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COVER STORY P 5



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GKNP support expanded

Downstream impacts addressed in delayed support package.

LATE last week, the NSW Minns Government announced an extension of its Forestry Industry Supply Chain Support Program. The initial \$5 million program was announced last October and designed to provide financial support to eligible businesses facing higher operating costs after wood supply was interrupted by the Great Koala National Park (GKNP) timber harvesting moratorium.

The program was limited to businesses directly affected. As *Enews* reported at the time, this left multiple businesses without support. In response to this feedback, the program has now been extended to additional eligible businesses, such as engineers, chainsaw sales and sharpening service providers, machinery operators and other impacted contracting businesses.

This funding includes up to \$25,000 to cover the costs of professional advice and business planning to support businesses to make informed decisions about their future, and up to \$250,000 to help eligible businesses implement their plans, including activities that support

“THE GKNP SUPPORT PROGRAM HAS NOW BEEN EXTENDED TO ADDITIONAL ELIGIBLE BUSINESSES

transitioning to a new business model such as the purchase or upgrade of equipment and machinery, advice on tax, legal and marketing strategies, as well as other transition costs such as disposal or site remediation.

Other support has included the Forestry Industry Worker Support Program and a \$6 million Community Grants package.

Janelle Saffin, Minister for the North Coast and Small Business, said, “We have listened to the local community and are expanding this package to ensure that the small businesses and contractors who keep the North Coast moving are well supported during this transition.

“This is a major opportunity for our region, and we are committed to helping local businesses adapt so they can share in the long-term economic benefits and jobs this new park will bring to our backyard.”

Timber NSW CEO Maree McCaskill



Janelle Saffin has helped drive the expanded offer to help some of the contractors and small businesses in her area, but for others it is too little too late. Image: supplied

told the *Daily Telegraph* she found the extended support “totally underwhelming.

“...The impact that was felt immediately in the first few weeks [after the moratorium] down the supply chain was documented then,” she said. “Five million is going to go nowhere.” Click here for the full

story (paywalled).

It is not clear whether additional funds have been committed or whether the initial program kitty is now covering a wider group.

The effects of losing so much timber supply have already impacted many companies. David Gibson from AE Gibson & Sons told *Enews* last November (see #876). “We’ve lost 15 staff. These people aren’t just employees, they’re family, part of our local community, and highly skilled in what they do. The loss of each one has been deeply felt.”

This announcement is far too late to bring those jobs back.

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Budget hits and misses

Early reaction to the budget is mixed.

AT the time of writing, most of us are still poring through the 2026 Budget Papers. *War and Peace* looks a comparative breeze in both length and density of text. But the reviews are coming in and it's a mixed bag.

Housing has been front and centre and changes to the capital gains tax discount were well signposted. Under existing rules, Australians can take advantage of a 50% capital gains tax discount if they hold an asset for more than 12 months. From 1 July, 2027, this will be replaced with cost base indexation and a 30% minimum tax rate on capital gains.

Pensioners and people on income support will be exempt from the 30% minimum rate. Any capital gains made before 1 July, 2027, will still qualify for the 50% discount.

Additionally, from the same date, negative gearing will be restricted to new builds. These measures are estimated to raise \$3.6 billion over five years from 2025–26 and expected to help 75,000 Australians buy their own home over the next decade by slowing the growth of house prices and eventually lowering rents.

HIA Chief Economist Tim Reardon said the Budget was attempting to solve a housing shortage by discouraging the investment needed to build more homes.

"The solution to a housing shortage is to build more homes. This Budget does the opposite," he said, noting that Treasury's own figures predict the measures will cause a fall in investor demand, reducing housing supply by 35,000 homes.

AFPA, however, has welcomed the changes. Acting CEO Richard Hyett said: "In 2024, we called for this important change to tax concessions on negative gearing to expand the supply of housing as part of a Senate inquiry into Australia's financial regulatory framework and home ownership.



Treasurer Jim Chalmers giving his Budget Speech on Tuesday night. Image: courtesy Parliament of Australia

"This change will help to increase much-needed investment in new housing development in Australia, which will address the shortage of new dwellings and our national housing crisis. This reform will boost confidence in the construction sector, drive new investment, and improve housing affordability."

The budget also includes \$2 billion over four years for councils and utility companies to build roads, pipes, power and sewage connections to speed up the construction of new housing. This will support 65,000 new homes, a net gain of 30,000.

AFPA also supports the budget measure to introduce free public access to Australian Standards, which will remove housing and planning red tape, and increase support for modern methods of construction.

"Having free access to these standards will reduce costs to builders, while helping to improve compliance and safety for the building industry," Hyett said.

The allocation of \$500 million to implement Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act

“HAVING FREE ACCESS TO THESE STANDARDS WILL REDUCE COSTS TO BUILDERS

reforms was also welcomed, as it will streamline approvals and increase investment in major projects. This includes \$28.0 million over two years from 2026–27 to support the transition of forestry operations under Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) to new regulatory arrangements under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act).

"Given the tight timeframes around the new national environmental laws, this funding is critical to provide resourcing to help progress bilateral agreements with states and territories, and reduce red-tape duplication," Hyett said.

Other standout budget measures include:

- \$105.9 million over four years to build an AI tool to help developers navigate environmental red tape, making it easier and quicker for projects to get approved.
- \$150 million Forestry Growth Fund as part of the National Reconstruction Fund Corporation's targeted investment in manufacturing businesses.
- \$23.8 million over four years from 2026–27 (and \$6.1 million per year ongoing) to sustain critical non-regulatory agricultural trade technical market access functions, supporting Australian agricultural, fishery and forestry exports
- A Covid-style tax break for businesses with up to \$1 billion in turnover, who will be able to reduce the profit they reported in the previous two years because of recent losses. That means a smaller retrospective tax bill in those years and, in many cases, a refund. This will become a permanent fixture for eligible companies.
- The small business \$20,000 instant asset tax write-off will also become a permanent fixture.

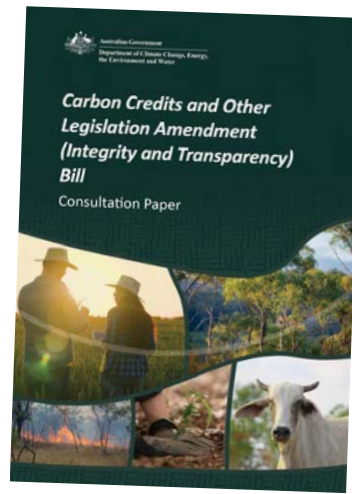
ACCU amendments feedback sought

AT the time of publication, just over one week remains for you to give feedback on proposed ACCU Scheme amendments. The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water has opened its proposed changes to public commentary (the Have Your Say process), which closes 5pm AEST Friday 22 May.

The text of the Carbon Credits and Other Legislation Amendment (Integrity and Transparency) Bill Exposure Draft, along with other consultation documents are available for review on the department's website ([click here](#)).

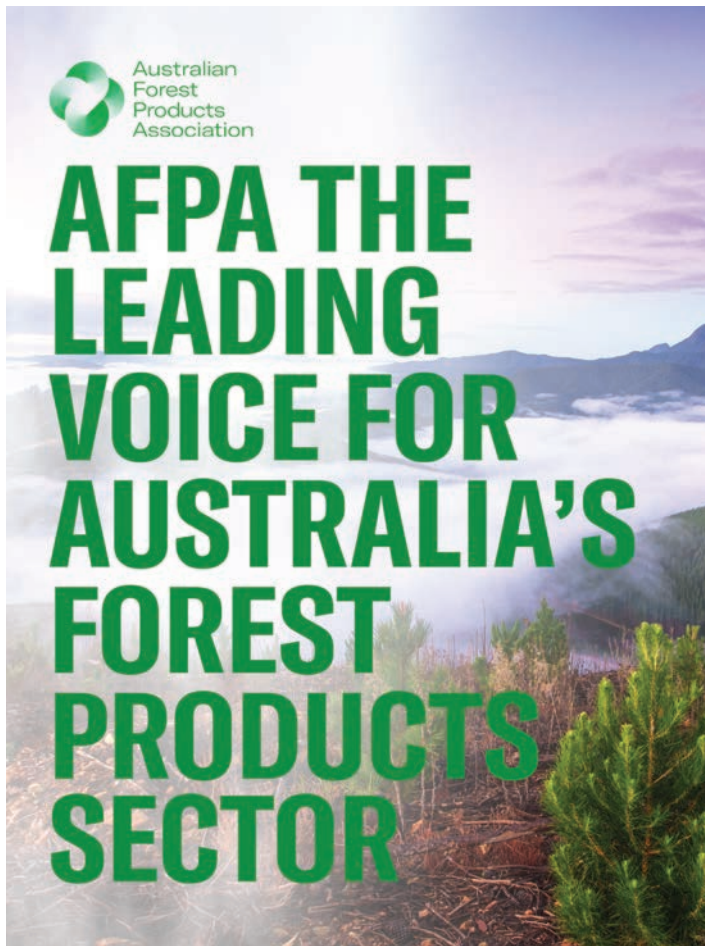
The Australian Government is proposing a suite of legislative amendments to implement review recommendations, respond to stakeholder feedback and bolster the integrity of the ACCU Scheme. The amendments to both the Carbon Credits (Carbon Farming Initiative) Act 2011 (CFI Act) and the National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Act 2007 (the NGER Act) would:

- Strengthen ACCU Scheme consent requirements by recognising registered native title claimants as eligible interest holders and requiring up-front and staged consent for projects on land that is recognised as native title land, or subject to native title claims.
- Enable the existing ACCU Scheme Emissions Reduction Assurance Committee to evolve into the new Carbon Abatement Integrity Committee (CAIC).
- Clarify the governance arrangements for proponent-led method development (PLMD) in the ACCU Scheme.



A consultation paper looking at the changes has been prepared to inform feedback. Image: supplied

- Create new Ministerial powers to manage critical integrity risks the ACCU Scheme could face in the future.
 - Encourage greater investment and participation in research and development into new emissions reduction opportunities for the ACCU Scheme.
 - Enhance the Clean Energy Regulator's compliance and publication powers to ensure ongoing integrity and transparency of the ACCU Scheme.
 - Simplify and streamline the ACCU Scheme administration.
 - Enhance the transparency and administration of the NGER Scheme.
- For links to feedback documents and the independent reviews that have led to the proposed changes, [click here](#).



AFPA thanks outgoing CEO

THE Board of Directors of the Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA) announced last Friday that Diana Hallam had made her decision to resign as CEO to pursue new opportunities.

The Board has initiated a comprehensive search to identify a new CEO.

During the interim period, the Board has appointed Richard Hyett, currently AFPA's Deputy CEO, to serve as acting CEO effective immediately.

AFPA Deputy Chair Matt Crapp said, "On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank Di for her dedicated service and leadership over the past two years.

"During her time as CEO, the organisation has been



Diana Hallam has overseen a successful period at the helm of AFPA
Image: supplied

a proactive and successful contributor to informing Government policy outcomes that recognise the essential role forest products play in the decarbonisation of the Australian economy.

"We wish Di the best in her future endeavours."

Ms Hallam said, "It has been an honour to lead AFPA. I am proud of what we have achieved and confident that AFPA is well-positioned for continued success."

TFTU calls for action

Australia's newest union hopes to see continued teamwork across the sector.

THE Timber, Furnishing & Textiles Union (TFTU), Australia's newest union, turned one at the end of last month and took to the road to celebrate both its birthday and May Day, with community events at Tumut and Orange. April also saw the official registration of the union as an independent entity. We spoke with NSW TFTU secretary Alison Rudman about the new union's work.



1/ Some of the visitors to TFTU stalls are former timber workers looking for a chat, and their expertise is welcomed.



2/ Kids were mostly interested in the free lolly bags, but mum and dad timber workers had good chats at the regional events. All images: courtesy TFTU

conditions for workers rely on there being good timber jobs. Those jobs rely on there being timber supply, which relies on social license. So TFTU tries as much as possible to bring all parts of the community along on the same journey.

Visits to regional fairs and events tick several of these boxes. "First of all, they're fun," said Rudman. "Everyone's having a good time and the kids love the union lolly bags.

"It's been a great start to the year," Rudman said. "It's been wonderful to see our members so incredibly proud to be building this new union, but it's also been a busy start to the year. We've had the New South Wales

timber roundtable at Parliament House. We've had organisers and delegates out at festivals talking to the members and community members about the importance of good timber jobs, and we've also been hosting parliamentary delegations for members of parliament to meet our members who live in their electorates and to visit local timber sites. So there's lots going on."

This multi-layered approach reflects the union's collaborative mindset: good

But they also serve three really practical purposes."

The first is introducing people to the TFTU name. "So when people do have an issue at work, they're very clear on who their union is," Rudman said. "It also provides an opportunity for members, often with their families, to chat with us about their workplace rights away from the mad rush of a lunch break.

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“Finally, these events play a really important role in community education. There is so much noise about the timber industry, much from people who really don't know what they're talking about. The easiest way to cut through that noise is for people to meet timber workers and hear what they actually do all day.”

Public events have also been an opportunity for TFTU to share its petition calling on the NSW government to roll out a project similar to the Snowy Valley Skills Development Service across other areas of high timber industry activity.

“Accessing training is difficult in many regional areas,” said Rudman. “It's often hard to get the market thick enough to attract Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) to come and talk to our members and meet them where they live. When we can't do that, there's a real challenge for workers in accessing accredited training.

“If you're having to travel for training, older workers need to juggle family responsibilities around that. And for younger workers, they may be a long way from home without family to fall back on. I remember a group of apprentices from Kempsey who were going to Tumut TAFE to do some training and their parents helped them to join the union. I asked the parents why and they replied, ‘It's a long way from home. We just want to know that there are people looking out for them.’

“It's great that those apprentices knew that they had support, but we also want them to be able to access training close to where they live and work,” Rudman concluded.

The petition also calls for easier access to training opportunities through peer coordinators from industry who can both help to pool trainees from various businesses to make it worthwhile for an RTO to visit an area and also share information about what programs are available and how to access both the programs and funding.

“Too often, people don't know what's available,” said Rudman. “The peer coordinator at the Snowy Valley Skills Development Service was able to help 400 learners and 40 businesses. We'd love to see that repeated across all timber areas in New South Wales.”

POLITICAL EDGE



Alison Rudman talking at NSW Parliament. Engaging with politicians of all stripes has helped remind them just how many jobs rely on NSW timber.

TFTU, along with the AWU, the union for Forestry Corporation workers, was pivotal in organising the Timber Industry Roundtables in March, with the experience overall a positive one.

Rudman said, “There's been great feedback from other participants in the industry about the type of things that people need to see in order to support good timber jobs in timber towns: support for skills and skills development; supporting New South Wales-made products; making sure the timber industry is getting our fair share of the huge government procurement spend of \$44 billion each year. That is money that should be spent backing good jobs and good businesses in New South Wales.”

While the work is ongoing in turning some of the ideas canvassed into reality, working groups and further meetings are already underway.

Parliamentary delegations have also held visits to TFTU workplaces and with members. “These have been really important for making sure that people understand the full gamut of timber work,” said Rudman.

“TALK TO YOUR PEERS ABOUT THE ACTIONS THAT WOULD MAKE THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE”

“Many people understand that there are people who work in forests and there are people who work in timber mills, but too often, the work of timber workers in places like southwest Sydney goes unrecognised.

“Meeting F&T fabricators, pallet makers and more has been a great opportunity for those MPs to understand that, actually, you're talking about jobs that support the entire economy. And for the workers, they can talk about how proud they are of their work with NSW timber.”

Rudman encourages others in the sector to also engage with both polities and the public, and says there have been simple steps behind the union's successes.

“Talk to your peers and be very specific about the couple of actions that would make the biggest difference,” she said. “The one thing I've realised dealing with politicians is that there's always a lot going on, so you've got to start with your key item, so when they walk away, that's the thing they remember.

“Many of timber sector businesses, and many of the people that work in them, have really long service. That's part of what makes these jobs so valuable, they are underpinning the economy in timber towns. If your business has a big anniversary this year, or one of your employees does, put on a cake, take some photos and call the local news – or *T&F Enews*. Tell that story, because it's an important and powerful story.

“The third thing I would say is make time to introduce yourself to your local MP. Ultimately, in the Australian system, all politics is deeply local, and the more that people know timber jobs are an issue in every single seat, the easier it is, come election time, to get those commitments on the key issues we all need.”

With the next NSW election scheduled for 13 March 2027, it's timely advice.

As a union, TFTU will always have worker concerns at the front of their actions, but Rudman says many parts of the timber sector are not particularly adversarial.

“Some of that is through living in the same country towns. Yes, we might have points of disagreement, but there are

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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: 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->

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20-21: 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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also large areas of shared interest. It's an approach that allows you to have those conversations with a view towards resolution, rather than staking out positions. It's harder to see each other as dragons when we're all part of the same RFS branch or playing on the same footy team."

Last year's combined efforts in the wake of the Great Koala National Park announcement and harvesting moratorium were a good example of that collaboration.

"We were all calling for a more sensible approach," said Rudman, "and there were people at that table who could look at the data on a very granular level and make very good assessments about what it meant for the whole of the supply chain. That's not my expertise, but we were helpful in saying, 'If this is what we need people to agree to, these are our best possible steps for getting them to do it.' And I think that had some people



The TFTU petition calling for more investment in delivering skills to regional NSW attracted lots of signatures at the Experience Orange Festival.

rethinking their idea of what a union is and what value unions offer."

STRONGER TOGETHER

Last Thursday saw the release of the final Independent Forestry Panel's Stakeholder Report (see story p 12). Rudman says elements of the report hit hard, but that it reinforces her belief in community engagement as a key tool for timber workers.

"It's understandably hurtful for our members to see the type of comments that came through from some campaigning groups in the report, although I acknowledge the work that the writers did to make sure they were clear where there were areas of genuine contest, and that being part of a campaigning group doesn't actually give you expertise in a particular area.

"This is why we need to be talking to people in the community and media. It's very hard when somebody stands

in front of you and says, 'I do this job every day' to say, 'But I read this on Facebook, so I think you're wrong.' We're out there meeting with different stakeholders, and have more public events scheduled, so people are hearing what actually gets done in these jobs.

"It dilutes this idea that it's either jobs or the environment, and clarifies there are actually two different views about how you achieve healthy forests. On the one side, you have researchers in related fields, usually not forest scientists, who advocate for lock it up and leave. On the other side, you have the forest scientists presenting peer-reviewed evidence about the need for active and adaptive forest management.

"It's worth noting that that is something that many First Nations peoples have practiced here for thousands of years."

Across NSW, Rudman would like to see three priorities in the timber industry. "The first is security of wood supply. Local timber equals local jobs. It might look slightly different in hardwood and softwood but, ultimately, all parts of the industry need to make sure that they've got good log supply.

"The second is making sure that there's really meaningful procurement policies that value local content. There's nothing worse than going by a NSW school development and realising the timber is 100% not from around here, while there are two mills a short distance down the road who would have desperately been able to use that contract."

Rudman concludes, "The third thing is making sure that workers continue to have an ever stronger voice in the industry. And that means saying to people, if you're really serious about this, join us. Show people that you've put your skin in the game and that you're prepared to stand with them to get some really meaningful changes."

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On the cover: The TFTU stand at Tumut's Falling Leaf Festival earlier this month. Image: courtesy TFTU

AFCA ceases operations

THE Australian Forest Contractors Association ceased operations on Monday of this week.

In its notice of voluntary liquidation on the association's website, the AFCA Board wrote: "The AFCA Board has resolved to place the Association into voluntary liquidation.

"This decision follows an extended period of financial remediation, stakeholder consultation, and unsuccessful efforts to resolve a historical project-related liability and establish a viable long-term operating pathway for the Association.

"Since September 2025, the current Board has undertaken extensive efforts to:

- strengthen governance and financial processes;
- reduce operating costs;
- complete outstanding commitments;
- engage transparently with stakeholders; and
- continue progressing key industry reform priorities affecting forest service businesses.



Log haulage firms are among the forest contractors who have lost their association.

Image: Shutterstock/TFoxFoto

"Consultation and feedback received from members and sponsors confirmed that, while there remains strong support for contractor representation and the issues AFCA has been advocating on, confidence in AFCA's ability to continue effectively under its current structure had been significantly impacted by historical legacy decisions and resulting actions.

"The Board concluded that voluntary liquidation represents the most responsible course of action to transparently address the organisation's liabilities and provide

clarity for members, sponsors, and industry stakeholders.

"An accompanying Operational Snapshot summarises the tenure and activities of the current Board.

"AFCA acknowledges and thanks its members, sponsors, stakeholders, and industry partners for their support and contribution over many years.

"Further information regarding the liquidation process will be communicated as appropriate."

On both the website and the association's social media accounts, the association shares the timeline behind events informing this decision (click here), which includes both financial mismanagement from a former CEO resulting in a debt to FWPA with no means to repay and members concluding that the association had suffered irreparable reputational damage.

Many contractors in the forestry sector benefitted from AFCA's advocacy work, we hope that they are able to find other group representation to advance their cause.

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Tradeware two call time

Mitch and Leonie O'Mara are leaving their renowned Brisbane store to the next set of hands.

By NTHA

TRADEWARE Building Supplies has been a staple of the Brisbane construction scene for 32 years. Now, Mitch and Leonie O'Mara have made the difficult decision to retire after building the business from a bare block of dirt.

For Mitch, the decision ends 44 years in the timber sector. He started out driving trucks in 1982 before moving into management at Fine Line Timbers — now Five Star Timbers — in 1988. In 1994, he and his wife Leonie took a leap of faith and launched Tradeware Building Supplies while raising a young family.

"We just thought, well, let's give this a go," Mitch said.

Over the decades, that gamble grew into a highly respected timber business known for quality, service and a willingness to evolve.

"We've learned a lot over the years and had to diversify a lot," he said.

Over the years the team has specialised in lattice and wine barrels, which were turned into eskies and heater barrels. But it was timber slabs that became the business's signature.

"If you visit our website, you'll see the beautiful slabs we have. That's where I really made my name in the industry and it was one of the highlights of my career."

Mitch sourced only seasoned timber, travelling far into regional areas to find old timber getters with sheds full of slabs that had been drying for decades.

"I've still got slabs out there that are over 30 years old," he said.

The character of the timber — cracks, knots and natural features — became part of the appeal. Mitch also taught himself how to finish and resin slabs, learning through trial, experience and



Mitch O'Mara receiving recognition from NTHA for his 30 years of service at the NTHA Queensland state awards in 2025. Image: courtesy Chris Parker

online videos. Tradeware's approach has always been highly hands-on. Customers often arrive with an idea for furniture, benchtops or feature pieces, and Mitch and his team help turn that idea into something practical.

While builders were always a core part of the customer base, major economic disruptions forced further innovation. When the GFC and then Covid hit, Mitch found new ways to generate revenue, including breaking down wholesale timber packs and reselling smaller quantities. More recently, Tradeware expanded again — importing FSC-certified cumaru hardwood from South America.

"We created about five different avenues of selling," Mitch said. "It's not bad for a little retail timber yard when we first started in '94."

Mitch said competition in the timber sector used to be fierce, but many yards have fallen away over time. His philosophy, however, never changed.

"I never bought average-grade wood. I

always bought the best wood available."

He credits the business's longevity to service, quality and loyalty.

"If you have those three things, price is never an issue. Back in the day, the people who ran timber yards were grumpy old buggers," Mitch said with a laugh. "We changed that. We became super helpful."

He is equally proud of the people who helped build the business. Long-time manager Dave started just one week after Tradeware opened.

Mitch said most of the staff are over 60 and all are friends.

Another point of pride is the presentation of the yard itself.

"I pride myself on having the cleanest timber yard in Australia," Mitch said.

"There's not a piece of strapping on the ground. Workplace health and safety is everything. Safety for the public has always been absolute number one."

New owner Graham Robertson, of Robertson Brothers Sawmill will work with Mitch to ensure a smooth transition. Even so, stepping back will not come easily.

"Tradeware would not have happened without the love and support of Leonie," Mitch said. "I will be eternally grateful for her dedication in helping create a successful and fun business. Without Leonie, Tradeware probably would not have existed. She was the driving force — not only behind the success of the business, but in making it fun as well," Mitch said.

After 44 years of marriage, with the couple's first grandchild due, Mitch says the timing feels right: "We're both in our mid-60s now. It's time to have a bit of fun."

"I PRIDE MYSELF ON HAVING THE CLEANEST TIMBER YARD IN AUSTRALIA"

Autonomous logging trucks on route

DRIVER error is one of the major factors in Canadian logging truck accidents, with fatigue the leading cause. Kodiak AI has now announced a pilot program exploring the deployment of trucks equipped with the Kodiak Driver, Kodiak's AI-powered autonomous driving system, at West Fraser Timber Co's log-hauling operations in Alberta.



Kodiak AI is already running autonomous trucks in other industries in the US. Image: supplied

Kodiak deployed its first driverless technology commercially in West Texas's Permian Basin in December 2024, and had scaled its operations to 20 driverless trucks by the end of 2025.

The Kodiak Driver is designed to handle the complex variables seen in industrial trucking environments. Its modular technology is built to withstand the dust, vibration, and extreme weather conditions typical in industrial environments, including the oil and

gas and forestry sectors.

West Fraser hopes the pilot will improve the safety of its logging transport operations, address the industry-wide shortage of drivers, and increase the consistency of its raw material supply to mills.

"Innovation that improves safety and sustainability has long been central to how West Fraser operates," said Mark Cookson, woods operations manager.

"This pilot gives us the opportunity to test autonomous technology that can help address driver shortages and enhance safety by reducing human exposure to the risks of remote, rough-terrain resource roads."

The trial is the first outside the US for Kodiak. "We built the Kodiak Driver to be the most versatile autonomous system on the market, capable of handling everything from interstate highways to the toughest industrial environments, from arid West Texas to the forests of Western Canada," said Don Burnette, founder and CEO of Kodiak.

"Our work with West Fraser is the perfect opportunity to support our expansion into logging, because it is an industry leader with a deep understanding of the logistical complexities of timber. By bringing the benefits of autonomous trucking to the wood products industry, we are demonstrating that our technology can thrive in even the most demanding settings."

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Forestry report published

The finalised report includes over 1600 submissions on the future of NSW forestry.

LAST Thursday, the NSW Government published the finalised Independent Forestry Panel's Stakeholder Report.

The panel was asked to confer with stakeholders ahead of the NSW Government's development of a Forestry Industry Action Plan (FIAP). It received written submissions from more than 1500 individuals and 160 organisations, representing a cross section of the timber industry, environmental groups, researchers, residents and businesses from regional NSW and others, as well as data from various group and individual meetings.

Unsurprisingly, there are a lot of what the report politely calls "competing claims". There are also competing government aims: the establishment of the Great Koala National Park (GKNP), a legislated commitment to deliver net zero emissions by 2050, a need for NSW timber supply for housing, and economic concerns.

The report is transparent in acknowledging these, as well as scrupulously fair in detailing the facts of the NSW State Forest estate (including that half that estate is already permanently locked up for conservation reasons).

Of the 1525 individual stakeholders who responded, 948 live in regional areas. There were 329 from environmental group members 157 from the timber industry/supply chain and 131 researcher/academic respondents. Of the 169 submissions from organisations, 92 were located in regional areas. Of the 169, 80 are from environmental groups and 49 from the timber industry/supply chain.

The call for submissions was structured around six topic areas, of these, sustainable forestry was the only one equally likely to be raised by all stakeholder groups.

The report notes the skill involved in

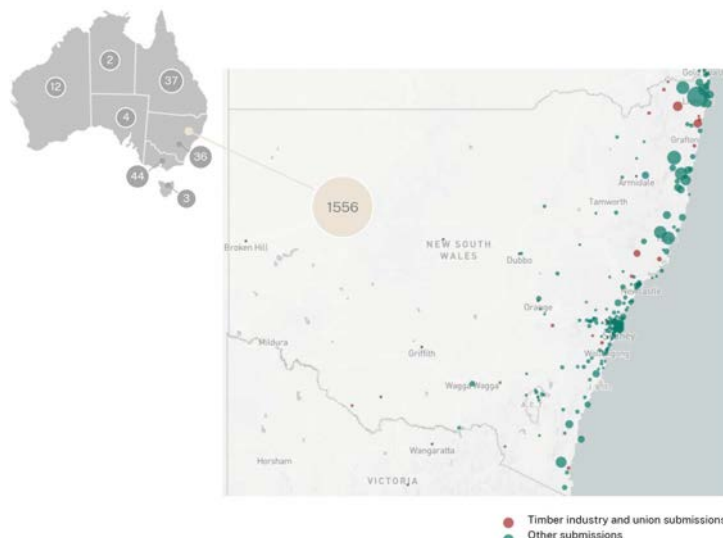


Figure 7 from the report, the distribution of submissions around Australia and NSW. Image: supplied

forest management, saying: "Well planned harvesting at this limited scale results in desirable landscape outcomes further bolstering the sustainability of the current operation. A key example emphasised is the positive role thinning plays reducing fuel loads and managing bushfire risks."

It goes on to quote the Timber NSW submission: "The level of regulation, particularly on public land, is extremely detailed and far more sophisticated than regulation applying to other primary industries."

The risks of closing our native timber industry were also addressed by the Australian Forest Products Association: "By not taking responsibility for sustainable forest management in Australia we are putting pressure on developing countries for further deforestation."

As the report concludes: "The pressure on the timber industry to scale down operations is considered to be in direct conflict with meeting the practical needs of the State for sustainably sourced timber."

The report also notes that active management forestry practices have helped monitor and protect threatened species as well as lower bushfire risk and deliver valuable public recreational access. Feedback notes, "Koala

populations on the North Coast are widespread, stable and not materially impacted by forestry operations."

Plantation needs, both softwood and hardwood are also addressed, with the report noting that they function alongside the native timber supply at the moment, rather than as a ready replacement and come with their own sets of concerns.

While the environmental viewpoints raised contain sensible comments on the environmental and cultural importance of forests, there are also some wild furphies, including the belief that forestry practices have become less sustainable with time.

The impact of Black Summer on the state is a recurring theme, with people worried that the huge amount of forest lost is not being given time to regrow. While many submissions call for an immediate move to plantation-only forestry, others demand that older plantations within native forests be removed from the plantation estate, arguing they should "be restored to native forest".

The lived experiences in regional communities section makes it clear that state forests are seen as valuable recreational facilities as well as major parts of the local economies. One consideration raised was that the GKNP "has been forced on the local community from a mandate from the city. Responsible and sustainable harvesting should continue."

Overall, the report makes a sincere effort to accurately and transparently reflect the range of views on the topic, while also supplying data to weight that evidence. We hope the politicians are as diligent as the report's authors when it comes to the FIAP.

To download the report, click [here](#).



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Predation driving swift parrot losses

Sugar gliders, not forest harvesting, represent the biggest risk to this endangered bird.

IT'S a staple claim of the forest wars in Tasmania: native forest harvesting is driving the swift parrot towards a speedy extinction. Now, new research published in March 2026 *Australian Forestry*, concludes the introduced sugar glider is a far more significant and urgent risk.

Swift parrots are critically endangered with estimates of the wild population around 500 birds.

One of only three migratory species of parrots known, they fly to Tasmania to breed during the warmer months. Their nesting season coincides with the flowering of the Tasmanian blue gum, and also black gum and brooker's gum. They nest in gum tree hollows in pairs or groups or small colonies across multiple trees, and it's thought there is a rotational pattern to their migration to specific areas.

Habitat loss has become the orthodox view for their decline, although other factors are also acknowledged. To quote Birdlife Australia: "The primary cause for the dramatic decline in Swift Parrot numbers has been the historic and on-going removal of habitat throughout their entire range since European colonisation. The most significant threat to the species survival today is the continued destruction of habitat through commercial logging, the impacts of which are exacerbated in Tasmania by the predation of eggs, nestlings and incubating adult females from introduced Sugar Gliders."

Researcher Dr Simon J Grove is an entomologist and ecologist who has been working in Tasmania's forests for decades. He has over 150 academic publications, many on forest management. In the current edition of *Australian Forestry*, Grove tests the hypothesis that native



The swift parrot's biggest threat is the introduced sugar glider.
Image CC Kevin Murray/Wikimedia Commons

forest harvesting is the main driving factor in the decline of swift parrot populations against the competing hypothesis that predation by sugar gliders (syn. Kreff's gliders, *Petaurus notatus*) is responsible for the rapid loss of the birds.

Grove reviewed 16 research papers published by the Difficult Bird Research Group (DBRG) and looked at the data provided, plus two subsequent reports from the Landscape Recovery Foundation that looked at population data and monitoring as well as other research.

His conclusion was stark, as outlined in the paper's abstract: "A review of research papers to elucidate key drivers of decline demonstrates that neither the straightforward forest habitat hypothesis, nor its more-nuanced version that links the threat of sugar glider predation to forest disturbance, is well-supported by the evidence, in contrast to the predation hypothesis which is grounded in empiricism and supported by apparently robust statistical modelling. A conservation strategy that relied solely on

protecting existing breeding habitat would, therefore, make negligible material difference to the swift parrot's fate in the short term, and would do little more than ensure that the remaining birds will continue to be predated when nesting. An all-out focus on predation mitigation remains the only strategy with at least the potential to avoid species extinction."

FWCA Chair Steve Dobbins said the paper should refute the claims that forestry is responsible for swift parrot decline out of the debate for good.

"This study is a wake-up call that exposes how ideology has been allowed to hijack conservation science," Dobbins said. "For years, the native forest industry has been a convenient scapegoat for activists, while the real killers – like the sugar glider – were ignored. We see this same pattern across the board; whether it's the swift parrot or other threatened species, the focus is routinely shifted toward stopping timber workers rather than managing the complex, primary threats like invasive predators and bushfire fuel loads."

Grove's paper also discusses other factors impacting the swift parrot, including climate change, fire, drought and collisions with human-built structures, while concluding that sugar gliders remain the most significant threat.

He notes that, while difficult, an all-out push to drastically reduce predation rates or to make predator-free islands more attractive nesting sites are not only the best hopes for the parrots' survival, but the only options achievable within the timeframe remaining.

For those who do not subscribe to *Australian Forestry*, an open source copy of the paper is available at ResearchGate, click here. Thanks to FWCA Chair Steve Dobbins for alerting us and contributing to this story.

“THE PREDATION HYPOTHESIS IS GROUNDED IN EMPIRICISM AND SUPPORTED BY MODELLING”

International Day of Families

TOMORROW, Friday 15 May, is International Day of Families. This year, the theme is Families, Inequalities and Child Wellbeing. The UN says that this was chosen to underscore how widening inequalities are shaping family life and influencing children's futures. It calls for stronger investment in integrated, family-oriented policies to reduce disparities and support healthy child development.

Multiple-use public forests and some private plantations in Australia are one small push-back against that inequality. As well as delivering well-paid jobs for regional families, they offer a range of free and low-cost recreational activities to encourage family time together in nature.

Bushwalking, horse riding and mountain-bike riding are commonplace in working managed forests and even some national parks. Visitors are generally welcomed outside harvesting areas, though horses and bikes should keep to approved trails in order to protect local ecosystems.



Wynter is one of the resident koalas at Daisy Hill Koala Centre. Image: courtesy Queensland Government

Some of the most beautiful tourist destinations in the country are free in our state forests. If you haven't visited them already, check out Blue Pool in Gippsland's Briagolong State Forest, where you can laze on a lilo in summer or enjoy scenic walks in cooler months; WA's Marrinup State Forest with its trails perfect for walking and riding, as well as forest camps; Niigi Niigi/Sealy Lookout near Coffs Harbour with its panoramic views of rainforest and coast; or Daisy Hill Koala Centre, where you can meet koalas for free just 20 minutes from Brisbane.

So, if you have the chance this weekend, celebrate the International Day of Families by getting out into the green and letting the kids get as muddy as they like.

For those looking to the wider picture, the UN has a 90-minute celebration from 10–11.30am New York time (Saturday midnight to 1.30am AEST) which will be live streamed on UN WebTV.

For more details, click here.

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MRFH report on land use

THE Murray Region Forestry Hub (MRFH) has just released a new report comparing Environmental Plantings vs Timber Plantations, and the findings raise important questions for landowners, policymakers, and industry alike.

Prepared by Indufor, the Land Use Review and Comparison report examines the relative contribution of potential environmental plantings and harvestable timber plantations to regional economies in NSW and northern Victoria. The report explores:

- Return on investment for landholders
- Carbon sequestration outcomes
- Risk profiles of each land use
- Contributions to local communities

Dean Anderson, chair of MRFH, notes that “A key finding of the review is that for every 1000 hectares planted to Timber Plantation rather than Environmental



Employment is one of the areas where timber plantations significantly outperformed environmental plantings. Image: supplied

Plantings about 20 to 40 extra jobs are created locally which equates to about an extra \$2 to \$3 million of annual household income. The overall impact of this prioritising of Timber Plantations over Environmental Plantings is about a \$2 to \$5 million increase in the Gross Regional Product for every 1,000ha.”

For both direct economic returns and employment (both direct and indirect), timber plantations outperformed

environmental plantings. The study also found that, over a 25-year crediting period, the total ACCUs generated for environmental plantings and timber plantations in the region were broadly comparable on a per hectare basis for a range of growth rates.

As the MRFH team put it in their LinkedIn Post: “We invite informed discussion – how should Australia balance environmental goals with economic productivity in land use?” This report delivers the data to help land managers make good decisions in answering that question.

To download the full report, [click here](#), and for an overview, [click here](#).

Longnosed bandicoot thriving

IN a good news story, it appears the longnosed bandicoot is happy to live alongside forestry operations. The NSW Government Forestry Research Unit, working as part of the Forestry Corporation of NSW's Forest Fauna Watch program, has recorded these shy, nocturnal marsupials at 120 of the 170 survey sites where camera traps were placed. Using this data, and accounting for how difficult the animals are to detect, occupancy modelling indicated that these bandicoots were present at around 90% of all survey sites in the program.

The species most commonly occupied sites with moderate temperatures and annual rainfall, with an increased presence at sites that had rough, uneven ground, and higher portions of rainforest nearby. The analysis also found that their presence wasn't affected by things like timber harvesting or past fires.

The broader Eastern NSW forest monitoring program stretches across 300 sites in State Forests along the east



One of the bandicoots caught on camera traps. Image: supplied

coast, from the Queensland border to Victoria. Sites are measured in spring and autumn each year using sound recorders, ultrasonic sound recorders and cameras to give valuable information on species' occupancy and spread in NSW State Forests.

This work is funded under the Coastal IFOA Monitoring Program and overseen by the NSW Forest Monitoring Steering Committee.

Longnosed bandicoots were once widespread throughout NSW but have now largely disappeared from populated areas such as Sydney, where only a few remnant populations remain. Aside from camera traps, you're most likely to find the rabbit-sized marsupial by looking for the small, round conical holes they dig into which they insert their pointy snouts, looking for bugs for dinner.

Hyne community grants opening soon

FOR nearly 20 years, the Hyne Community Trust has been investing in the wellbeing of the area in which so many employees and their families live and work. The trust has provided almost \$1 million to the Tumbarumba community since it was established in 2007, focusing on initiatives that provide lasting benefits to the community.

This year's round of applications to the Hyne Community Trust opens next month and eligible community groups are encouraged to consider how the Trust can support them to deliver lasting benefits to the Tumbarumba region.

Previous supported projects include the extension of the Carcoola Children's Centre, construction of the local Men's Shed, and even a new generator for local SES volunteers.

As a major local employer, Hyne is deeply connected with the community and has an admirable record of corporate responsibility, of which the Hyne Community Trust is but one part. An example of a recently successful project is the Tumbarumba Sports Academy and its new basketball hoops. Hyne Community Trust Director, Janet Anderson said this is the second grant the Tumbarumba Sports Academy has received as the facility goes from strength to strength.

"The provision of good quality sports and recreational opportunities for the Tumbarumba region enables health and fitness in a fun, social and affordable way for all ages," Anderson said.



From left, Charlee Blencowe from Tumbarumba Sports Academy (TSA), Hyne Trust director Janet Anderson, TSA's Bernadette Alleyn and Patrick Rhynehart. Image: courtesy Hyne Community Trust

"The funds to fit out the sports hall with new basketball hoops has further improved the range of quality sporting opportunities for the community.

"This comes after the Trust previously helped to fund the transformation of the mezzanine level into a safe Youth Precinct which is now fully operational and complete with security cameras in both the sports hall and adjacent dance hall." (See story in Enews #850.)

The Tumbarumba Sports Academy is increasingly recognised as the local sports hub, with activities including

boxing and martial arts that provide both mental and physical fitness as well as discipline and a social element. The Academy has a rapidly growing membership, with knowledgeable and experienced coaches, and well organised sessions.

Importantly, it acts as a safe space for local youth to gather and relax as well as play sport, with additional services including a youth café, a recording studio for podcasts and

music and even a barbershop. All these activities help keep kids connected to the community, while the building itself doubles as a fully equipped multi-purpose disaster response facility.

Trust applications open on 1 June and close 30 June 2026.

Tumbarumba community groups considering applying for a Hyne Community Trust grant should start reviewing the 2026 guidelines available here: <https://www.hyne.com.au/about/community>

Projects must be valued over \$10,000 and demonstrate how they will provide lasting benefits for the community in order to meet the criteria.

For more information, contact tumbatrust@hyne.com.au

“THE TRUST HAS PROVIDED ALMOST \$1 MILLION TO THE TUMBARUMBA COMMUNITY



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