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# timber & FORESTRY *e*news



SPECIAL REPORT

## 4 Corners' Forestry Fail

COVER STORY P 2

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T&F Enews watched Monday night's *4 Corners* with the same disappointment and growing anger that most of the industry felt. In this special issue, we look closely at what was wrong with the story and cover some of the

early reactions to it. Next week's issue will look at the fallout in more depth. If you would like to contribute, please contact us at [editors@timberandforestryenews.com](mailto:editors@timberandforestryenews.com)

The Enews team

# Taking an axe to forestry

Monday's *4 Corners* was a lesson in missed journalistic opportunity.

THERE'S a core lesson you're taught as a baby journalist: don't let yourself get in the way of the story. Which makes Monday night's *4 Corners* 'Timber Turmoil' report all the more disappointing. It missed the important and complex issues at the heart of Australian native forestry and their significant impacts on rural and regional centres, jobs, the economy and the future of the regional environment, instead accepting a line of argument put forward by environmental activists, even without the benefit of data.

Anger from the industry was palpable even before the program aired, with the adverts painting native timber harvesting in a negative light and allowing activist Green voices to frame the discussion. Sadly, for the majority of the actual report, that pattern was repeated. Rather than a dispassionate investigation of the costs, benefits and impacts of native timber forestry from environmental, economic or social positions, *4 Corners* accepted the flawed premise that native timber harvesting is an environmentally



The opening credits for the *4 Corners* episode. Image: supplied

costly practice that was only being limited in its rapaciousness by valiant activists.

Let's take a closer look at some of the report's flaws – and some facts that didn't make the cut.

## START WITH A SPIN

The story opened with "Across Australia,

“**IMPORTANTLY, FORESTRY REPLANTS THE AREAS IT HAS HARVESTED**”

native forest logging has long been unpopular” and a clip of an anti-forestry protest. “And now, it's losing political support,” added journalist Jessica Longbottom. This framing permeated the arguments that followed.

It is true that multiple polls over the past five years in NSW, Tasmania and Victoria have shown a majority of people calling for an end

to native timber harvesting – overall numbers have been in the region of 55-70% against, 35-20% in favour of retaining the industry and 10% unsure.

It's also true that polls taken in regions where native timber harvesting is actually carried out have returned the opposite result: a pre-election poll in Gilmore last year saw some 80% of voters, including more than half of those intending to vote Green, in favour of the industry continuing to produce high-

Cont P 3

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From P 2

grade products. All the above have been of smallish poll sizes, generally around 1000 respondents or fewer.

Back in 2023, the North East NSW Forestry Hub engaged StollzNow Research to look at public attitudes to native timber forestry a part of its *Social Licence to Operate* report (click here to read). The report showed clearly that

respondents who were more informed on the realities of native timber harvesting (including the small range of areas open to it, the regrowth cycles and the regulation governing it) were significantly more in support of the industry.

“Losing political support” is also hard to defend when Labor, the Coalition and even small parties like One Nation and the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers have publicly declared support for the sector, with only the Greens and some Independents committed to ending native timber forestry.

At the end of that introduction came the second major framing of the story: “While loggers have been forced out in one state, they’re now chopping down native trees in another. And it’s fuelled by taxpayer dollars that were meant to transition the industry out of this.”

An earnest young man (Hugh Nicklason, a forest campaigner for the Wilderness Society, Tasmania) gave his ‘message to the Victorian government: “Yeah, stop funding forest destruction down here in Tasmania.”

For ‘balance’, Longbottom concluded her introduction with: “The thing is: Australians love native forest timber ... But now Australia’s running out of forest to fell ... In this *4 Corners*, we follow the logs and the money and ask whether there really is a future in native logging?”

Which would have been a great question to investigate. Alas, it was never asked.



1



2

1/ Australian Sustainable Hardwoods owner and managing director Vince Hurley (right) with Federal Member for Gippsland Darren Chester (left) and Senator Murray Watt. Image: courtesy Darren Chester

2/ Tasmanian native timber made into high-value architectural lining boards by Neville Smith Forestry Products at Flinders Residence, designed by Abe McCarthy Architects. Image: courtesy Neville Smith Forestry Products/photo Shannon McGrath

## MANUFACTURING A PROBLEM

The story proper began with a captivating character, former Greens MP Paul O’Halloran, driving after timber logging trucks through Tasmania. He believes the trucks are carrying native timber logs bound for Victoria and described “chasing” them.

The truck was followed to Western Junction Sawmill, which has supply contracts in place with Victoria’s Australian Sustainable Hardwoods (ASH), a company in which the Victorian Government holds a 49% stake.

While the report bounced between topics for visual impact, we’ll go through them in turn.

“One reason Victoria shut down native logging in state forests was that it was running out of places to log,” said Longbottom. “Most of the giant trees are long gone — due to fire, land clearing and logging.”

Technically that last part is true. But what she forgot to mention was the percentages. Fire has been number one in recent years. In terms of humans removing trees from the environment, forestry is a very distant fourth behind agriculture, mining (albeit now reduced

in Victoria, but a major driver in other states) and development. Importantly, forestry *replants* the areas it has harvested, a fact ignored throughout the program. Most of the native timber harvested in Australia is re-harvesting of previously logged areas, decades or a century after their first harvest.

As to the first part, Longbottom factchecked herself some three minutes later, noting that the Victorian government called a sudden end to native timber forestry thanks to legal challenges locking up the forest estate, not an absence of the forest itself.

Longbottom said, “The Victorian government paid 1.5 billion dollars to support the transition away from native forestry —and assist businesses affected by the shutdown. While some companies took the money and closed, others used it to stay open and source native timber elsewhere.”

Again, true, and a fact underlined by ASH’s managing director Vince Hurley, who makes it clear that a very significant proportion of the Victorian government money paid to the company was penalties as a result of cancelled contracts.

This segment opened in the town of Heyfield, where ASH’s mill is sited, chatting with multiple locals who demonstrated the mill’s centrality as a local employer and economic driver. Longbottom gave a brief history of the Victorian Government’s partnership with

“ THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT ‘COMPENSATION’ MONEY WAS PAYING PENALTIES FOR FAILURE TO SUPPLY

Cont P 4



From P 4

(EWP) that is highly sought-after, allowing multistorey construction from timber and avoiding a huge percentage of the carbon cost for such builds in concrete and steel – was surely worth more than half a sentence.

Instead, Dr Daniela Juric, lecturer in forensic accounting at Monash University, was brought in to discuss ASH's books. "It looks like an entity that's struggling to stay afloat without the additional compensation from the Victorian state government," she said.

Hurley reiterated that the Victorian Government had paid ASH significant penalties for failure to supply – not money intended to stop native harvesting, as Longbottom's line of questioning appeared to imply – which ASH reinvested. He noted that the past several years had seen massive and expensive retooling for the company's manufacturing division, which was very clearly paying off in its EWP sales. Using the penalty monies to fund those machinery assets has delivered another life for the business. He suggested that Longbottom sounded as though she was having a go at ASH for surviving and keeping its workforce employed.

"I am questioning the use of taxpayer money to prop up a business after the Victorian government banned native forest logging," she said.

Hurley replied: "You need to ask the



**Timber NSW's Andrew Hurford during his ABC interview.** Image: courtesy Timber NSW

Victorian government why they banned native logging and therefore were liable for failure to supply payments."

To give credit, Longbottom attempted exactly this, asking for an interview for weeks and finally pitching her question to the Premier at a press conference.

Premier Jacinta Allan replied that the government's main focus was jobs, saying: "We'll always look at ways to back workers, particularly in these small rural communities where companies like this one, they're a big and important source of income and support for that area."

At this point, you might be waiting to hear back from the workers relieved to still have their jobs in Heyfield. Don't. We never saw them again.

**“WE’LL ALWAYS LOOK AT WAYS TO BACK WORKERS”**

## THE CLAIM GAME

Back in Tasmania, against background shots that showed small logging coupes in large swathes of forest, Longbottom climbed onto a large tree stump, saying: "Giant trees like this one aren't meant to be felled at all. The state forestry watchdog says logging contractors had to cut it down for safety reasons.

"When you look at this stump, it's absolutely huge... One of the things that's turned many Australians against logging is the felling of old growth trees like this."

Rather than ask STT about those safety reasons, Longbottom again handed the floor to the Wilderness Society's Nicklason, who said "These places around here, particularly in the Central Highlands, which should have been protected decades ago, are still being logged. That is ultimately partly being driven by Western Junction, ASH and the Victorian government."

Longbottom did not ask how a mill purchase made four years ago had changed protection policies made decades ago, but she did ask whether the ownership of the mill had any real impact or if the timber would simply have found another buyer.

Nicklason replied: "The reality is, is that the industry has been on the decline for decades. So that demand should be going down."

Cont P 6

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From P 5

How activists impeding native forestry are meant to directly cause people to stop wanting hardwood benchtops is anyone's guess.

Longbottom did push back on Nicklason's claim native harvesting has increased recently, noting that "the state timber corporation denies any increase — and says harvesting levels have remained relatively consistent over the past five years. From next year the corporation will reduce the number of native logs it harvests and provide more plantation timber to sawmills."

The story then returned to the log chasing it had opened with, showing whole logs being trucked onto the interstate ferry. O'Halloran and his equally charming colleague Patrick Johnson shared evidence of white-stickered whole logs from the Tasmanian public estate being shipped to Victoria for processing.

"Tasmanian authorities have repeatedly stated that whole logs from public forests stay in Tasmania — to keep jobs on the island. It says that none of these logs are from the public estate — and they're all from private forests," said Longbottom.

Representatives of Sustainable Timber Tasmania and Tasmanian Resources Minister Felix Ellis backed this claim up. However, both have since admitted this was a political preference, not law nor a defined contract term for supply.

Readers will recall that Tasmanian sawmillers were worried about this precise impact of Victoria's exit from native forestry, with the penalty payouts from broken contracts being perceived as granting Victorian sawmills an unfair advantage. The ABC reported on this at length: [click here](#) for just one report from ABC Hobart's Ellen Coulter.

The *4 Corners* report suggested that these whole logs were traced back to Neville Smith Forest Products (NSFP) by them, but the written version of the story

“WHAT WE HAVE DONE IS IMPORT MORE AND MORE TIMBER FROM OVERSEAS TO FILL THAT GAP



**The ABC vehicle became bogged after the interview and Andrew Hurford stopped to winch them out. Jessica Longbottom is in the background filming.** Image: courtesy Timber NSW

([click here](#)) suggested it was a phone call from owner James Neville-Smith that solved the mystery. Whichever is the case, Neville-Smith made it clear his business had in no way violated its contracts, a position supported on Tuesday in media comments from STT and Minister Ellis.

Recently, the company's Tasmanian facility has been converted to deal with plantation log only, meaning that NSFP needed to deal with its native hardwood log contract volume elsewhere. Most was sold to other Tasmanian sawmills and a small amount of native hardwood log consisting of mixed STT and private supply went to Victoria.

Longbottom gave Neville-Smith room to talk about the fact that hardwood products have to come from somewhere and Australia's highly regulated industry is a better option than most overseas alternatives.

While she didn't follow up on that point, she did clarify why his logs were being processed in Victoria, saying: "He says his shift to plantation in one mill means he can no longer process all his native logs — but that he still has to fulfil his contracts with customers for native timber products. So he is selling some logs to Victoria and they process them there. It's not about making a quick buck, he says."

The fact that this problem arose

entirely because NSFP has been transitioning into 100% plantation timber was yet another discussion left out.

## NOT A KOALA IN SIGHT

New South Wales was the last port of call for the story, opening with another charismatic environmentalist, out spotlighting for Greater Gliders. Scott 'Sooty' Daines, president of South East Forest Rescue, was very clear that the goal was to find as many gliders as possible so that native timber harvesting would be excluded from as many parts of the forest as possible.

In this section of the report, Longbottom came closest to actually interrogating the future of native timber forestry. Daines noted that he uploads his information on glider locations as soon as it is gathered, and that Forestry Corporation NSW adjusts their harvesting range accordingly. Longbottom added that the formation of the Great Koala National Park had removed 40% of wood supply in the north of the state in a single stroke.

Despite the passing mention of the GKNP, none of Dr Bradley Law's koala research showing the animals do better in State Forests than National Parks was cited, nor were any recent population counts showing that multiple endangered species including the Greater Glider and Corroboree Frogs (see *Enews* #903) are doing well in NSW's managed State Forests.

Longbottom's final interviewee, Timber NSW's chairman, Andrew Hurford, was given a couple of minutes at the very end to talk about the difficulties of operating against this level of activism, saying, "I think that we've got a rule set there which is, almost by design, trying to regulate the industry out of existence."

He described the operations of his five timber mills, talking about how they source from both private and public estates and selectively harvest on a cyclical basis, though none of those terms were explained for the lay audience, nor the fact that the lush forest location for the interview was itself regrowth of recently harvested forest,

Hurford added, "I'd say there's no other jurisdiction in the world that has a more complex or tougher rule set to operate

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**JUNE**

**30: Timber Queensland Presentation – University of Queensland, Brisbane, 12noon - 5.00pm.** WoodSolutions presents Queensland Timber Trajectory: award-winning exemplars showing the way to modern construction. For more information and to register, visit <https://www.timberqueensland.com.au/event-details/woodsolutions-presents-queensland-timber-trajectory-award-winning-exemplars-showcasing-the-way-to-modern-construction>

**JULY**

**9: National Centre for Timber Durability and Design Life-Annual Showcase 2026 – UniSC, Moreton Bay, 8.30am - 4.00pm.** The event will highlight the latest research, innovation and industry engagement across the Centre's work in timber durability, design life, circularity and sustainable construction. For more information and to register, visit <https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/national-centre-for-timber-durability-and-design-life-annual-showcase-2026-tickets-1987465010347>

**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](mailto:tahlia@ntha.com.au)

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**AUGUST**

**7: WCTE 2027 – Call for Abstracts.** Call for abstracts for WCTE 2027 is now open. Submission deadline is 7 August. Visit <https://event.fourwaves.com/wcte27/submission>

**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](mailto: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/>

**19-20: International Woodchip and Biomass Trade Conference – Singapore.** The conference will serve as a key meeting point for the global biomass community. For more information and to register, visit: <https://web.cvent.com/event/7fd17c6e-d403-4eb4-a6cd-ab69df757864/summary>

**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](mailto: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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From P 6

under. I guess the question becomes, what is it that we want? The alternative, as we've closed more and more of our forests to productive forestry in Australia, what we have done is import more and more timber from overseas to fill that gap."

Longbottom replied: "Well, I guess people are concerned about the environment and that's what you're up against."

To which Hurford countered: "Yes, but they're not concerned about the environment in West Papua or Solomon Islands or... which is where we're transferring our timber production to."

Frustratingly, this line of discussion was again dropped, with the conversation instead turning to hardwood plantations – Hurford's comment that they require governments with long-term vision was only too depressing in this age of soundbite social media politics.

## NOTABLE ABSENCES

In the final two minutes of the program, Longbottom said: "Across the country, native timber is being squeezed. For the industry – and the towns that rely on logging – it's a fight for survival."

Covering that fight would have made for a fascinating *4 Corners*. Alas, not a single worker was interviewed, beyond one quick question in passing to a Heyfield resident as part of the introduction to Vince Hurley.

This wasn't the only notable absence. In the whole episode, only one forest scientist was quoted: ANU's Prof David Lindemeyer. Longbottom correctly identified him as "one of the industry's foremost detractors", which raises the

question of why no other scientific voice was asked to respond to his claims and why data such as Dr Law's work on koalas was excluded.

Lindemeyer was filmed in a Victorian forest logged in 2022, about which he said: "It hasn't regenerated properly. It's no longer a forest. What we're really seeing is the creation of an ecological desert."

Never mind that one of the consequences of Victoria's sudden halt of native forestry was the end of VicForest's seed collection, sowing and replanting programs, at a time when seed stocks were historically low thanks to Black Summer, and that DEECA, the replacement agency, is still getting up to speed.

Regional areas which rely on forestry as an economic driver did not appear in the program. No-one from Herons Creek was asked what will happen to their small town after mill job losses, nor were any of the consumers who buy the end hardwood products asked if they would rather buy their flooring or beams from less sustainable sources.

The broader economic case was

also mostly missing. Hurley was able to show the huge return on investment the Victorian Government has received in keeping ASH jobs going, and Ellis was able to mention that forestry is a \$1.2bn industry for Tasmania, but there was no wider discussion of the impact of native timber harvesting on the bottom lines of the States, nor Federally. There was certainly no calculation of the carbon costs of using native hardwood building materials rather than their high-carbon-cost steel, concrete and aluminium alternatives.

Despite three stalwarts of the industry being interviewed, timber sector voices were also mostly absent. In the 43 minutes run time of the program (ignoring credits), timber interests received only 11 minutes and 10 seconds: perhaps a few seconds more if you add the clips of STT staff in their committee hearing.

Instead, Longbottom focused on what my younger friends would call the vibes, foregrounding environmentalists who were clearly well intentioned but whose understanding of the issues was based on personal beliefs, not data. The result isn't only skewed, it's a missed opportunity, as those questions she asked but never answered are vitally important ones.

It's particularly disappointing to see a report this lacking in balance on the ABC, as the national broadcaster has a long history of comprehensive reporting on the Australian timber sector, particularly on its *Landline* and regional radio programs.

*Enews* has some of the early industry reaction to the program on pages 10 and 11 and will cover more in future issues. See ad on this page for how to reach us if you would like your comments added. If you missed it, *4 Corners* 'Timber Turmoil' is available on iView.

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**“ IN THE WHOLE EPISODE, ONLY ONE FOREST SCIENTIST WAS QUOTED**

**On the cover: Andrew Hurford explained the highly regulated Australian timber industry to the program, to little avail. Image: Timber NSW**



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# Timber industry responds to 4 Corners

## From factchecking to frankly irate, the replies have held the ABC flagship to task.

SINCE the first ads ran last week for ABC's *4 Corners* Timber Turmoil, voices across the sector have been raised in rebuttal. Here's a round up of some of the points being made across the sector.

### FORESTRY AUSTRALIA

Monday saw Forestry Australia President Dr Michelle Freeman take to the airwaves on *3AW Mornings with Tom Elliott*. In the interview, which aired before the program screened but after participants had already spoken about their experiences with *4 Corners*, Dr Freeman emphasised that it was not logical to pretend stopping native timber harvesting in Victoria would stop all native timber harvesting.

She told Elliott: "I must admit, I'm rather bemused by all the reporting that's been coming out about this recently, because it's not surprising at all. Stopping timber harvesting in one area doesn't magically make demand for that timber go away. Australians want and need timber products, and they should.

"Timber is renewable and natural, it captures and stores carbon to help us combat climate change, and it's beautiful. The mental and physical health benefits of living and working in timber buildings have been proven. So if we're not sourcing timber from our own backyard, we have to get it from elsewhere, or substitute it with other products that are almost always non-renewable, like steel, concrete or plastic."

Elliott pressed Dr Freeman on claims that had been published on the ABC website that morning alleging a 'loophole' that allowed Tasmanian logs to be exported to Victoria (see main story, this issue). She declined to comment on the details of the allegations, which subsequent events on Tuesday revealed to be a case of political promises running behind contracted arrangements, but spoke instead to the broader regulation of the sector.



**Dr Michelle Freeman, President of Forestry Australia, told 3AW's Mornings with Tom Elliott that stopping native forest harvesting in one state does not end the demand for timber, it simply shifts it elsewhere.** Image: supplied by Forestry Australia

Freeman said: "...Harvesting in Australia is highly regulated and independently certified. I'm confident that whatever is happening is in line with the rules and regulations, because the oversight is strong and there's such high scrutiny on these operations, particularly from environmental groups.

"I think we need to look at the bigger picture here as well. In this case, at least we're still sourcing our timber from Australian forests, which have strong oversight and are strongly regulated. But the reality is that Australia is already a net importer of wood products from international forests.

"Our timber trade deficit is to the tune of \$2 billion a year, and we know a significant proportion of that comes from what we call high-risk countries, those where the sustainability, environmental and social credentials are hard to verify. And that does include

**“4 CORNERS REVOKED AN OPPORTUNITY FOR AFPA TO PROVIDE AN INDUSTRY RESPONSE,**

conflict timber from Russia coming into Australia via China. So Australia really needs to decide what it wants. For me personally, I would much rather we sourced our timber needs locally, from our own forests, where we know where it's come from and we can verify it."

You can listen to the full interview by clicking here.

### DARREN CHESTER MP

The Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Darren Chester MP, Federal Member for Gippsland, was characteristically blunt in Tuesday's Facebook post,

saying: "When it comes to timber, governments have two choices: harvest our own in an environmentally sustainable way, or take someone else's.

"Shutting down Australian forestry means more imported timber, fewer regional jobs, weaker bushfire capability and more pressure on countries with poorer environmental standards.

"Our timber workers deserve better than contempt from the Labor-Greens and their friends at the ABC."

In a media release, he added: "From the first sentence of the program, it was obvious the ABC wasn't going to be interested in presenting a balanced view of our world-class and environmentally sustainable native hardwood timber industry," Mr Chester said.

"There was no attempt to include the views of some of Australia's leading forest scientists who support the hardwood timber industry, as the ABC dragged out the same old activists...

"...Thousands of jobs have already been lost, communities have been destroyed, and the regions are less safe

From P 10

because we have lost the equipment and the skilled workforce which we've always relied on during major bushfire events."

## AFPA

AFPA's Acting CEO Richard Hyett was one of the first out of the gates on Monday night, saying: "Tonight's story was not balanced, accurate or fair, and blatantly prioritised activism over credible journalism."

"The program ignored the evidence supporting Australia's world-leading forest management systems and failed to present a balanced assessment of a sustainable industry that provides renewable products, regional jobs and significant environmental benefits."

Hyett confirmed that the episode had lost what balance it may have had at conception during its production. He said: "Disappointingly, *4 Corners* revoked an opportunity for AFPA – the peak national body for forestry – to provide an industry response, despite inviting our spokesperson to speak in April."

"We were one of many industry representatives who were ignored or misrepresented by *4 Corners*."

Hyett echoed Dr Freeman's point that hardwood timbers are an important part of our building materials library and that if not sourced under Australia's carefully regulated system, they will be imported from far less-regulated markets.

He also spoke eloquently on the human impacts of activist drives to halt all native timber forestry, saying: "Native bans in Victoria and WA have also had devastating impacts on regional jobs and communities, local economies and long-term investment in Australia's sixth-largest manufacturing sector."

"Rather than slamming an industry contributing more than \$24 billion a year to the economy, *4 Corners* should



1/ Log wagons at a Russian railway station. Australia's \$2 billion timber trade deficit is partly met by imports from high-risk countries, including conflict timber from Russia entering via China. Image: CC A.Savin/Wikipedia

2/ AFPA's Acting CEO Richard Hyett (left). Image: courtesy AFPA/Facebook

have focused on the need to invest in sustainable forestry and support essential Australian-made products used every day, including flooring, decking, furniture, pallets, packaging, paper and power poles."

Hyett added: "The 80,000 Australians employed in forestry in many regional communities would also take offence to working for a 'zombie industry', as one academic incorrectly claimed in the story."

## STT

On Tuesday, STT announced that new contracts designed to replace existing agreements due to expire in 2027 will contain a requirement that logs sourced from Tasmania's public production forests are processed in Tasmania.

Dean Kearney, CEO of STT, said, "Our responsibility is to manage Tasmania's public forest resource for the benefit of Tasmania. By strengthening on-island processing, we can support

local businesses, local jobs and the next generation of investment in Tasmania's wood processing sector."

## NEVILLE SMITH GROUP

The parent company of Neville Smith Forestry Products also responded to the program with clarifications, pointing out that over the past 24 months it has processed 98.4% of all logs procured in its own sawmills in Tasmania and will be transitioning to 100% within 12 months.

NSG also noted that the vast majority of its annual log supply is plantation hardwood sourced from private forest estates and is fully PEFC (Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification) Chain of Custody certified.

The company currently employs over 150 Tasmanians directly and many more indirectly located in regional Tasmania.

All logs supplied to Powelltown (Vic) were certified, compliant and from regulated Tasmanian sources only. While the sale of those logs was allowed under current contracts, NSG strongly supports the Minister for Resources and STT's future direction regarding on-island processing requirements for native logs in Tasmania.

"NSG has been a willing and active participant in the Forest Congress process facilitated by Kirsha Kaechele," said the statement. "During this process, NSG has listened intently to all stakeholders including First Nations Leaders, environmental groups, forest growers, logistics providers and sawmilling stakeholders, with a view to find alignment and a practical way to ensure that our forests are sustainably managed in perpetuity."

*If you would like your reaction to the program to form a part of Enews' coverage, please contact us at: [editors@timberandforestryenews.com](mailto:editors@timberandforestryenews.com)*

# Free modern housing training

## The new course will support modern methods of construction in Australia.

BUILDING on its existing free training courses, Melbourne Polytechnic's Future of Housing Construction Centre of Excellence (FHCCoE) has launched a new, free microcredential, Design for Manufacture and Assembly (DfMA), which addresses a critical workforce skills gap identified by industry as a barrier to more widespread adoption of modern methods of construction.

DfMA is widely recognised as a foundational capability for organisations seeking to adopt modern methods of construction (MMC). It requires project teams to consider manufacturing, transport, assembly and construction requirements from the earliest stages of design, helping improve buildability, increase productivity, reduce waste, and support more efficient project delivery.

As Australia seeks to increase housing supply while improving productivity and sustainability outcomes, strengthening DfMA capability across the workforce is becoming increasingly important.

Federal Minister for Skills and Training, the Hon Andrew Giles MP, said the project demonstrates how Australia's national network of Centres of Excellence is helping address emerging workforce and productivity challenges.

"The nationally networked TAFE Centres of Excellence are bringing together industry, TAFEs and other stakeholders to tackle some of Australia's most pressing workforce and productivity challenges," he said.

"Through industry-led training and national collaboration, the Future of Housing Construction TAFE Centre of Excellence is leading the development of a modernised national construction workforce to build the homes Australians need. Through its innovative programs, it is supporting the construction industry to adopt modern methods of construction



**Better understanding of DfMA will result in faster, more economical modular construction to help meet housing needs.** Image: courtesy Melbourne Polytechnic

that will strengthen Australia's housing sector and create opportunities for workers across the country.

"This new course demonstrates how the Centre is responding directly to industry needs and helping to build the workforce needed for the future."

The free courses offer an inclusive and accessible way for skilled construction professionals, businesses and people entering the industry who need to understand the design principles that underpin successful MMC projects, including Australia's ambitious housing targets.

"Modern methods of construction can help us build homes faster, smarter and more efficiently, but we need a workforce with the right capabilities to make that happen," said Victorian Minister for Skills and TAFE, The Hon Colin Brooks MP.

"Through the FHCCoE, we're equipping people across Australia with practical, industry-led training that will help grow the workforce needed to build more homes and support Victoria's future. The Centre is backed by a joint \$50 million investment

from the Allan and Albanese Governments and is helping ensure our training system keeps pace with the evolving needs of the housing and construction industry."

Frances Coppolillo, Chief Executive of Melbourne Polytechnic, said the new course demonstrated the role of the FHCCoE as an industry-led national hub for skills development.

"The Centre was established to work closely with industry to identify emerging capability needs and respond quickly with relevant education and training

solutions," he said.

"Industry told us that design for manufacture and assembly capability was critical to supporting wider adoption of modern methods of construction, and this course is a direct response to that feedback.

Damien Crough, Executive Chairman of prefabAUS, said DfMA capability was essential if Australia wanted to unlock the full benefits of MMC.

"One of the biggest barriers to wider adoption of modern methods of construction is that many projects are still being designed using traditional approaches and then adapted for manufacturing later," he said.

"DfMA turns that thinking around. It brings manufacturing, logistics, assembly and construction considerations into the design process from the beginning, resulting in projects that are more efficient, more predictable and easier to deliver."

The new online DfMA course is the third in the Centre's national training program and draws on the knowledge and experience of subject matter experts, including partner prefabAUS to ensure the training addresses real industry needs.

To register, [click here](#).

For more on the FHCCoE and other microcredentials, [click here](#).

**“ DfMA RESULTS IN PROJECTS THAT ARE MORE EFFICIENT, MORE PREDICTABLE AND EASIER TO DELIVER ”**



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The new 895.3 for higher productivity in tough conditions

# NZ fire data informs

NEW research from the Bioeconomy Science Institute Maiangi Taiao aims to improve New Zealand's wildfire preparedness and response.

The institute has developed national-scale wildfire hazard potential data layers to help communities, businesses and wildfire managers better understand the areas that are more likely to burn under high-risk conditions, and how severe fire behaviour is likely to be.

The data was developed by simulating more than 500,000 potential ignitions and wildfire growth around New Zealand. Fire scientist Laura Kiely, who led the work, says the team modelled potential fires under set conditions – not actual fires that have happened. “We’re not saying this is the number of fires that will happen at any time. Rather, we’re considering if we have an ignition occurring, then what happens? What does that look like? Combining data from a high number of simulations allows



**Ignition probability for the region near Upper Hutt on the North Island.**  
Image: supplied

us to consider the potential fire behaviour and the probability of it occurring.”

The data combines information about likely ignition drivers, fuel and weather conditions and potential fire behaviour to provide a consistent, documented baseline for planning, prevention, preparedness and risk communication. The team is designing these layers so they can be shared and reused in operational tools and scientific workflows.

“This will help identify what parts of New Zealand burn repeatedly under historical locally extreme weather

conditions in our simulations and what parts have high- or low-intensity fires – to give an indication of what a wildfire could look like in a particular area if a fire were to occur there,” Laura says.

“This can enable safer wildfire management, resilience planning, better-prepared responses and more transparent conversations about mitigation. Knowing the potential hazard that could occur allows us to better prepare for a wildfire.”

Consistent hazard layers can help explain why defensible space, building design choices and protection of evacuation routes matter—supporting resilience.

The team is working with councils and risk analysis companies that have already expressed interest in using this data.

The data layers can be accessed by clicking here.

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# Claymark acquires Tilling

IN a letter from Glenn Tilling on Friday, Claymark Australia announced that on 31 July 2026, it will complete the acquisition of the Tilling Group.

With its storied 63-year history, Tilling is one of the best-known names in Australian timber.

As the letter said, “Claymark’s Mortim distribution business, together with Tilling SmartFrame, strengthens our service capability across Australia and supports the expansion of our product offering. By combining Claymark’s culture of ‘Ingrained Precision in everything we do’ with Tilling’s longstanding expertise, we are positioned to deliver even greater value and service to customers nationwide.

“The Tilling SmartFrame team will continue operating under the trusted Tilling name, retaining their staff and upholding the high standards that



**Tilling back in its early days at Eltham. The company – and its product range – has evolved enormously since then.** Image: courtesy Tilling

have made them a preferred partner to timber merchants and the wider building industry for decades.”

Paul Pedersen, executive director, Claymark Group, said, “It’s a truly exciting time for our industry. With Claymark guiding both Mortim and Tilling as independently run businesses, we are strengthening our national supply chain while keeping each operation focused on what it does best. This approach ensures we continue delivering what the Australian building sector needs, while still honouring the history and values of

the Tilling family.”

Glenn Tilling, son of Norm and Judy and managing director Tilling SmartFrame, said, “Since its beginnings in 1963, the Tilling Group has had many significant landmark events, and today’s announcement is one of them.

“This process ensures the legacy of Norm, Judy, and the Tilling family in the coming years and decades. We’re excited about our people and the combined business enabling them to bring our customers more products, more brands, great service and value, supported by many years of relationships and experience.

“We’re also delighted that a quality driven business like Claymark is taking the reins of the Tilling Group. We look forward to this new chapter, combining the strengths of both organisations to deliver outstanding results for our customers, now and into the future.”

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# Native bee claims questioned

FWCA asks how native bee climate study supports call to end forestry.

FOREST & Wood Communities Australia (FWCA) has written to Macquarie University researcher Dr Carmen da Silva seeking clarification regarding comments made during a recent ABC Sydney Radio interview in which she stated that Australians need to “try to stop native forest logging” in order to help protect native bees.

FWCA Chair Steve Dobbys said the organisation welcomed the research and acknowledged the importance of understanding the challenges facing Australia's native bee populations under a changing climate.

“Native bees are an important but often overlooked component of Australia's biodiversity, and research that improves our understanding of their ecology and climate vulnerability should be encouraged,” Dobbys said.

“However, after reviewing Dr da Silva's recently published paper, FWCA has been unable to identify how a recommendation to cease native forest logging arose from research that appears not to have examined forestry as a causal factor.”

Dobbys said the study focused on the thermal tolerance of 95 Australian native bee species and examined how nesting behaviour influences vulnerability to rising temperatures.

“The paper investigated climate vulnerability, heat tolerance and nesting ecology,” he said.

“It did not compare logged and unlogged forests, assess the impacts of timber harvesting on bee populations, measure bee abundance before and after harvesting operations, or attempt to isolate forestry impacts from other environmental variables.”

FWCA has asked Dr da Silva to clarify whether her statement that Australia should stop native forest logging was:



**Steve Dobbys of FWCA questions whether the advice is based in science or opinion.**  
Image: supplied

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FWCA has long campaigned for sustainable Australian timber harvesting. Image: supplied



**Nesting bees like the blue-banded bee, which burrow to make their nests, were found in the research to be better able to cope with climate change than their stem-dwelling cousins.** Image: CC/ Louise Docker/Wikimedia

- a conclusion arising from the research itself;
- based on a separate body of scientific literature not discussed in the interview; or
- a personal opinion regarding native forest management policy.

“If there is a body of scientific evidence demonstrating that contemporary regulated native forest harvesting contributes to native bee decline, then that evidence should be identified and openly discussed,” Dobbys said.

“If not, then it is important that the distinction between scientific findings and personal policy views is made clear.”

Dobbys said the issue was not about restricting academic freedom but about maintaining public confidence in science.

“Researchers are entitled to hold and express personal views on public policy issues,” he said.

“However, when policy

recommendations are presented during discussion of scientific research, many listeners will reasonably assume those recommendations are supported by the evidence being discussed.”

“Where that connection is unclear, it is appropriate to seek clarification.”

Dobbys also noted that the study identified climate warming and temperature exposure as the primary mechanisms influencing native bee vulnerability.

“This naturally raises broader questions about other landscape-scale disturbances that may alter forest microclimates, including drought, forest decline and severe bushfires,” he said.

“High-intensity bushfires can remove canopy cover, increase ground temperatures, destroy nesting resources and reduce flowering across extensive landscapes for many years.”

“These factors appear directly relevant to the mechanisms identified in the study and may warrant further investigation.”

Dobbys said FWCA looked forward to Dr da Silva's response.

“Good science is strengthened through open discussion, scrutiny and evidence,” he said.

“We are simply seeking clarification about the scientific basis for a statement that has the potential to influence public policy and public perceptions about native forest management.”

# New ABARES report

ABARES last week released its most recent Australian forest and wood products statistics (AFWPS).

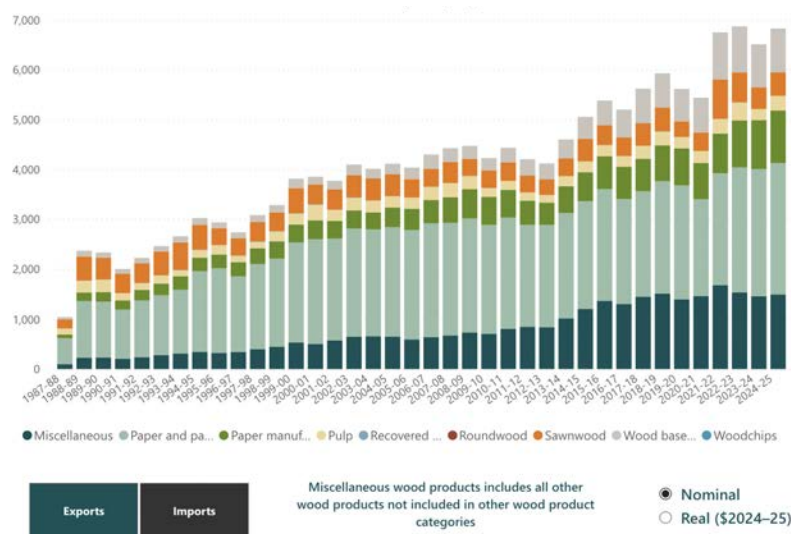
This biannual report presents historic statistical information for Australia's forest and wood products industries. This issue includes the latest data for key domestic indicators of forestry sector activity including Australia's commercial plantation estate, volume and value of logs harvested as well as data on production and trade of wood products.

AFWPS has two components: a production and trade focussed report released in June, and a separate trade only edition focussed on newly released trade data from the ABS in November. The current edition of AFWPS covers production and trade data to 2024–25.

Imports of forest and wood products continue to be dominated by paper-related products across the period, while the value of wood product exports picked up in 2024–25.

There were 7600 hectares of new plantations established in 2024–25, and while most were softwood (as has been the case for most of the past decade), hardwood plantation growth also tracked upwards. Overall, hardwood and softwood plantation estates both remained stable year-on-year in 2024–25, though notably down over the past decade for hardwood, which has declined in both volume and value since its peak in 2018–19.

The native hardwood



The value of imports in the report. Image: supplied

harvest was stable among state level shifts, with the volume of sawlogs falling and of pulplogs rising. The total volume is well down over the decade (despite what activists in this week's main story allege).

The total log harvest volume for 2024–25 was:

- Native log harvest 2,437,000m<sup>3</sup>
- Commercial plantation log harvest 20,427,000 m<sup>3</sup>
- Total 22,864,000m<sup>3</sup>

This represents a -2.4% change from 2023–24.

Meanwhile, the higher softwood plantation harvest has driven a value increase.

Total log harvest values were \$277 million for native log harvest and \$1.966bn for commercial plantation log harvest, a 3.6% overall drop year-on-year (or 5.9% adjusted to real terms).

It is worth noting that state breakdown shows the gross value of hardwood native log production in Victoria went from \$154 million in 2004–05 to \$2 million in 2024–25 after the state ban on native timber harvesting on public lands. Hardwood plantation values across the same period lifted

from \$19 million to \$213. In Western Australia, hardwood native log production fell from \$40 million to \$4 million across the same period (buoyed slightly by salvage logging from mines), while hardwood plantation lifted slightly from \$91 million to \$142 million.

For comparison, NSW hardwood native log production dipped from \$133 to \$103 million, while hardwood plantations crept up from \$6 million to \$16 million.

Total import value of wood products was \$6.828bn, a 4.9% lift from the previous year (2.4% in real terms). Most of this came from China (\$2.8bn worth), followed by New Zealand (\$490 million), Indonesia (\$449 million), Malaysia (\$349 million) and the US (\$289 million).

Total export value was \$2.887bn, a 6.6% lift from 2021–22 (4.1% in real terms). Of this, \$1.099 bn went to locations with no country data recorded, \$353 million to New Zealand, \$271 million to China, \$226 million to India, \$186 million to Indonesia and \$141 million to the US.

To download the full data set or take in more snapshot data, click here.



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