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David Little to leave NTHA

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SWG makes timber an election issue

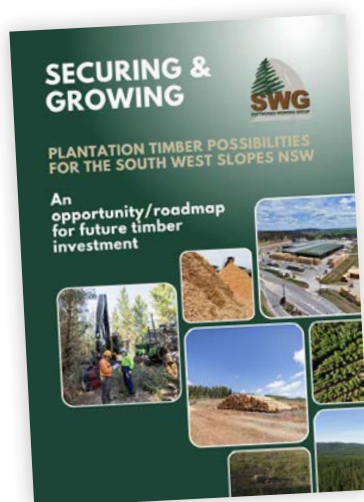
Ahead of the NSW 2027 election, politicians are put on notice.

THE next NSW election is scheduled for 13 March, 2027, and with only seven months to go, the Softwoods Working Group (SWG) is calling on NSW election candidates to back jobs, investment and the future of the State's timber industry.

This week, it has released its new 'Securing & Growing Plantation Timber Possibilities for the South West Slopes NSW' roadmap ([click here](#) to download), outlining five priority areas where government action can unlock investment, improve regional infrastructure and protect the long-term future of plantation forestry and timber manufacturing. They are:

- Regional road infrastructure and safer communities;
- Bushfire preparedness and protection;
- Coordinated blackberry management;
- Creating a positive investment environment for new plantations and practical climate outcomes; and
- Investigating a Strategic Plantation Economic Zone for the South West Slopes.

The South West Slopes is home to around 125,000 hectares of sustainably managed, internationally certified *Pinus radiata* plantations and the largest concentration of timber processing capacity in Australia. A Strategic Plantation Economic Zone (SPEZ) would identify strategically suitable



The SWG's roadmap gives candidates in the upcoming NSW election time to study the issues and commit to action. Image: supplied

locations for plantation development and coordinate planning, infrastructure, regulation, investment and government expenditure on risks including transport, fire and weeds.

SWG executive officer Carlie Porteous said the upcoming NSW election presented an important opportunity for all candidates to recognise forestry as a strategic regional industry.

"The South West Slopes has the plantations, processing capability, skilled workforce and communities needed to grow Australia's timber manufacturing capacity. What we now need is government to work alongside industry,

our councils and our communities to unlock that potential," she said.

At the centre of SWG's election platform is an immediate commitment to prioritise \$18 million for critical upgrades to roads that have already been identified by Transport NSW as being in urgent need of attention. The investment would improve freight efficiency, road safety and regional transport networks used by timber businesses, residents and visitors.

SWG is also proposing a Regional LGA Road Funding Preparedness trial, providing up to \$400,000 per council per year to help smaller regional councils undertake the surveys, designs, environmental assessments, cultural heritage studies and road safety audits required so they can be considered by state or federal roading grants as shovel ready.

SWG chair Dean Anderson said: "Our forestry and timber businesses compete in national and international markets, but the roads, fire protection and other enabling infrastructure they rely on are fundamentally regional.

"We are asking every candidate to recognise the value of an industry supporting more than 5500 jobs and contributing almost \$2.3 billion to our regional economy, and to commit to the infrastructure and policies needed for it to grow."



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David Little leaving NTHA

Little will leave the role in December, having steered the organisation through merger and beyond.

By CAMPBELL McINNES

FOR almost eight years, David Little has been a steadying hand on the tiller, first at TABMA and now the National Timber & Hardware Association (NTHA). He announced this week that he will be stepping down in December, after tidying up as many outstanding projects as possible for the next CEO, then relocating to Hong Kong.

"When I first took on the role, I felt the leadership of an association should be refreshed from time to time to keep the energy and new ideas coming," he says. "After nearly eight years, the timing feels right."

The move to Hong Kong is a family decision as much as a career one. "My wife and I also have a unique opportunity to experience life in Hong Kong, and the kids are now just about old enough to manage without us nearby, at least in theory," he says. "It's one of those opportunities that may not come around again."

TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE

Little took the reins at TABMA at a time when the industry and regulatory environment were both changing. Costs and the administrative burden of doing business were already rising before Covid hit and that was as true for the organisation as for its members.

Accordingly, the defining act of his tenure has been the merger of TABMA and the Australian Hardware Association to form NTHA.

It was far from simple: "You're bringing together two histories, two sets of loyalties and different expectations about what the organisation should be," he says, adding: "We were very fortunate that both Boards were absolutely committed to the amalgamation. They worked hard with



Little (far right) with the NTHA team at a recent awards ceremony celebrating independent businesses and trainees – one of the joys of the job. All images: supplied

their respective members and made the process much easier for my team."

The combined organisation was able to harness the power of a significantly larger member base, and the possibilities that represented at every level, from training opportunities to engagement with governments, with significantly less 'buck' for more 'bang', thanks to the merger.

While there were definitely stresses along the way – "The mechanics of an amalgamation are much easier than the human side," he says – the benefits have clearly been worth it. It's a lesson he wants the wider timber sector to learn from.

"Our industry still has overlap, duplication of effort and unnecessary cost," he says. "We've even seen different parts of the timber sector arguing against each other, which must bring a smile to the steel industry's face."

CHALLENGES MET AND ONGOING

Two years into the job, Little and his team faced a global pandemic.

"The early stages of Covid have stayed with me," he says. "Government directions were sometimes changing overnight, and members were calling because they needed practical answers: whether they could continue trading, how to keep people safe and what the latest rules meant for

their staff and customers."

It reframed, for him, what an association is actually for. "Our team effectively became a translation service between government announcements and the reality of running a business," says Little. "It reinforced that advocacy is important, but sometimes the greatest value an association provides is simply giving a business owner a clear answer when they need it."

In the years since, that translation role has shifted to one of the most significant

challenges Little still sees for NTHA's members: the accumulating weight of regulation on small operators. "My biggest disappointment is that we haven't been able to do more to help small businesses deal with the extraordinary pace of regulatory and compliance change," he says.

Employment law, workplace safety, privacy, environmental claims, product compliance and reporting obligations are all changing. "In a small business, responsibility for understanding and implementing those changes often falls directly on the owner or manager, on top of running the business. I honestly don't know how they do it," says Little.

"It isn't about opposing sensible regulation. It's about making sure businesses can realistically understand and implement it. The current Federal Government has added to that burden at a pace I haven't experienced before."

At the same time, the sector itself is changing. "It has become more consolidated, more sophisticated and much faster-moving," Little explains. "Independent businesses are using better systems, data and digital tools, while their customers expect quicker service, more information and greater certainty."

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From P 3

"Margins are tighter, finding good people is harder and the compliance burden is much heavier. [But] it remains a relationship business. Trust, service, product knowledge and local connections are still the things that allow independents to compete successfully."

His biggest concern for the next five years isn't the skills shortage, it's who replaces the people at the top. He points to the generational nature of many independent businesses, and the risk of that knowledge simply disappearing. "If younger people can't see an attractive future in owning or managing these businesses, we risk losing good companies, valuable knowledge and competition, particularly in local and regional markets. We need deliberate pathways into leadership and ownership, not just entry-level jobs."

PROUDEST ACHIEVEMENTS

"I'm proudest of the part members generally don't see: building a



1/ NTHA's Christine Bannister (left) and Tahlia Bellotti with David Little at the Queensland state awards. All images: supplied

2/ Watching members succeed and seeing new people come into the industry have been the two best parts of David Little's time as CEO.

professionally managed, well-governed national organisation with good people and sound systems behind it," Little says. "Campaigns, events and announcements receive the attention, while good governance and disciplined management generally don't. But they're what allow everything else to happen."

It's a theme he returns to often, the unglamorous groundwork behind a functioning association. But it's a different part of the job entirely that clearly lights him up. "My absolute favourite part of the job is seeing the new trainees and apprentices our GTO and RTO [Group Training Organisation and Registered Training Organisation] bring into the industry," he says. "It's what attracted me to the role in the first place."

"My favourite stories typically involve a young person who didn't necessarily flourish in a classroom, gets an opportunity with a good host employer and blossoms," he says. "They may need quite a bit of help initially, but they gradually gain confidence, complete their qualification and become someone the business

depends upon. Traineeships can be genuinely life changing."

He hopes that this will remain a key focus after his departure. "We need stronger connections with schools, parents and employers, and training that keeps pace with technology, design systems, automation and changing business practices," he says. "I'd like the incoming CEO to protect the quality of those pathways, keep the training and employment operations close to members, and continue measuring success by outcomes rather than enrolment numbers."

Little is working to leave the incoming CEO with a clean plate to start their work from but hopes they continue with the data-driven approach NTHA has taken with government, saying that governments listen best to evidence and real examples, particularly when they come with suggested solutions.

He knows that he will miss the NTHA team, members, board and chairman Peter Hutchinson, giving serious thanks to their efforts during his tenure. Still, Little is looking forward to the move to Hong Kong, though quick to reject any suggestion it's a wind-down. "I see it as a new chapter, certainly not retirement, I'm far too young," he says, before adding: "I'd encourage members to keep supporting their Association, get behind the incoming CEO and continue working together. Our industry has a much stronger voice when it speaks as one."

The full interview with David Little will appear in the next issue of Timber Trader News.

On the cover: David Little with Enews' Campbell McInnes (left) and Chris Parker (right). Affable and informed, the NTHA CEO has always known how to command a table. Image: supplied



National Forestry Day

Celebrating the industry that builds homes and communities.

NEXT Tuesday is AFPA's National Forestry Day 2026.

This year's theme is Grown for Australian homes. Whether it's a timber frame, hardwood floors, panelling or furniture, timber plays a vital role in building our homes and helping us to enjoy living in them. In regions around the country, forestry plays just as vital a role in building communities, from jobs, to community sponsorships and keeping the local mechanics and cafes going.

Our sustainable, renewable industry delivers roughly 180,000 direct and indirect jobs, plus \$24 billion to the national economy every year. Plantations plant some 70 million trees per annum, while harvested native forests are regenerated. With wood being the only building material that is entirely sustainable, it's good news that 80% of



our new homes are timber framed.

Nationwide, there are over 130 million hectares of forest storing about 22 billion tonnes of carbon. While foresters harvest only a tiny fraction of this, forest management helps to reduce fire and protect wildlife, at the same time as keeping areas accessible for recreation and some good old shinrin-yoku – Japanese for forest bathing, or enjoying your time under the trees.

So next Tuesday, celebrate the homes you're helping to build and the sustainable industry you support. AFPA and state forestry associations are encouraging everyone across the supply chain to get involved by sharing celebrations and using #NatForestryDay26 on social media to spread the word about Australia's 'tree-mendous' forestry industry.

ITI named most inclusive

CONGRATULATIONS to ITI NSW, which was named Most Inclusive Employer for the Mt Druitt/St Marys region at the 2026 Local Business Awards.

The award celebrates ITI NSW's longstanding partnership with disability employment service, NOVA Employment, which over the past three years has helped connect talented job seekers with meaningful careers.

The recognition builds on last year's



From left, Aaron Pharo from NOVA Employment with ITI's HR manager Tiarna McNamara and warehouse manager Christopher Galea. Image: supplied

success, when ITI NSW was named a finalist in the same category, highlighting the team's ongoing commitment to fostering a workplace where every individual is supported, respected and given the opportunity to succeed.

Through its partnership with NOVA Employment, ITI has welcomed a number of employees who have become valued members of the team, strengthening the business with their skills, dedication and contributions.

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Entries close Friday August 14, 2026.

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New FWPA report on mechanised planting

Data shows mechanised tree planting shows promise for safer forest establishment.

A NEW FWPA industry scan by Mike Sutton of Forest Innovation Services looks at the adoption of mechanised tree planting in Australia and New Zealand's forest sector. The technology is currently being explored as an avenue to improve worker safety, ease labour pressures and deliver more consistent plantation establishment.

The Mechanised Planting Industry Scan draws on insights from growers, contractors, manufacturers and researchers across Australia and New Zealand. It finds mechanised planting is still in its early stages, with most activity focused on trials and small-scale deployment, but interest is growing as the industry looks for safer, more reliable and more efficient establishment methods.

The report covers the full case for moving to mechanisation and also the constraints, including the high capital cost of machines that often sit in the \$1–3 million bracket.

Rather than focusing only on the capacity of machines compared to manual planters, the report looks at the broader operational case. Modern mechanised planters can combine many functions – spot cultivation, ripping/mounding, fertiliser and herbicide application, irrigation and precise tree location – potentially reducing passes, emissions and total establishment cost while improving quality and auditability.

Individual growers and contractors have been conducting operational trials in recent years, but little information about them or contemporary attitudes to mechanised planting is available. Accordingly, FWPA requested an industry scan to better inform future research, collaboration and information sharing between growers, contractors and researchers.

Survey respondents were clear that manual tree planting can be physically demanding, particularly on steep terrain and second-rotation sites with



The Komatsu D61EM Planter was one of the mechanised planters discussed by respondents in the report. Image: courtesy Komatsu

heavy slash and harvest residues. They identified worker safety and the increasing difficulty of securing seasonal labour as the strongest drivers for considering mechanised alternatives.

The report found mechanised systems could offer benefits beyond planting productivity. Modern machines can combine site preparation, planting, irrigation and fertiliser application in a single operation, reducing repeated machinery passes while improving tree placement and establishment consistency.

Survey participants also highlighted potential benefits including improved seedling survival and early growth, extended planting windows through integrated irrigation, reduced establishment risk, and the capture of tree-level GPS data to support future forest management and harvesting operations.

PROMISING EARLY RESULTS

While the evidence base is still developing, several trials have reported encouraging outcomes. The report cites Victorian trials where machine-planted trees were measured as 67% taller and 43% larger in stem diameter than hand-planted trees under the same conditions. In Western Australia, mechanised planting trials

with blue gum seedlings demonstrated improved survival and up to 38% greater growth after six months in moisture-limited environments.

Research and operational experience suggest that carefully matched planting stock, consistent seedling placement and integrated irrigation can produce stronger early establishment and more uniform stands. Current systems include excavator-mounted planting machines suited to steep and

variable terrain, as well as higher-capacity continuous planting systems for suitable sites.

Despite strong interest, high capital costs, limited seasonal utilisation, short contract periods and the need to adapt imported equipment for local conditions continue to constrain investment. Second-rotation plantation environments can be particularly challenging due to stumps, roots, slash and difficult terrain.

The industry also faces challenges around seedling logistics, machine compatibility with different stock types, operator training, technical support and spare parts. As a result, most growers remain cautious and are seeking stronger long-term evidence before committing to large-scale deployment.

One of the report's key findings is that mechanised planting should not be assessed only on planting speed or cost per seedling. Researchers argue it should be evaluated on a whole-of-operation and whole-of-rotation basis, taking into account safety improvements, reduced establishment risk, lower site preparation requirements, survival rates and future productivity gains.

The report recommends industry-supported multi-site trials, long-term monitoring and stronger collaboration between growers, contractors, manufacturers and researchers to build confidence and generate robust performance data.

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



MACHINE-PLANTED TREES WERE MEASURED AS 67% TALLER AND 43% LARGER IN STEM DIAMETER

AUGUST

18: Australian Forests & Wood Innovations Webinar 1 – ONLINE EVENT, 12:30pm – 1:30pm AEST. #1: Managing the forest-to-product value chain with systems-based thinking and AI integration. For more information and to register, visit <https://www.afwi.au/events/>

SEPTEMBER

2: AFPA member dinner – Wrest Point Hotel, Hobart, 6.00pm - 9.30pm. The event will involve key industry leaders, Members of Parliament, including from the Federal and Tasmanian parliaments. It will also feature a CEO breakfast, Annual General Meeting (AGM) and Members Forum as well as the Softwood Supply Chain and Hardwood Supply Chain meetings. For more information and booking, visit <https://www.trybooking.com/events/landing/1613848>

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/events/2026-industry-awards/> or contact tahlia@ntha.com.au

10: Forestry Australia Webinar 1 – ONLINE EVENT, 9.30am - 10.30am AEST. Session One - Forest Fire Science: An Australian and US perspective. Registrations close 9 Sep at 10am. To book, visit <https://forestry.memnet.com.au/MemberSelfService/EventBooking.aspx>

12: 2026 WFTN Cocktails for Charity –

Cloudland, Brisbane, 1.30pm - 6.00pm. Join us for an afternoon of networking, drinks and canapés as we come together to raise much-needed funds for a remarkable Queensland charity making a real difference in the lives of children affected by domestic and family violence. In support of Zephyr Education Limited. Further information, and ticket sale visit <https://events.ntha.com.au/events/nationaltimberhardwareassociationntha/2273829> RSVP: Monday 31 August 2026.

22: Forestry Australia Webinar 2 – ONLINE EVENT, 11.30am - 12.30pm AEST. Session Two - Prescribed Burning in Practice: Lessons from California and Western Australia. Registrations close 9 Sep at 10am. To book, visit <https://forestry.memnet.com.au/MemberSelfService/EventBooking.aspx>

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>

4eb4-a6cd-ab69df757864/summary

21: SAVE THE DATE: Timber Design Awards – Museum of Commentary Art. More details and ticket booking information to follow.

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/events/2026-industry-awards/> or contact tahlia@ntha.com.au

NOVEMBER

8-13: The Gottstein Trust's Understanding Forest Science Course – The Country Club, Launceston, Tasmania. For those working in, or with an interest or association with the timber and forestry products sector, this unique course will provide an update on core aspects of forest science and aspects of management of the nation's public and private estates. Participants will also gain a better understanding of the national and international forces impacting upon forests. Bookings are now open. For more information, visit <https://gottsteintrust.org/> or phone Helen Murray on 0419 991 424

18: 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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Concerns ignored

Dr John Raison has delivered expert criticisms of the INFM. In reply: silence.

By DONYALE HARRISON

DR John Raison has studied the ecology of Australia's native forests for over 40 years, with a particular interest in forest carbon cycling and how it is impacted by harvest and fire. A former chief research scientist at CSIRO, he has spent his career supporting evidence-based policy.

When it comes to the Improved Native Forestry Management ACCU method (INFM), he is very clear: "The science tells us it won't create valid credits."

One of a series of experts speaking out against the method, Dr Raison has written to Minister for Climate Change Chris Bowen twice in recent months outlining his concerns with the INFM. In those letters, he has clearly spelled out the issues with the method: its lack of a full and accurate life-cycle analysis of forest carbon stocks; the low precision of the FullCAM model used to estimate changing carbon stocks in native forests; the lack of verification processes for model predictions; the lack of a reliable baseline harvest level within the model the INFM relies on and fact that leakage is poorly addressed and significantly underestimated within the method.

In his second letter, Dr Raison set out his concerns that the INFM will lead to "bogus" carbon offsets, saying: "The Forestry Australia assessment found that in relation to within-forest carbon stocks, over-crediting may be of the



From left, NSW Environment Minister Penny Sharpe, Coffs Harbour Hardwoods' Shane McCarthy, Premier Chris Minns and Martin McCarthy during last year's site tour at CHH when the Premier assured the NSW native timber industry he was listening to their concerns, before massively cutting supply. Image: courtesy CHH

order of 50-100%. This is excluding either carbon stored in wood products or leakage which will also markedly erode estimated credits. The treatment of leakage within the INFM is totally inadequate and does not reflect either scientific principles or information based on imports of wood products and their sources."

Enews asked Dr Raison what response he had received from the Minister.

"Nothing directly," he says.

"They're remaining pretty silent on it ahead of this disallowance motion that's coming up on the 18th of August – next week. It's all quite politically charged: it looks as though it will be the Greens with the balance of power in the Senate who will determine whether that disallowance motion is successful or not."



Dr John Raison. Image: supplied

He points out that in addition to push back from the forest industry, many conservation groups have also come out against the INFM and are urging the Greens not to support it. "The science tells us it won't create real credits," he says. "So both the Federal and NSW Governments are remaining quiet while they wait for the outcome of next week's motion."

POOR ADVICE

Raison questions the advice that led to the approval of the INFM by the Emissions Reduction Assurance Committee (ERAC).

"They don't really have a strong science capability themselves," he says, "but they often lean on the advice from within the department, including from the clean energy regulator, and I think that's what they argued they did this time."

"Additionally, they went out to Griffith University for an 'independent' review, but Griffith is linked to the carbon set at ANU, which is all a bit incestuous."

He notes that the public consultation feedback also contained multiple negative commentaries

about the INFM from both timber industry and research experts, and from environmentalists. [You can read the recently published submissions by [clicking here.](#)]

"In my letters and elsewhere, I've argued that you need to do a full life cycle analysis of the carbon balance of a harvested forest," Dr Raison says. "You

"MANY CONSERVATION GROUPS HAVE ALSO COME OUT AGAINST THE INFM"



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From P 8

have to look at what happens in the forest, what happens to the wood products, the substitution of wood for high emissions materials like steel and concrete and so on. There is also this question of leakage: if you stop production, then it goes somewhere else, and you have to account for the emissions from that."

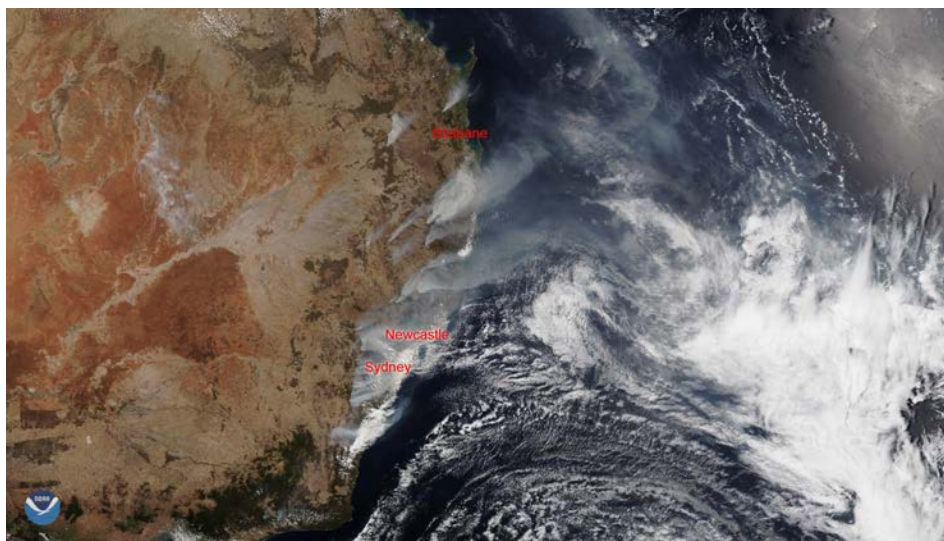
The manner in which the FullCAM model is applied is insufficient, he argues. "FullCAM really looks at only a part of that. It looks at what happens in the forest and what happens in the products that come out, and that modelling is under challenge."

Raison says, "The native forest is a very complex thing to model in terms of disturbance and what happens to the carbon there. You've got a whole range of mixtures of species, forest structures and site conditions. It's a very heterogeneous beast, so modelling it isn't easy."

"And one of the things that happens if you harvest is that you get two responses that have to be modelled. First of all is what happens to the trees left behind? It's like a thinning response. They've got less competition and more resources, and so we expect them to grow faster. The second thing is you have a cohort of new regenerating trees coming up, so you have to model those as well. The two need to be modelled together, and that's pretty complicated. Some of us would argue that the current FullCAM model isn't up to it. It hasn't really been properly evaluated and tested against field data."

He points to Forestry Australia's commentary on the over-crediting likely to result from the INFM's clearfall harvesting assumptions in FullCAM (see *Enews* #910), and the risk of creating fictitious carbon credits using the method.

"Then there's the additional question," says Dr Raison. "There's



Smoke from the NSW, Victoria and Queensland bushfires detected by satellite during Black Summer. Dr Raison worries unmanaged forests will lead to more huge fires. Image: NOAA/NESDIS (public domain)

nothing new or additional about those forests that NSW in particular claims are being taken away from harvest. It's long been a promise from the NSW government that the Great Koala National Park (GKNP) would be established.

"Now that government is saying, 'If the method doesn't get up and we don't get the revenue from carbon credits, then the GKNP won't go ahead.' I don't actually believe that, but it's a pressure point argument not an evidence-based one, isn't it? There's no science that really tells you it will do anything for koalas, let alone carbon abatement."

"The whole point about Australian Carbon Credit Units is that they should be additional. They should be things that would not have happened anyway, and that change becomes the basis of the ACCU being issued. But clearly, here you've got a long-running promise to establish the park. Then you've had a moratorium there, which is already causing industry reductions and loss of jobs. So you can't say now that, if it becomes a carbon project, it's additional: it was already entrained."

SCIENCE LEADS ELSEWHERE

Enews asked Dr Raison if decades of cutbacks at the CSIRO and other State and Federal science bodies had led to a situation where it was harder

for government agencies to give good advice to ministers as they lacked the expertise to dissect complex issues.

"You're absolutely right," he says. "I think, certainly, the forest science capacity has dropped in the CSIRO as well as in the state agencies that used to be quite strong. It is a weaker science base."

"There has been quite a lot of research, though, that's relevant to the topic, so we know what's needed, and we know roughly how to do it."

He points to the multiple associations and agencies, including Forestry Australia, AFWI and more that have been supporting well-grounded research in the issues surrounding native forestry, but bemoaned the fact that research receives little coverage.

"We wrote a paper that came out earlier this year about a lot of the criticisms commonly pointed against forestry, and almost all of them are wrong," Dr Raison says ([click here](#) to download the article, first published in *Australian Forestry*).

"If you actually look at the science and analyse it properly, those criticisms are all based on furrphies. Yet they are repeated. It's all very political. There are certainly organisations that have ongoing campaigns to stop harvesting of native forests and this is playing into their hands."

In 2024, Raison published 'A review of the impacts of sustainable harvesting, non-harvest management and wildfire on net carbon emissions from Australian native forests' in *Australian Forestry*, which flagged the poor application of life cycle carbon assessments in Australian native forestry research.

He wrote: "Changes to C [carbon] stocks in Australian native forests are driven much more by extensive wildfire

“THE WHOLE POINT ABOUT ACCUS IS THAT THEY SHOULD BE ADDITIONAL

Cont P 11

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than by harvesting” and noted that the carbon in annual log harvests equated to only about 0.6% of Australia’s total net anthropogenic greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions, rising to 0.8% if you added emissions from the decomposition or combustion of slash produced during harvest, both of which were offset by carbon sequestration in new and regrowth, as well as wood products.

In contrast, the carbon emissions of the ‘Black Summer’ 2019/20 fires were about twice Australia’s total annual anthropogenic GHG emissions.

Dr Raison’s abstract concluded: “When examined at the landscape scale, there is no evidence that harvesting leads to increased area burnt, fire severity or C emissions caused by wildfires. However, future wildfires in the large and contiguous areas of thick regrowth

created after Black Summer pose a major threat to C stocks in all forests in the coming decades.”

With the acceptance of the INFM by ERAC, Dr Raison worries that native forests face a future of much less management.

“One of the things about the INFM is 100 years of permanence. But what are the chances that a forest won’t get burnt down in the next 100 years? Pretty low, probably, particularly if they’re not actively managed.

“We have 130 million hectares of native forests. My great concern is that it will be locked away and not managed, and then just go up in smoke.”

He emphasises that he is not against ACCUs in general and notes that a better method has been proposed by Forestry Australia. “It wouldn’t just look at the effects of harvesting or withdrawing harvesting, it would look at native forests

overall, including those which are in conservation. A lot of the forests that have gone into the conservation reserve network were previously disturbed forests. They were harvested or they’ve been burnt, and they’re regrowing. So there’s quite a big carbon sink that’s probably occurring in the conservation forest as well.

“They’ve proposed a method that captures that, as well as actions within the wood production native forest that could improve the carbon sink. For example, there are areas that have been burnt too often, where they haven’t regenerated well, such as in the alpine ash forest. They could be rehabilitated and you would get extra carbon sink created there.

“There’s certainly potential to develop alternative methods that will be more widely applicable and don’t just focus on ceasing harvesting.”



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The skills challenge: building the next generation of industry leaders

THIS National Skills Week (24–30 August), the timber and hardware industry is celebrating the apprentices, trainees and cadets who are building their futures, and the employers helping shape the next generation of skilled professionals.

With skilled workers needed more than ever, apprenticeships are about much more than filling roles today. They are about developing the talent, knowledge and capability the industry will rely on tomorrow.

NTHA Trainees & Apprentices helps businesses make that investment by supporting recruitment, employment, payroll, and ongoing guidance, allowing host employers to focus on what matters most: providing hands-on experience and helping apprentices reach their potential.

And the results speak for themselves.

ZANE WILLIAMS' JOURNEY FROM CHALLENGE TO CHAMPION

For the 2026 Queensland Timber &

“WE ARE NOT JUST DEVELOPING SKILLED WORKERS FOR TODAY, WE ARE BUILDING FUTURE LEADERS



1/ Zane Williams (left) receiving his 2026 Queensland Timber & Hardware Awards NTHA Trainee/Apprentice of the Year award.

2/ Ryder Grinsted's traineeship is now the basis of his bricklaying career.

3/ From left, NTHA's BDM Darren Hooper, Ryder Shop & Office Fitting general manager Miles Austin, IFA Award winner Thomas Daw, Ryder Shop & Office Fitting production manager and team leader Matt Graham, Ryder Shop & Office Fitting managing director Glenn Ryder and NTHA CEO David Little. All images: courtesy NTHA.

Hardware Awards NTHA Trainee/Apprentice of the Year, Zane Williams, success has been built on determination, resilience and refusing to give up.

Today, Zane is building a successful career as a young joiner with GCD Architectural, creating quality timber products including doors, windows and frames.

But his journey has not always been straightforward. Starting his Joinery Apprenticeship just one week after finishing Year 12, Zane faced significant challenges throughout his education journey, including changing schools 10 times and navigating ADHD and dyslexia.

Rather than letting those challenges hold him back, Zane found strength through persistence, support and a willingness to keep learning. With encouragement from GCD Architectural owners Jacqui and Orkun Evren, NTHA,

TAFE Queensland and his family, Zane developed his skills and built confidence.

His approach has always been simple. "I have got a never give up attitude. I always turn up to work every day. I was dedicated to the job and willing to learn."

For Zane, the journey is far from over.

"I love working with timber and learning new things. I don't plan leaving anytime soon," he said.

BUILDING ON TRADITION: RYDER'S FUTURE CAREER

Taking a house from timber frame to home for Ryder Grinsted, bricklaying is more than a trade, it is part of his family story.

Wanting to build a career in the industry, Ryder began his apprenticeship with NTHA Trainees & Apprentices,

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hosted by LJP Masonry.

Over four years, he worked alongside Luke Powell across residential and commercial projects, developing the skills, confidence and experience needed to become a qualified bricklayer.

For LJP Masonry, supporting Ryder was about more than training an apprentice. It was about investing in the future of the trade and helping a young person build a career they could be proud of.

Ryder credits the guidance and support from LJP Masonry and NTHA as a key part of his success, helping him grow into a skilled and confident tradesman.

Now qualified with his Certificate III in Bricklaying, Ryder continues building his experience with the goal of one day establishing his own bricklaying business.

During National Skills Week, Ryder's journey highlights the power of apprenticeships: combining passion, opportunity and industry support to help young people build careers they are proud of.

THOMAS DAW: A RISING STAR IN SHOP FITTING

Still at the beginning of his apprenticeship journey, Thomas Daw is already showing the qualities of a future industry leader.

The NTHA Shop & Office Fitting apprentice claimed first place in Certificate III Shop Fitting at the 2026 IFA NSW Apprentice & Design Awards, recognition of his talent, commitment and passion for the trade.

Since joining Ryder Shop & Office Fitting in January 2025, Thomas has impressed everyone around him with



Marcus Hallam (left) with NTHA's David Little at the Apprentice Employment Network Awards night.

his enthusiasm, willingness to learn and drive to improve.

"He is a rare apprentice. You don't see many come through with the enthusiasm and drive that Thomas has," said Ryder General Manager Miles Austin.

For Thomas, the appeal of the trade is clear. "I love being on the tools and having the opportunity to build things. I wasn't made to work behind a desk."

Supervisor Matt Graham said Thomas's ability already rivals many experienced tradespeople.

"There is nothing you can give Thomas that he cannot handle. He is switched on, capable and outstanding."

From an award-winning school project to a state title in his trade, Thomas is proving what can happen when talent meets opportunity and support.

FROM WAREHOUSE TO AWARD WINNER: ITI BUILDING FUTURE LEADERS

ITI Australia is proving that one of the greatest investments a business can make is investing in its people.

Through its Cadetship Program with NTHA Trainees & Apprentices, ITI is turning opportunity into careers — equipping young people with the skills, confidence and experience to build a future in timber.

Marcus Hallam never imagined himself working beyond the warehouse floor. But with encouragement from ITI and support from NTHA, he stepped into internal sales, inventory management and customer service, discovering a career path he never expected.

The journey transformed his confidence and opened new possibilities, culminating in Marcus being recognised as the AEN Trainee of the Year.

"ITI has given me great opportunities and invested time and money into my training and future career," he said. "When I started, I only wanted to work in the warehouse, but now I've started in customer service and I'm enjoying it."

Now, Marcus is helping guide the next generation of cadets, proof that the right opportunity can change a career, and a life.

INVEST IN YOUR FUTURE TODAY

This National Skills Week, make an investment that lasts longer than a week. Take on an apprentice through the NTHA Trainees and Apprentices and help build the future of Australia's timber and hardware industry.

Melissa Clark, General Manager NTHA, believes that investing in apprentices and trainees is one of the most important investments we can make as an industry.

"By providing opportunities, guidance and hands-on experience, we are not just developing skilled workers for today, we are building the future leaders who will keep our industry strong for generations to come," she said.

To celebrate this National Skills Week, NTHA is offering host employers a \$1.00 per hour discount for employers who take on two or more trainees or apprentices to commence in September. This discount is valid in September only.

To start your journey with a trainee/apprentice contact: Melissa Clark, 1800 822 621. Email: melissa.c@ntha.com.au

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Timber Turmoil fallout continues

FWCA takes Four Corners complaint to ACMA after ABC clears itself.

Forest & Wood Communities Australia has escalated its complaint about ABC *Four Corners*' 'Timber Turmoil' to the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), after rejecting the ABC Ombudsman's finding that the broadcast did not breach the ABC Code of Practice (see *Enews* #910 and #904).

FWCA Chair and Director Steve Dobbyns said the Ombudsman's decision failed to deal with the substance of the complaint and set an unacceptably low bar for accuracy, impartiality and fair dealing.

"The ABC has effectively marked its own homework and declared there is nothing to see," Dobbyns said.

"FWCA rejects that conclusion. Timber Turmoil was not balanced, rigorous or properly contextual journalism. It was an activist-framed prosecution of Australian native forestry."

FWCA is asking ACMA to review whether the broadcast complied with the ABC Code of Practice, including requirements that material facts be accurate and presented in context, that news and information be presented with due impartiality, and that organisations subject to damaging implications be dealt with fairly.

Dobbyns said one of the clearest failures was the treatment of Professor David Lindenmayer.

"*Four Corners* presented Professor Lindenmayer as a leading forest ecologist and the principal scientific authority in the story," he said.

"But viewers were not given a careful scientific explanation of contemporary regulated native forestry. They were given highly charged opinion – including claims that native forestry is a 'zombie industry that just won't die' and that the industry had 'raped and pillaged the forests of Victoria'.

"Those are not neutral scientific findings. They are emotive, activist-style characterisations.

"If *Four Corners* was going to give that commentary the authority of science, it had an obligation to test it against equivalent scientific evidence from forest scientists, silvicultural experts and



Professor David Lindenmayer was the only scientist interviewed for *Timber Turmoil*, with no opportunity given to counter his emotive assertions. Image: supplied

practitioners with direct knowledge of modern regulated harvesting, regeneration, threatened species prescriptions, certification and regrowth management.

"It did not."

Mr Dobbyns said the Ombudsman appeared to accept that comments from a politician and a timber business representative were enough to balance Professor Lindenmayer's scientific authority.

"That is plainly inadequate," he said.

"A politician or business owner referring to sustainable forestry is not an equivalent scientific response.

"Balance is not achieved by counting heads. It depends on authority, airtime, sequencing, imagery, tone, framing and whether the strongest claims from each side are properly tested."

FWCA said the program gave anti-forestry and activist voices the narrative momentum, emotive imagery and dominant storyline, while forestry voices were often placed in defensive or limited roles.

Dobbyns said production correspondence also raised concerns about the program's editorial approach.

"In an email to Timber NSW Chair Andrew Hurford before the program aired, the *Four Corners* reporter referred to him as a 'formidable opponent'," he said.

"We do not rely on that phrase in isolation, but it is consistent with the broader concern that industry representatives were approached as adversaries, not as principal stakeholders

whose evidence deserved fair examination."

FWCA also refers to Timber NSW's account that the *Four Corners* team repeatedly sought to have Mr Hurford say "End native forestry" to camera before adding his own comments.

"If accurate, that suggests an attempt to manufacture a loaded broadcast moment rather than fairly elicit the industry's position," Dobbyns said.

FWCA said the treatment of Australian Sustainable Hardwoods was another serious concern.

"The program told viewers Victorian taxpayers had put 'more than \$110 million into ASH,'" Dobbyns said.

"That figure bundled together very different categories of money to create the most damaging number possible.

"ASH has publicly stated it did not receive \$61 million in 2017, but instead \$3 million, which was applied entirely to union-negotiated redundancy entitlements, leaving it with a net position of zero.

"ASH has also stated the \$49 million referred to in the program was not a subsidy, but a contractual failure-to-supply penalty arising from the Victorian Government and VicForests failing to meet agreed timber supply obligations. After tax, ASH says the actual amount received was \$34 million, and every cent of it, and more, was reinvested into stock, jobs, plant, equipment and manufacturing capability.

"The ABC should have clearly distinguished between subsidies, contractual penalties, shareholder transactions, grants, redundancy payments, tax and reinvestment. It did not."

The ABC interviewed Dr Daniela Juric, lecturer in forensic accounting at Monash University regarding her opinions on the ASH accounts, which were intercut with ASH managing director Vince Hurley's interview.

"If a program uses forensic accounting

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commentary, the public is entitled to expect forensic precision," said Dobbys. "That did not happen."

FWCA said the broadcast also failed to properly examine import leakage – the central environmental consequence of shutting down Australian native timber supply.

"Closing Australian native forestry does not make timber demand disappear," Dobbys said.

"Research by Venn, Huang and Lachhwani indicates that for every 1000m³ reduction in Australian native forest sawlog production, Australia imports approximately 813m³ of solid wood products to replace it.

"In other words, more than 80% of reduced domestic supply is effectively replaced by imports.

"As Timber Turmoil itself illustrated, closing Australian native forestry does not end demand; it displaces much of that demand to other jurisdictions."

Dobbys said Australia already imports timber from countries with weaker forest governance, higher deforestation risk, poorer legality controls and less



FWCA's Steve Dobbys at work. Image: supplied

transparent supply chains.

"If the ABC is going to present native forestry closure as an environmental good, it must examine where replacement timber comes from, what standards apply there, and whether Australia is simply exporting harvesting pressure, biodiversity risk, carbon emissions and legality concerns to other nations," he said.

"Mentioning import concerns in passing is not enough. A principal counterargument must be investigated, tested and weighed."

FWCA said the program also failed regional workers and communities.

"Workers, contractors, truck drivers, forestry families, mechanics, sawmill towns and small businesses were treated as background scenery in a story about their own future," Dobbys said.

"Four Corners found time for activists, log chasing, dramatic imagery and highly charged commentary. It should have found time for the workers and communities whose livelihoods were being judged."

FWCA is asking ACMA to review whether Timber Turmoil breached the ABC Code of Practice and is calling on the ABC to publish a clarification on the ASH financial figures, provide a genuine right of reply to ASH and the broader forest and wood products sector, and commission follow-up broadcast coverage that properly examines the consequences of closing Australian native forestry.

"Australians deserve serious journalism on forestry, not selective storytelling," Dobbys said.

"Timber workers and regional communities deserve fair treatment.

"That is why FWCA is taking this complaint to ACMA."

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Fire webinar

Forestry Australia presents Forest Fire Science: An Australian and US Perspective.

THE news has been grim this winter as scenes of uncontrolled fires across Europe, North Africa and North America flash through the evening bulletins. With an active El Niño declared, Australians are looking at the upcoming fire season with trepidation.

In this frame, Forestry Australia could not have picked a more timely topic for its upcoming webinars than 'Forest Fire Science: An Australian and US Perspective'. Presenters from Australia and the United States will share research, case studies and practical experience on bushfire risk, forest management and prescribed burning. The series will look at what works in practice and how different approaches can support more resilient forests and communities.

The webinar is split across two sessions. The first is 'Fire, Forest Dynamics and Active Forest Management' on Thursday 10 September from 9:30 am–10:30 am (AEST).

Dr Tony Bartlett AFMS will open with 'Does Active Forest Management Increase Bushfire Risk?'

Dr Bartlett has 50 years of experience in forest fire management from Victoria, NSW and the ACT. His presentation will provide a review of the science relevant to claims that timber harvesting and prescribed burning increase bushfire severity and presents additional analysis demonstrating why such claims are contested. Key findings include: that at the landscape level timber harvesting has



Kangaroo Island during Black Summer. Image: CC/New Matilda

limited impact on fire severity; that forests in conservation reserves and long unburnt forests also regularly burn at high severity; and that strategic prescribed burning is one of the most practical strategies we have for reducing the extent and severity of bushfires.

Liane O'Neill and Terra Rentz from Portland, Oregon, US, will follow with 'From Social Licence to Landscape Resilience in the Western US'.

O'Neill and Rentz from The Nature Conservancy will present an international case study from the US Western Dry Forests Program. They will introduce the program's forest restoration work across the western United States, including how the program is taking a holistic approach to conserve, research and shape policy. The presentation will also explore how the program is building greater public understanding and acceptance of forest restoration through communications and public outreach informed by social science.

Session Two, titled 'Prescribed Burning in Practice: Lessons from California and Western Australia', will run on Tuesday 22 September from 11:30 am–12:30 pm (AEST).

Lenya Quinn-Davidson, director of the UC ANR Fire Network, University of California, will explore the Californian experience, including prescribed burn associations, certified burn boss programs, private landholder engagement, and community-based approaches to prescribed fire in her session, 'Bringing Fire Back to the People: An Example from California'.

The final session will see Ryan Butler present on the 'Fine-scale Mosaic Project – Developing a broad area, fine-scale burn mosaic in the south west WA forest'. His talk will explore the progress on DBCA's Fine-Grained Mosaic project in Western Australia, including the purpose of patch-based prescribed burning, project challenges, recent science observations, and practical lessons from the field.

Registrations cost \$25 for Forestry Australia members; free for student members and \$125 for non-members.

Registrations close: 10 am, Wednesday 9 September.

Everyone who registers receives a link and joining instructions 24 hours before each webinar commences, plus a recording of each webinar – so if you can't listen live, you can listen later.

For more information about the webinar and presenters, [click here](#).

Victorian WFH Bill paused

NEW Victorian Premier Ben Carroll has paused his government's contentious Work From Home (WFH) legislation, to the relief of many of the state's businesses.

Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry chief executive Sally Curtain

said, "We welcome the Premier's decision to pause the debate of this divisive legislation, and to listen to our members.

"The Victorian Chamber maintains that the Bill must be scrapped, as it is completely unnecessary, costly and burdensome for Victorian businesses.

The Premier has been in touch with us directly and has indicated he is willing to meet with us. We hope to persuade him to abandon this destructive course.

"As it stands, this legislation remains a profound risk to our state's economy."

Media coverage reinforces concerns

DEBATE about native forestry in the face of the INFM's flaws (see pages 8-11 this issue, plus special in *Enews* #910) has now reached the general media.

Sustainable Timber Tasmania's Rob de Fegely penned an Opinion column for the *Australian Financial Review* last Thursday highlighting "suggestions that Australia should cease harvesting public native forests and instead manage them solely for carbon credits are not only unrealistic, but are also environmentally counterproductive."

The editorial steps through key facts often overlooked in the debate around native forestry. de Fegely highlights the fact that consumers want timber, for its beauty, its functional qualities and the fact it is the only renewable building material. The demand isn't disappearing, and de Fegely explains: "If Australia chooses not to produce the wood it needs, the demand does not disappear – it simply shifts overseas. This phenomenon, often referred to as carbon or production 'leakage', increases reliance on imports from countries where environmental protections and forest management standards may be lower than our own."

He goes on to describe how research has shown that harvesting can play an important role in forest health and debunks assertions that softwood plantations can simply take over for native hardwoods, spelling out the biological and structural differences in the timbers.

Importantly, he notes



Bob Debus. Image: courtesy State Library of NSW

that harvesters of native forest have a legal obligation to regenerate it, an act that creates an even more productive carbon sink than that found in a mature forest.

Click here to read the whole article.

Over at the Australia Institute's The Point blog, Bob Debus, chair of Wilderness Australia, is equally critical of the method. Former NSW Environment Minister and a lifelong environmentalist, Debus had a front-row seat to what happened with an early offsets scheme he introduced during the Carr Government: "The Baird Government removed the environmental guardrails, developers profited handsomely, and the scheme failed utterly to protect nature."

While he approaches the issue from the opposite perspective to de Fegely, he is equally damning of the INFM as a carbon offset arrangement. "When carbon credits, however well designed, are traded as offsets, they don't reduce emissions: they maintain the status quo," Debus writes. "They don't advance

decarbonisation: they simply allow emitters to continue business as usual. It makes no real difference if government notionally directs credits away from fossil fuel companies to other big carbon emitters in the industrial, transport and manufacturing sectors if offsets are still widely available and unlimited trading is allowed."

Debus provides a profound insight into the political problems with the method, writing: "... the NSW Government is judge, jury and beneficiary of the INFM method. It is simultaneously the method proponent and designer (with a contractor); the largest eligible landholder; the project proponent; the primary financial beneficiary (of ACCUs created from its own regulatory decisions and design); and a jurisdiction whose largest industrial facilities can use those ACCUs to comply with the Federal Safeguard Mechanism. It has a direct interest in optimistic assumptions that maximise ACCU volumes and revenue; and a direct interest in giving NSW-based emitters a cheaper local offset pool.

"Already we can see the policy drift. The GKNP, originally justified by biodiversity conservation values in the normal fashion, has now been tied operationally to revenue from offsets. The NSW Government has made protection of the habitat of an endangered species conditional on its monetisation as an offset commodity."

Click here to read the whole article.



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