringing together real-time domestic and global market data - including insights on imports, pricing, consumption and housing activity - the dashboard provides a clear, evidence-based view of the operating environment.

For businesses, the value is practical and immediate. It enables more informed strategic planning by allowing users to model demand and pricing scenarios. It strengthens risk management by tracking key cost drivers such as fuel and import competition. It also supports market positioning by highlighting emerging growth segments and underpins investment decisions with credible, industry-wide intelligence.

In a market defined by volatility and change, access to this level of insight is a genuine competitive advantage.

Use insights and act decisively

The message for FWPA members and the broader industry is clear. Costs are rising, demand is shifting and competition is intensifying, but opportunities remain for those who can identify them clearly and act decisively. The difference will increasingly come down to how effectively businesses use data to guide their decisions.

In this environment, the question is no longer whether to adopt data-driven decision making, but how quickly you can integrate it into the way you operate.

Explore more here: News - Forest & Wood Products Australia

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\$150 million Forestry Growth Fund

Driving timber manufacturing growth.

THE Australian Government has opened applications for the new Forestry Growth Fund, unlocking \$150 million in concessional finance aimed at strengthening and modernising the wood product manufacturing sector.

Delivered through the National Reconstruction Fund Corporation (NRFC), the fund is designed to support projects that lift processing capability, expand production, and increase the value of timber outputs—particularly those used in housing construction.

The funding targets businesses looking to invest in areas such as mass timber, engineered wood, and high-value secondary processing. It is also focused on helping manufacturers develop more competitive, advanced operations that can meet growing demand across the building and construction supply chain.

A key feature of the Forestry Growth Fund is its concessional structure.



The Forestry Growth Fund is an opportunity for businesses to lift their processing capability, expand production, and increase the value of their timber outputs. Image: Shutterstock

With a lower benchmark rate of return than the NRFC's General Fund, it allows investment in earlier-stage proposals, first-of-a-kind projects, and initiatives with significant upfront capital costs or longer repayment periods. This opens the door for businesses that may not otherwise meet traditional financing thresholds.

HOW TO APPLY

The Forestry Growth Fund is now open for applications. Businesses can register their interest by completing the online form, outlining their business and/or project and how the fund could support their plans.

Once submitted, an NRFC investment professional will make contact to discuss eligibility and assist with progressing a formal proposal for investment.

For more information and to apply click here.

For timber and hardware businesses, particularly those considering expansion, diversification, or value-adding opportunities, this fund presents a significant opportunity to access patient capital and accelerate growth in a changing construction landscape.

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Truss games

Jenga, tradies and trusses: the hidden balancing act in roof design.

By PAUL DAVIS

IN a game of Jenga your tower collapses; if you are a bad loser, you may blame the tower, your opponent, the table, or even gravity. Whilst I don't know about your opponent, I can say with confidence that the tower, table and gravity don't care.

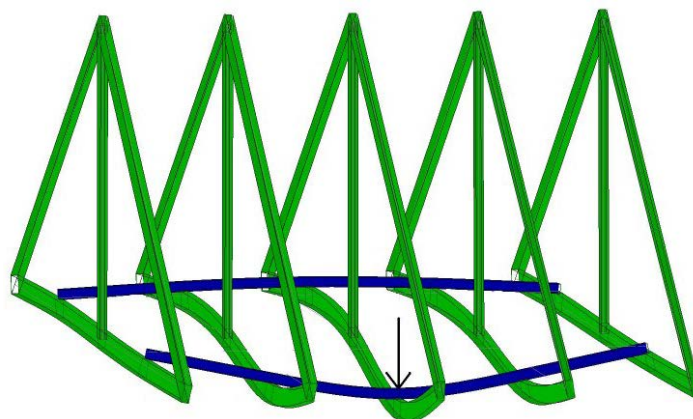
Structural analysis isn't a field of endeavour where opinion counts. We are dealing with the equivalent of a game of Jenga. The structure performs the way it must, the loads go where the loads go, and it's an engineer's job to understand and quantify the behaviour. If the structure collapses, whilst many people may care, the physics doesn't. In Jenga, as in engineering, denial is not a load path.

As you might imagine, the engineers and software writers who formulated the truss design software that you use had a complex task to wrangle the Jenga-like complexity of truss analysis and design. There are so many factors that can affect the final result and an infinite number of different ways that they interact.

Some of these factors affect the design outcome more than others. It turns out that a point load that represents a person standing on the bottom chord is one of them; it has a dominant effect on truss bottom chord size. With all other things being equal, this load changes the maximum panel span at which a 90x35-MGP10 chord flicks over to MGP12.

As you would demand, the software engineers and code writers went to a lot of trouble to get the design of a truss as efficient as possible whilst remaining safe. So, this change-over span to MGP12, and the factors that affect this threshold gets special attention.

“LOADS GO WHERE THE LOADS GO – IT'S THE ENGINEER'S JOB TO UNDERSTAND WHY



This diagram shows how a binder, aka over-batten, can shed some of the load from the loaded truss to the adjoining trusses. Image: supplied

The load you must design for is a value nominated by the Australian Standard. The roof must sustain this load. Knowing the value, it's not excessively high and so plenty of pie-loving tradies with a tool bag would meet or even exceed this load.

So, the only "game in town" is to try and get some of that load off the truss. And the way truss software writers do this is to work with the ability of the ceiling structure and binders to move some of that person-load to adjacent trusses.

The diagram above shows how a binder, aka over-batten, can shed some of the load from the loaded truss to the adjoining trusses:

The binder deflects with the loaded truss. In that process some of the applied load moves along the binder to the adjoining trusses and drags them down a little. There is generally only ever one XXL tradie in the roof so, luckily, we don't have to design for every truss to be loaded with a person at the same time. So, we know these adjoining trusses can carry that shared load.

If it is known that there are screw fixed ceiling battens, then potentially the stiffness of these battens can be included to shed more load. And more controversially, a direct fixed ceiling lining may have some capacity as well. That is the Jenga equivalent of adding back a brick! A suspended ceiling system definitely does not share load!

In this way the design of the trusses bottom chord can be as lean as possible, that threshold span for the changeover to MGP12 is increased, and your design remains competitive and safe.

The Australian standard for truss design says that a crossing member (binder) which is effectively a 35x70-F5 "fixed in the centre of each panel may be assumed. In such cases the crossing members should be specified in the design and installation documentation". And I am

quite confident that is what your software does and specifies.

The difficult questions, however, are: *Do you supply those additional timbers? Do the carpenters know what they are for? Do the carpenters care?* and, ultimately, *'Are they installed?'* If the answer to any one of these questions is "No" then it's likely some of your trusses are unable to reliably carry the required load and so in the terms of the standard, are unsafe.

I may have been in one or two roofs, and I'm pretty sure that in many cases the answer is indeed that these binders are often not installed.

So, the Jenga tower's wobbling. I can't say I know how to steady it in the commercially tough world we operate in, but as any seasoned Jenga player knows, spotting the shaky block is the first step to saving the stack. Now it's your move.

Paul Davis is an independent structural engineer managing his own consulting firm Project X Solutions Pty Ltd. The view in this column is Paul's professional opinion and may not necessarily reflect the opinion of Timber Media Australasia.



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New Zealand-India Free Trade Agreement now signed

AS reported in Issue #882 of *Timber and Forestry Enews* when the agreement was first concluded, New Zealand has now formally signed its landmark Free Trade Agreement with India.

New Zealand and India signed the comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA) on 27 April 2026 in New Delhi. The pact delivers significant tariff reductions and improved market access for New Zealand exporters, particularly in the forestry sector which has already established itself as a strong performer in the Indian market.

Forestry remains one of New Zealand's standout export categories to India. In the year ended December 2025, New Zealand exported NZ\$399 million worth of forestry products, a substantial increase from the NZ\$134 million recorded in the year to June 2025 that was referenced in Issue #882. This growth demonstrates momentum even before the agreement entered its formal phase.

Under the signed FTA, over 95 percent of New Zealand's forestry exports will be able to enter India tariff-free immediately once the agreement comes into force. Tariffs on almost all remaining existing trade will be phased out over seven years. This covers key product categories including logs, sawn timber, lumber, pulp, paper and paperboard. The removal of tariffs that previously ranged between 5.5 and 11 percent will improve competitiveness against other suppliers who already enjoy preferential access through their own agreements with India.

The agreement includes modern and practical rules of origin that align with New Zealand's existing free trade agreements. This consistency should make compliance easier for exporters. The rules of origin chapter supports electronic documentation and paperless trade processes. Approved exporters will be able to self-declare their goods from the start of the agreement, with a review



With the Free Trade Agreement now signed by both New Zealand and India, now is the time for exporters to prepare their full supply chain for the changes to the market. Image: Shutterstock

scheduled after five years to consider expanding self-declaration to all exporters and producers.

Customs procedures under the FTA emphasise efficiency. Goods that meet the requirements are expected to clear within 48 hours in most cases, with faster processing for certain shipments. The agreement also strengthens cooperation on sanitary and phytosanitary measures as well as technical barriers to trade, which should help reduce non-tariff barriers over time through greater regulatory dialogue and risk-based approaches.

India continues to show strong economic momentum as the fastest-growing major economy. It is expected to become the world's third-largest economy by 2030 with a GDP of approximately US\$7 trillion and a middle class exceeding 700 million people. This creates sustained demand for construction materials, packaging, and value-added wood products. New Zealand's radiata pine and other sustainable softwoods are well positioned to meet needs in India's urban development and manufacturing sectors,

where domestic softwood supply remains limited.

Current trade statistics highlight the potential. India ranks as New Zealand's 11th-largest goods and services export market, representing 1.8 percent of total exports. Two-way trade between the countries reached NZ\$3.95 billion in the year ended December 2025, with New Zealand exports totalling NZ\$2.03 billion. While travel services remain the largest single export category, forestry has solidified its position as a leading goods export alongside horticulture, aluminium, iron and steel, and wool.

The FTA provides immediate duty-free access on more than 54 percent of tariff lines, increasing to 82 percent once all phase-outs are complete. For the forestry sector this represents one of the most comprehensive outcomes in the agreement. Industry groups including the New Zealand Forest Owners Association have continued to welcome the deal, noting the opportunities it creates for growers, processors, and exporters across the country.

Beyond tariff reductions, the agreement includes commitments to promote investment. New Zealand has set an aspirational target of increasing private sector investment into India by US\$20 billion over 15 years. A dedicated New Zealand Investment Desk will support businesses looking to build partnerships or establish operations. This could open avenues for joint ventures in processing, technology transfer, or sustainable forestry initiatives, where permitted under Indian regulations.

Implementation timelines will now be critical. Following signing, both countries will undertake their respective domestic approval processes before the agreement enters into force. The FTA includes built-in review mechanisms, with the first review

“SCOPE TO EXPAND INTO HIGHER-VALUE PROCESSED AND ENGINEERED WOOD PRODUCTS”

Rental affordability snapshot urges budget action

NATIONAL housing campaign Everybody's Home said the federal government must prioritise building social housing and ending investor tax breaks in this year's Budget, as new analysis reveals virtually no affordable rentals exist for people on the lowest incomes.

This year's Rental Affordability Snapshot, released by Anglicare Australia, found that nationally, 0% of private rentals were affordable for people on JobSeeker and Youth Allowance, just 0.2% for someone on the Age Pension, and only 0.5% for a full-time minimum wage worker.

Everybody's Home spokesperson Chantal Caruso said the Federal Budget must deliver tax reform and redirect those savings into homes people can afford.

"It's staggering that there are virtually no affordable rentals in the private market for people on the lowest incomes. Even full-time workers on the minimum wage are being completely priced out," Ms Caruso said.

"The system is failing, but it can be fixed if the federal government steps up now with meaningful reform and investment.

"This Budget presents a critical opportunity to deliver

meaningful reform by ending unfair investor tax breaks that are making the housing crisis worse, and reinvesting those savings into building more public and community housing.

"Australia has a shortfall of 640,000 social homes and demand is growing. Building more homes that are actually affordable will not only support those in greatest need, but also ease pressure across the broader rental market.

"We need a housing system that is fair and affordable for everyone. Every Australian deserves a safe, secure and affordable home."

From P 16

scheduled one year after entry into force and subsequent reviews every two years. These provide opportunities for industry feedback on any remaining issues or to pursue further liberalisation.

For New Zealand timber and forestry businesses, the agreement offers several strategic pathways. Traditional volume exports such as logs and sawn timber should benefit from immediate cost reductions. There is also scope to expand into higher-value processed and engineered wood products as India's consumer and construction markets evolve. Exporters are encouraged to review the specific rules of origin requirements and engage with industry associations to prepare for the new market conditions.

Challenges will still need to be navigated. These include logistics for bulk shipments,

meeting evolving Indian quality and sustainability standards, currency considerations, and competition from other international suppliers. However, the combination of tariff relief, improved trade facilitation, and India's long-term growth trajectory provides a strong foundation for expansion.

The signing of this agreement represents a concrete step in New Zealand's trade diversification strategy. It builds directly on the potential identified in Issue #882 when negotiations concluded. With the deal now formalised, the focus shifts to implementation and execution. Forestry exporters should monitor updates from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and prepare supply chains to capitalise on the new access.

As India pursues ambitious infrastructure and urban development

goals, reliable suppliers of quality sustainable wood products will be in demand. New Zealand's established reputation in this space, combined with the FTA's provisions, positions the industry for increased export volumes and stronger commercial relationships in the years ahead.

The agreement also supports broader collaboration through economic cooperation chapters that can facilitate technical exchanges, training, and joint projects in forestry. This holistic approach should help build enduring partnerships beyond simple trade flows.

Overall, the New Zealand-India Free Trade Agreement marks an important milestone for the timber and forestry sector. The coming months and years will show how effectively the industry can convert these opportunities into sustained growth.



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