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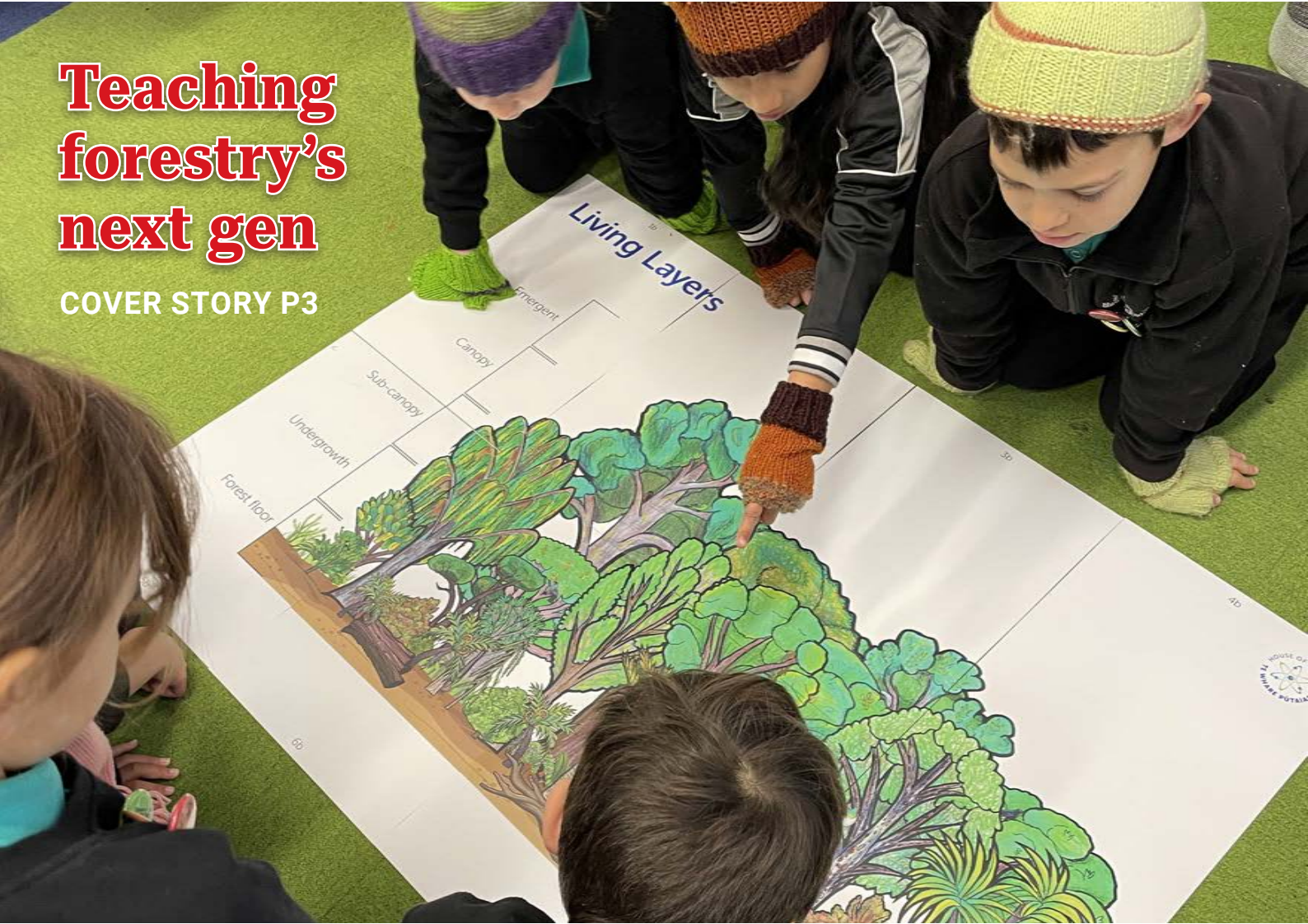


ISSUE 834 // January 23 2025

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COVER STORY P3



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# Research investment opportunity

FOREST & Wood Products Australia (FWPA) has announced that a call for proposals for its current Forestry Research Program is now open. This program supports collaborative research, development, and extension (RD&E) activities designed to deliver measurable benefits to Australia's commercial forest growers and drive industry innovation.

The Forestry Research Program provides a unique opportunity to advance the science of commercial forestry and its practical adoption. By addressing critical challenges and leveraging industry partnerships, this program aims to enhance productivity, sustainability, and resilience across the sector.

"This program reflects FWPA's ongoing commitment to supporting our forest grower members through research that drives productivity, sustainability, and innovation," said Andrew Leighton, CEO of FWPA.

"This program is about creating tangible value for Australia's commercial forest growers," said Jodie Mason, Head of Forest Research



The FWPA program funds research aligned with industry partners to ensure practical outcomes. Image Shutterstock

at FWPA. "Our focus is on fostering innovative research with strong industry support to address key priorities and deliver impactful outcomes. Collaboration is at the heart of this effort, ensuring the research is both practical and transformative."

Aligned with FWPA's 2023-2028 Strategic Plan, the program focuses on key RD&E priorities that reduce risk, loss, and cost while increasing productivity across the sector. The specific industry priorities are articulated in FWPA's grower RD&E investment plans, across the themes of:

- Climate Change
- Damage Agents
- Forest Operations &

- Supply Chain
- Impact of Fire
- Native Forest Silviculture
- Plantation Silviculture & Nutrition
- Tree Breeding & Genetic Improvement

Proposals addressing topics outside these priorities may also be considered if strong support from the forest-growing industry is demonstrated, though FWPA's website notes that the Soil Microbiome and Resource Modelling and Remote Sensing Investment Plans are excluded from this call for proposals due to significant current investment.

## APPLICATION PROCESS

The Forestry Research Program follows a two-stage application process:

1. Submission of **Concept Notes** (due Monday, 3 February 2025)
2. Submission of **Full Proposals** (due Monday, 7 April 2025)

Funded projects must commence in the 2025/26 financial year.

Proposals will be assessed based on their alignment with FWPA's Strategic Plan, demonstrated industry need and support, scientific merit, and a clear pathway to delivering measurable benefits for Australia's commercial forest growers. FWPA encourages prospective applicants to engage early with potential industry partners to ensure meaningful collaboration and alignment with industry needs. A minimum of three industry partners is required for each project.

For more information, including application guidelines and templates, visit the Forestry Research Program webpage: <https://fwpa.com.au/funding-opportunity/january-2025-call-for-proposals/>

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# Teaching future foresters

New Zealand's collaborative approach is helping kids to understand ecosystems.

A NEW educational kit for primary school students in Aotearoa New Zealand is taking a mātauranga Māori [Māori knowledge] approach to forest health and environmental issues such as myrtle rust and kauri dieback.

The kit has just been launched by House of Science, a charitable trust dedicated to fostering scientific literacy and curiosity among young learners through hands-on, curriculum-aligned educational kits. Scion, the leading Crown Research Institute for forestry in the country, is the collaborative partner behind the science.

Activities in the Te Ora o te Wao Forest Health kit allow students to explore native forests through audio soundscapes, compare giant trees such as kauri and pōhutukawa and learn to conserve forests by dissecting seeds, studying tree growth and understanding diseases including kauri dieback. The kit also includes Scion's interactive app E Heke e Heka! and the augmented reality tool Mātaihia Te Heka!, which help rangatahi [young people] identify other threats such as myrtle rust.

House of Science CEO and founder Chris Duggan says the kits give young learners practical knowledge

“STUDENTS ARE THOROUGHLY ENJOYING THIS HANDS-ON, SCIENCE-BASED APPROACH TO LEARNING



Scion and House of Science have previously developed another learning kit together: *A Load of Rubbish* was led by Marc and Eva Gaugler. Image Scion

to understand and help protect New Zealand's native ecosystems, inspiring the next generation to become stewards of our forests and environment. “By age 10, most children have formed a strong impression of careers they can see themselves doing, said Duggan.

“If science hasn't been part of their lives by then, the chance they'll follow this pathway is slim. Empowering primary school teachers to deliver engaging science lessons will ensure a workforce with the necessary skills to embrace and support the future of work.”

The kit is part of a library of hands-on, bilingual science resource kits covering a range of topics, including electricity, climate change and soil. “Careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics are at the heart of many future workforce requirements and underpin the transition to a climate-resilient, sustainable, low-emission economy,” Duggan said.

Katerina Pihera-Ridge, Scion's Portfolio Lead for Restoration, Protection &

Mauri o Te Waonui a Tane, says the inclusion of E Heke e Heka! and Mātaihia Te Heka! in the kit is significant. “It will make the app directly available to all House of Science member schools and kura [schools using Māori], presenting myrtle rust science in Te Reo Māori and English and allowing young learners to engage with this environmental knowledge in a relevant and interactive way.”

Pihera-Ridge led the development of the app after recognising a significant gap in accessible resources about myrtle rust, particularly in Te Reo Māori. “We identified a need to make scientific knowledge more accessible to whanau [families], communities and rangatahi,” she says. “This app offers an interactive learning experience that helps young people understand the impact of myrtle rust and empowers them in their roles as kaitiaki [guardians].”

The kit is guided by the BioHeritage National Science Challenge's Oranga – Wellbeing program, which combines Māori perspectives on well-being with scientific

strategies for biosecurity, ecosystem health and resilience.

Thanks to sponsorship from the BioHeritage National Science Challenge and the Freemasons Foundation, most House of Science branches nationwide will have two copies of the kit. “We have 20 House of Science branches serving over 700 schools across most of the North Island and Christchurch, and our kits have the power to reach more than 170,000 schoolchildren each year,” Duggan said.

Andrea Acton, a teacher at Bethlehem School, who recently trialled Te Ora o te Wao Forest Health kit, says it was an outstanding resource that captivated the students' interest. Acton said: “We integrated it seamlessly across the curriculum, which inspired some of the best creative writing students have done all year. They also created posters full of newly learned facts and are thoroughly enjoying this hands-on, science-based approach to learning.”

The kit marks the second collaboration between Scion and House of Science. In 2022, they partnered to create “A Load of Rubbish”, a kit that introduced students to the six Rs of resource management – rethink, refuse, reduce, reuse, recycle and repair.

To learn more about Scion, click here, and to support or learn about House of Science, click here.

On the cover: Children at Horohoro School learn about native forests through Te Ora o te Wao Forest Health kit. Image: Scion

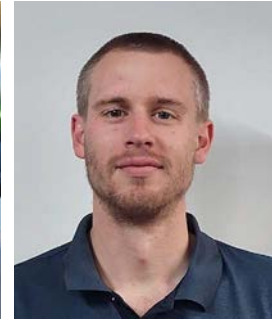


# International experience for young foresters

## Australian forestry professionals join Canada, UK and New Zealand as part of international exchange program.

FORESTRY Australia, along with the Canadian Institute of Forestry/Institut forestier du Canada, the Institute of Chartered Foresters (United Kingdom) and the New Zealand Institute of Forestry, is running a pilot international exchange program for early career foresters. The program has been developed to offer participants an opportunity to gain diverse perspectives as well as foster personal and professional growth.

Forestry Australia CEO, Jacquie Martin said Australia is delighted to be part of the scheme. "The pilot international exchange program offers a unique opportunity for emerging leaders in forestry and forest



From left: Hope Rebonne, Alex Donaldson, Prue Crundall and Sean Boucher. Photos: courtesy Forestry Australia

management to participate in a three-month paid international work placement," Martin said.

"It allows participants to build global networks, exchange knowledge and gain hands-on experience.

"Participants will be able to immerse themselves in a new environment, assisting them develop adaptability,

broadening expertise, and collaborating on shared opportunities and challenges."

Prue Crundall, currently employed by Forestry Corporation NSW, will be hosted by the Duchy of Cornwall in the UK. Crundall said she is relatively new to the forestry industry and participating in this program will give her an opportunity to enhance her understanding of forestry practices and expand her professional network.

Sean Boucher, of Sustainable Timber Tasmania will work with Strategic Natural Resource Consultants, a trailblazer in forest management and resource consulting, in British Columbia, Canada.

Boucher said he was looking to enhance his understanding of sustainable forest management and to view and learn different forestry techniques and practices.

Australia will welcome Hope Rebonne from Canada, who will gain experience with Sustainable Timber Tasmania.

Rebonne recently graduated with a forestry diploma in April 2024. "I applied to this exchange program because I see it as a fantastic opportunity to deepen my understanding of forestry on a global scale, while I am still

discovering all the forestry job opportunities here in Canada," she said.

"I am excited to explore the diverse practices and approaches in Tasmania's forest sector and to compare them with forestry in Canada."

Alex Donaldson, regeneration programme manager with Zulu Ecosystems, UK will be working for Forest Corporation of New South Wales.

Donaldson said joining Australia's international forestry sector is an unmissable opportunity: "I'm eager to exchange insights from the UK and immerse myself in their unique industry."

Martin said the benefits stretch both ways: "By opening their doors to young professionals from overseas, Sustainable Timber Tasmania and Forestry Corporation of NSW are providing life-changing opportunities and showcasing the exceptional forestry expertise and innovation within their organisations."

Other participants include New Zealanders Phoebe Milne, who is headed to Canada and Tor Drummond, who is UK-bound and Emyr Parker who is exchanging the UK for New Zealand.

Australian Forest Products Association

# AFPA THE LEADING VOICE FOR AUSTRALIA'S FOREST PRODUCTS SECTOR

# New NTHA board

## NTHA welcomes two new board members and thanks Danny Gattone.

THE National Timber and Hardware Association (NTHA) recently held its second AGM since the merger between TABMA Australia and Hardware Australia early last year.

Two new board members were announced, Cameron Quartermaine of Mackenzies Home Timber & Hardware along with John Lorente of Big River Industries. As the AGM concluded, NTHA Chief Executive Officer, David Little said he was thrilled to welcome its two new members and sincerely thanked returning members for "their continued service to our members, who are also the owners and decision makers of the association.

"They're giving up their time and energy to make the industry a better place. Our members are the owners and



**Cameron Quartermaine of Mackenzies Home Timber & Hardware is one of the new NTHA board members.** Photo: NTHA

the decision makers of the NTHA, and these leaders will ensure that the direction and purpose of the association lies purely with our members and their voices are heard as we move into the New Year."

The following NTHA members were elected as Directors.

### MERCHANT/ FABRICATORS POSITIONS

- Paul Stewart of Barrow & Bench Mitre 10
- Cameron Quartermaine of Mackenzies Home Timber & Hardware
- Chris Lavis of Lavis Mitre 10



**John Lorente of Big River Industries is the other new board member.** Photo: NTHA

- Clint Spence of Beaudesert Mitre 10
  - Gary Walker of Belmont Timber Co Pty Ltd
  - John Lorente of Big River Industries
  - Julie Murphy of Murphys Mitre 10
  - Lyndon Poirrier of Williams Group Australia Pty Ltd
  - Michael Gaske of Ozline Timbers
  - William Abi-Arrage of George's Building Supplies
- ### NON-MERCHANT/ FABRICATOR POSITIONS
- Peter Hutchison of MiTek Australia Ltd

- Glenn Tilling of Tilling Timber
- Greg Downie of Central Purchasing Services
- Mike Shadbolt of ITI (Aust.) Pty Ltd

Following the AGM, the directors elected the following office bearers for the ensuing year:

**Chairman:** Peter Hutchison  
**Vice Chairman:** Paul Stewart  
**Vice Chairman:** Glenn Tilling

Finally, as the NTHA's oldest member and after 30 years of service to the board, Danny Gattone, director of Swadlings Timber & Hardware has formally retired.

Mr Gattone has been an enormous support to the organisation after serving the board for over three decades and also serving as an NTHA Chairman, Little said.

"There is an incredible amount of history between the Gattone family and the NTHA," said Little. "While retirement is a natural part of the process, Danny will be very missed not only by myself, but also by our member community. We thank Danny for sharing his expertise in running such an iconic timber business with the NTHA membership."

“THEY'RE GIVING UP THEIR TIME AND ENERGY TO MAKE THE INDUSTRY A BETTER PLACE”

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# The future of Australian eucalyptus plantations

An upcoming seminar looks at how the market is changing.

By DENNIS NIELSON

FOR 200 years – from the late 18th century to almost the end of the 20th century – Australia was largely built on several commercially valuable eucalyptus species suitable to produce building materials

From the 1960s, native eucalyptus species were also used to make pulp and paper, and to start the eucalyptus woodchip trade to Japan – and some of this has continued in a smaller way to Korea and Taiwan.

Major commercial plantation growth of just two eucalyptus plantations species – *E. globulus* on the mainland and *E. nitens* in

## AUSTRALIA AND VIETNAM HW CHIPS EXPORTS



Australian Hardwood exports include a small volume of native woodchips, but this volume continues to reduce in favour of plantation woodchips. Data: Industry Sources

Tasmania – was started in Western Australia by several Japanese pulp and trading companies eager to secure future woodchips for their own pulp industry and then moved into the Green Triangle.

The area under plantation growth really accelerated from the late 1980s though to 2008 when the infamous Managed

Cont P 7



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- Opportunity for/threat of South China eucalyptus plantations harvest impact on future China woodchip import demand
- China SW log and sawn timber 5 & 10 year supplier predictions
- Future harvest predictions for Australian hardwood plantations
- China domestic hardwood forests, harvest overview
- Alternative markets for Australian eucalyptus pulpwood
- China pulp industry and imported woodchip demand trends
- The role that tree carbon is playing/could play in Australia
- 2024 imported woodchip suppliers to China
- India -- A market for Australian SW and HW logs

FOR WEBSITE
CLICK HERE
OR TO CONTACT ORGANISER
CLICK HERE

**FEBRUARY**

**13: DANA The Future of Australian Eucalyptus Plantations and of Australian log exports to China and India Seminar – Jasper Hotel, Melbourne.** Visit <https://www.danaevents.co.nz/2025melbourne/home> for more information. Contact [admin@dana.co.nz](mailto:admin@dana.co.nz)

**MARCH**

**22: NTHA QLD State Awards – Brisbane City Hall, Brisbane.** Join us in celebrating the QLD Timber and Hardware Industry. Contact Tahlia at [events@ntha.com.au](mailto:events@ntha.com.au)

**25-28: DANA Global Wood Products Supply and Demand Trends Seminar, Global Forest Investment Conference, and WWII Battle of the Bulge Battle sites tour – Europe.** Contact [admin@dana.co.nz](mailto:admin@dana.co.nz)

**APRIL**

**10-11: Forestry Australia 2025 Forest Carbon Summit – National Press Club, Canberra.** For full details and to register, visit <https://www.forestry.org.au/2025-forest-carbon-summit/>

**MAY**

**7-8: Sydney Build 25 – ICC, Sydney.** Australia's largest construction and design show. Enews is a media partner for Sydney Build 2025. For more details visit <https://www.sydnebuildexpo.com>

**11-17: Japanese Wood Architecture Tour – Japan.** Tour the world's oldest and most impressive wooden buildings. From Hōryū-ji, the world's oldest wooden building to the World Expo in Osaka - home to the world's largest wooden ring building. For more information and view the program, visit <https://timberconstruct.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Japanese-Study-Tour-2025-Sponsored-by-WoodSolutions.pdf>

**26-30: LIGNA 25 – Hannover, Germany.** The world's leading trade fair for woodworking and wood processing plant, machinery and tools. For more details visit <https://www.ligna.de/en/for-visitors>

**30: NTHA SA/NT/WA State Awards – National Wine Centre, Adelaide.** Join us in celebrating the SA, NT & WA Timber and Hardware Industry. Contact Tahlia at [events@ntha.com.au](mailto:events@ntha.com.au)

**JUNE**

**22-26: World Conference on Timber Engineering – Brisbane.** WCTE is the world's leading scientific forum for the presentation of the latest technical and architectural solutions and innovations in timber construction.

timber construction.

**29-JULY 2: 5th International Conference on Timber Bridges – Rotorua, New Zealand.** The focus is on timber bridges and the current need for resilient infrastructure to support thriving communities. For more information and to register your interest, visit <https://ictb-conference.org/2025/>

**OCTOBER**

**13-14: Timber Construct 2025 – Melbourne.** More details to follow.

**20-22: International Woodchip and Biomass Seminar and Networking Event – Singapore.**

**22-23: Melbourne Build 25 – MCEC, Melbourne.** Victoria's largest construction and design show. For more details visit <https://melbournebuildexpo.com>

From P 6

Investment Fund (MIS) industry took off. Eucalyptus plantations looked to be the perfect investment vehicle for Australian professionals, who were offered deals 'too good to be true' by several new MIS companies – sold as very attractive and tax effective investments.

Alas, they were too good to be true. Some projects appear to have been little more than Ponzi schemes, while others

had what the government report described as 'fanciful evaluations' and the whole MIS industry, which had planted 750,000 hectares of (mostly) farmland, collapsed.

This led to a number of well-funded Australian and American Timber Industry Management Organisations (TIMOs) buying up almost all of the assets of these failed companies.

Most of the harvest volume from these plantations is chipped and exported to North

Asian pulp mills – earlier almost all to Japan but now increasingly to China.

While the Japanese export scene has been slowly declining if remaining generally steady, the promised huge increase of demand in China exports has been hampered by:

- delays in some Chinese pulp mill expansions.
- increasing use by Chinese pulp-mills of domestic plantations for pulp to replace

woodchip imports – as the China-domestic eucalyptus plantation construction plywood industry has collapsed up there.

- the seemingly never-ending expansion of exports of Acacia hybrid woodchips from Vietnam. While these are lower quality than either *E. globulus* or *E. nitens* woodchips for pulp and paper making, their lower FOB costs and (especially) lower

Cont P 8

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# New AFWI Executive Director

## Dr Joseph Lawrence will help drive timber innovation.

AUSTRALIAN Forest and Wood Innovations (AFWI) has announced the appointment of Dr Joseph Lawrence as its new Executive Director. With an extensive background in academic, government and private sector management, Dr Lawrence has successfully led transformative initiatives for over 20 years.

Dr Lawrence's career highlights include senior executive roles at leading universities and government agencies. His expertise spans manufacturing, agrifood, energy, construction, digital and health industries, and he is recognised for his ability to forge impactful collaborations that drive innovation and deliver tangible outcomes.

AFWI's Board Chair, Bob Gordon, expressed his enthusiasm for the appointment, highlighting the rigorous selection process undertaken by a panel that included representation from AFWI, AFPA, and the University of Tasmania.

"After a thorough recruitment process, we're thrilled to welcome Dr Joseph Lawrence as AFWI's Executive Director," Gordon said. "His impressive track record in fostering collaboration and delivering innovation makes him uniquely qualified to lead

AFWI in achieving its ambitious goals. With the support of our Board of Directors and a team of expert staff, we are confident Joseph will help shape the future of the forestry and wood products sector."

Dr Angela Castles, Dean of the College of Science and Engineering at the University of Tasmania, also welcomed the appointment.

"We are very pleased to have secured someone of Joseph's calibre for the Executive Director role," Dr Castles said. "He brings a combination of executive experience ... as well as leadership in research and development, innovation, and sectoral partnerships. His strong engagement skills and clear vision for AFWI give us confidence he will hit the ground running and engage with our important industry partners early in his tenure."

Lawrence holds a PhD in Engineering Management from the University of Canterbury, where his



**Dr Joseph Lawrence is AFWI's new Executive Director.** Photo: supplied

research focused on business models for collaborative research centres. He also holds a technical MBA (MEM) and a Bachelor of Engineering. His career has been marked by numerous leadership achievements, including roles as Pro Vice-Chancellor at Federation University and Deakin University, where he spearheaded strategic initiatives for research and innovation.

**“UNIQUELY QUALIFIED TO LEAD AFWI IN ACHIEVING ITS AMBITIOUS GOALS**

"Joining AFWI at this pivotal moment for the organisation and the forestry and wood products sector is an incredible opportunity," Lawrence said. "My focus will be on strengthening partnerships between researchers, industry, and government to position AFWI as a leader in transformative, industry-led research.

"By advancing innovation and sustainability, we aim to deliver tangible benefits that directly support and grow the sector. I'm eager to collaborate with our partners to drive impactful outcomes that address the industry's evolving challenges."

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Julie Collins MP said: "Dr Lawrence's experience and excellence in his field means AFWI is in extremely capable hands.

"AFWI has an important role to play in supporting research and innovation for the Australian forestry sector. Dr Lawrence will be a vital point of contact for industry and provide direction and security for both AFWI and the timber sector.

"I wish Dr Lawrence every success as he starts in his new role."

From P 7

shipping costs to North Asian pulp mills are simply too attractive for buyers to resist. The last time Australian exports exceeded those from Vietnam was in 2010. In 2024E, Vietnam exports are expected to be a record 18 million BDMT, compared with

Australia at 3.5 million BDMT [see chart on P 6].

- massive pulp mill expansions in Indonesia and Brazil that are pumping out new pulp tonnage faster than the market expands, so woodchip import pulp mill buyers are under serious pressure to minimise costs.

Competitor pressure from

Vietnam (especially), Thailand and China domestic resources – coupled with reducing nominal and especially real FOB prices – are challenging major owners of Australian eucalyptus plantations to look to for alternative uses for their plantation land and wood harvests.

DANA - Ginkgo will be

holding a one-day seminar on The Future of Australian Eucalyptus Plantations in Melbourne on 13 February. A variety of speakers from Australia, China and India will present.

Program and registration details can be found at <https://danaevents.co.nz/2025melbourne/>



# NTHA courses

Three ways to ignite your customer service and grow sales this February.

BOOST sales by building real product knowledge and improved customer service with NTHA's half and full day courses. February's enrolments will close soon so book now and ignite your business with exceptional customer service in 2025.

**Timber Knowledge:**

Grow your service teams' understanding of the many timber products you provide; ensure you and your staff have the knowledge and confidence to properly and professionally service your customers, trade or retail.

- Rocklea, Queensland, 9am to 12pm, Tuesday 18 February.
- Newcastle, NSW, 9am to 12pm, Tuesday, 25 February.

**Plan Reading and Basic**



*NTHA courses are taught by experienced industry experts and designed to quickly convey a wealth of detail.* Image: supplied

**Estimating:** Develop your sales team and grow your sales by building the knowledge and skills your sales team need to turn plans into quotes, or single product enquiries into a whole

lot more. Give your team the invaluable skill to read a plan and estimate materials and quantities – a natural developmental program for your building materials sales staff.

- Rocklea, Queensland, 9am to 2pm, Wednesday 26 February.
- Online – Zoom, 9am to 4pm Tuesday 25 February.

**Coaching Leaders for Performance:**

Inspire, guide and grow high-performing teams within your business by learning the arts of balancing leadership and management, mastering emotional intelligence, leveraging personality profiling and navigating difficult conversations with confidence.

- Rocklea, Queensland, 9am to 12pm, Tuesday 25 February.

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# FWPA signs new funding agreement

## DAFF updates to the levies system are behind the 10-year Statutory Funding Agreement.

FOREST & Wood Products Australia (FWPA) has announced the signing of a new Statutory Funding Agreement with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) that will be in effect from 1 January 2025 to 2034. The Statutory Funding Agreement (SFA) represents the renewal of a 10-year contract between the Australian Government and FWPA, a Rural Research and Development Corporation (RDC).

The new contract is in response to changes in the levies legislation passed by Parliament. Key points of change are:

- 1. Streamlining and Modernisation:** DAFF's updates to the levies legislation aim to reduce complexity and inconsistencies, making it easier for stakeholders to understand and comply with these regulations. Future adjustments to levy settings will also be simplified. Under the new levies legislation, the new SFA defines FWPA as being the Declared Recipient Body under the Act for the forest and wood products industry.
- 2. Focus on Clarity:** The primary goal of these changes is to enhance



FWPA's funding goes in part to reports on timber and forestry management. [Click here for details on Assessing & managing mid-rotation wood quality in Australian softwood plantations.](#) Photo: FWPA

comprehension and ease of compliance with the levies legislation, while maintaining the individual levy settings as they currently are.

### 3. Government Commitment:

The government remains dedicated to providing matching funding for eligible R&D activities conducted by RDCs, with the new legislation designed to streamline the current processes. Specifically for FWPA the new legislation provides access for full matching funding up to 0.5% of sector GVP.

### UNDERSTANDING THE LEVY SYSTEM

The levy system represents a long-standing collaboration between the Australian Government and industry. It is designed to bolster productivity and competitiveness in

international markets by imposing statutory levies on producers, processors, and exporters. These levies are collected with industry input and are crucial for funding initiatives that benefit the agricultural sector.

Australia's rural R&D levy system is often regarded as a global benchmark for government and industry partnerships in agricultural innovation. It balances efficiency, inclusivity, and shared responsibility, driving improvements in productivity and sustainability while addressing industry-specific challenges.

This new agreement and

“AS OUR SECTOR GROWS, SO WILL THE MATCHING FUNDS AVAILABLE

modernisation of the levies will empower FWPA to further enhance the services it can deliver to its members and other levy payers, providing substantial benefits to our members and the wider industry.

“On behalf of FWPA, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry for their support and partnership, demonstrated by

the renewal of our SFA,” said FWPA Board Chair, Craig Taylor. “This new contract is not only a testament to our collaborative efforts but also a commitment to the future of the forest and wood products research and development, and the industry in Australia.

“Based on the 2023 GVP of the sector, this new contract makes available approximately \$11.5 million per annum in matching payments for R&D investments made by the industry through FWPA. As our sector grows, so will the matching funds available. We are excited about the opportunities this will create for innovation and growth, benefitting our members and the broader community.”

To learn more about levy rates, [click here](#). For more about the levy system and principles, [click here](#).



# Timber measurement

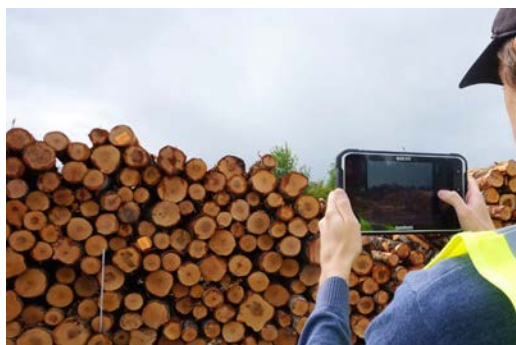
A LOT of fanfare, as well as energy and water, has gone into generative AI, producing photos with extra fingers and texts that read like a teenager's book report. Meanwhile, actually useful AI projects that utilise the technology's proven ability to analyse visual data are being launched far more quietly.

Unlike the optimistic predictions that surround generative AI, analytical AI is a solid technology that has shown real world capability in fields such as scanning medical samples and looking for patterns in large data sets, reducing the time taken for such tasks significantly and freeing up human researchers to interpret and make use of the data.

In Poland, Timbeter, a leading provider of digital timber measurement solutions, has been running a pilot

scheme with State Forests (Poland) in approximately 100 forestry units within 14 districts of Piła and Poznań.

Since late July 2024, Timbeter licenses have been distributed to foresters, technical support teams, and educators in this area. Timbeter's innovative solution utilises AI and photo-optical technology to measure timber stacks accurately. By seamlessly integrating with the State Forests' Leśnik+ system, the software ensures data synchronisation and minimises errors. The adoption of this technology is expected to increase measurement



**The AI is able to analyse log sizes and numbers more quickly and accurately than humans, freeing up staff for more high-value work.** Image: courtesy Timbeter

efficiency by 10–30% and reduce manual workload, freeing foresters to focus on higher-value tasks.

The project's goals include reducing the workload of foresters, simplifying timber measurement processes and enhancing objectivity of results. This transition will also provide additional insights for stakeholders, from contractors to timber purchasers, enabling

better decision-making and operational efficiency.

The scheme will be fully rolled out this year, but already the pilot phase has seen this functional AI facilitate the measurement of up to 700,000 m<sup>3</sup> of timber.

State Forests have tested photo-optical measurement methods since 2012. Timbeter was selected for its proven compatibility with existing systems and rigorous testing compliance.

"We are thrilled to collaborate with Poland's State Forests on this transformative journey," said Anna-Greta Tsahkna, CEO at Timbeter. "This partnership highlights our commitment to advancing sustainable and efficient forestry practices."

To learn more about the project, click here.

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# HIA calls for skills help

## An ongoing deficit in critical skills is threatening housing goals, and fee-free TAFE isn't a fix, say HIA experts.

RECENT releases from the ABS contain good and bad news for the construction sector.

The Building Activity report for the September 2024 quarter, released on Wednesday, shows a seasonally adjusted lift in construction. The total number of dwelling units commenced rose 4.6% to 43,247 dwellings. Private houses were again the standout, with new private sector house commencements rising 5.2% to 27,651 dwellings.

Other residential building was not enough to reverse its downward trend, but house commencements have been strong enough to show an overall dwelling lift of 7.7% yoy, though completions remain flat. The value of total building work done in the quarter rose 0.3% to \$38.5 billion.

Last week's December 2024 Labour Force, Australia data helps to explain the lack of improvement in completions, showing significant gaps in the labour market.

"The labour force data continues to reinforce the alarming picture that while there are boots to fill in the residential building industry, there simply aren't enough people to fill those boots," said Matt King, senior economist at the Housing Industry Association (HIA).

"This troubling gap between the demand for skilled trades and its supply risks significantly impeding the nation's ability to meet our ambitious housing target.

"According to the ABS, in November 2024, private sector job vacancies were 308,000, an increase of 4.7% from August



**More apprentices are needed in construction and HIA has called for assistance to make them more affordable, as well as safer and more inclusive worksites.** Image: Shutterstock/Monkey Business

2024. The data also reveals that construction sector job vacancies were up 33.5% from pre-COVID period (January 2020 to November 2024).

"These figures echo HIA estimates that an additional 83,000 skilled workers will be required to deliver the government's housing target. However, the current pipeline of skilled labour in the construction industry is far from sufficient. The persistent shortage of qualified tradespeople and construction professionals is compounding existing challenges, such as escalating construction costs and project delays," King added.

King applauded policy initiatives including increased funding for vocational education and apprenticeship programs, but said they were not sufficient in themselves.

HIA managing director Jocelyn Martin agreed with this position. "The focus on Fee Free TAFE is distracting from the real issue facing the supply of housing in Australia. Successive governments have been aware of the persistent

and structural skill shortages across key construction trades for decades and the current policy approaches are doing very little to shift the dial," she said.

Martin called for wage subsidies for apprentices, as well as easier paths through the red tape around taking on apprentices. Other policy changes called for include skilled migration with a simplification of the visa processes – "The residential building industry needs a construction trade contractor visa tailored to suit the way work is arranged on building sites," she noted.

She recommended a dedicated workforce development campaign to promote trades as a legitimate and rewarding career and industry-based mentoring programs to improve trainee retention.

"Finally," said Martin, "the construction industry must become an industry of choice. Last year's reports of unacceptable behaviour on construction sites have tarred the entire industry

with a negative brush.

There must be action taken to make the construction industry an attractive industry for all workers by ensuring acceptable, safe and appropriate behaviour on construction sites.

"Confidence must be restored to construction sites to attract the workers the industry desperately needs. HIA's pre-budget submission, due to be released at the end of this month, will offer Government practical solutions to address skill shortages in the construction industry," concluded Martin.

HIA has also called on the Federal Government to review its proposed Free TAFE Bill 2024. While the initiative promises to address critical skills shortages, HIA believes the plan needs a comprehensive review before it's locked into law.

"We absolutely support making vocational education more accessible but rushing this legislation risks turning a good idea into an ineffective policy," said Geordan Murray, HIA executive director – future workforce.

Murray called for evidence-based decisions, saying that over the period of Fee-Free TAFE, the number of construction apprentices and trainees had in fact fallen.

He also called for private and industry-based training providers to be given equal access to funding, saying, "Australia's vocational education system is built on diversity, restricting private providers not only limits student choice but also risks leaving gaps in the training landscape."





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# Confusing the forest and the trees

Leading forestry agencies are calling out environmental decisions and greenwashing that will harm both the environment and economy.

THE old adage that the squeaky wheel gets the oil is never truer than when it comes to public opinion. Unfortunately for Australia, that opinion is often swayed by commercial interests or emotion, rather than by facts.

It's particularly galling when it comes to the timber sector, as evidence shows that when the public is educated about the sustainable management of our Australian timber industry (both native and plantation harvested) and the importance of increasing carbon-capturing timber usage to minimise high-carbon materials in construction, support is very strong.

In 2023, the local timber industry reached out to members of the public in the Clarence Valley Council (Northern NSW) region and made the case for its responsible management of local native timber supply as well as its essential role as a provider of jobs and materials for housing. The result was significant community support in overturning an attempted council ban on native forest harvesting in the region.

But while there have been small-scale wins, the overall trend in Australia in recent years has been to lock the timber industry out of public forests.

Last year, *T&F Enews* 828 reported on new proponent-led models for development under the Australian Carbon Credit Unit Scheme (ACCU). One of these, proposed by the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy,



**Marshall Notaras Hardwoods was one of the local companies that spent months in 2023 spreading the word about their operations to build community support for native timber harvesting in the area.** Photo: courtesy Marshall Notaras Hardwoods

the Environment and Water, was Improved Native Forest Management in Multiple-use Public Forests.

The model "involves stopping or slowing down harvesting of publicly owned native forests. Not harvesting the forests for timber or letting them grow older before cutting them down, could enable ACCUs to be issued for storing more carbon."

Timber Queensland, the peak state body for the forest and timber industry in Queensland has raised major concerns with this method.

TQ CEO Mick Stephens said, "This proposed method raises far more questions than answers for addressing long-term climate mitigation and the integrity of the carbon credits intended to be generated."

Stephens points out that the method is at odds with the high-level principle identified in the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 4th assessment report that states: 'In the long term, a sustainable forest management strategy aimed

at maintaining or increasing forest carbon stocks, while producing an annual sustained yield of timber, fibre or energy from the forest, will generate the largest sustained mitigation benefit.'

This principle echoes the evidence: timber harvested from native forests is mostly used in residential housing where it continues to hold onto carbon for its entire functional life. Data from ABARES (click here to download the report), shows that while, on average, one cubic metre of plantation softwood logs contains sequestered carbon equivalent to 787kg of CO<sub>2</sub>, one cubic metre of native forest hardwood logs contains sequestered carbon equivalent to 982kg of CO<sub>2</sub>. The forest itself is replanted, with new trees also capturing carbon from the atmosphere.

"The proposed method suggests that by simply ceasing sustainable timber harvesting in public multiple-use forests you can generate additional long-term abatement compared to the counterfactual of continued

harvesting and storage of carbon in regrowing forests and harvested wood products," Stephens said.

"This is in direct contrast to many life cycle analyses of managed forests with sustainable timber harvesting, which show long-term sustained carbon benefits

when the substitution of steel and concrete in the built environment is included along with carbon stored in forests and harvested wood products.

"The method fails on multiple accounts to meet the very principles Minister Bowen set out following the recent Chubb review into the land-based carbon sequestration market."

Stephens said these failures include:

- a high likelihood of perverse carbon mitigation outcomes;
- a risk of wasting millions of taxpayer dollars on dodgy credits;
- adverse economic and social outcomes for the native forestry industry if implemented;
- disregard for a growing body of Australian and international research supporting the longer-term carbon benefits from actively managing native forests with the inclusion of sustainable timber harvesting; and
- a lack of transparency and public disclosure on the

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proposed method and assessment process used by the Emissions Reduction Assurance Committee (ERAC).

“We have briefed the Queensland Government and advocate they reject this method at a state level given the seriousness of potential impacts and policy

development flaws, similar to the position being taken by the Tasmanian Government,” said Stephens.

“The native hardwood sector in Queensland contributes almost \$700 million each year to the economy and supports 6000 jobs across the state, providing much needed building and housing materials.

“We believe this proposal is ideologically motivated by the method proponent (NSW Government) to further restrict native forestry in Australia, which can contribute to poor land management outcomes including higher risks of bushfires.”

Timber Queensland is calling on the Australian Government to withdraw the method immediately. Stephens also called on the government to “undertake a review into how the approval process seemingly ignored the counterfactual science.

“The irony is there is a definitive need for a carbon method that deliberately encourages forest thinning and sustainable timber harvesting as a tool to improve tree growth and productivity, forest health and



1/ **TQ CEO Mick Stephens points out the new ACCU model goes against established science, including a high-level IPCC principle.** Image: courtesy Mick Stephens LinkedIn  
2/ **Local sign in Tasmania rejecting the Bendigo and Adelaide Bank's decision not to finance timber operations.** Images: supplied AFPA



long-term carbon outcomes in many public and private native forests. This is particularly the case in Queensland,” he added.

## BANK GREENWASHING

Governments aren't alone in making decisions not reflected by the evidence. The Bendigo and Adelaide Bank last week denied financing to Tasmanian logging company TP Bennett and Sons, citing ‘environmental policies’.

Business manager Tammy Price, the daughter of founder Tony Bennett, told Pulse Tasmania it was “totally unacceptable” their operations had been lumped in with that of coal and gas.

“Because we generate income from native forestry, which is one of the sustainable and regulated industries here in Tasmania, we can't get any finance,” Price said.

“We are now harvesting forests that my forefathers harvested. We are in natural regrowth forests. We don't log old-growth forests.”

The publication reports that TP Bennett and Sons switched to banking with Bendigo after larger banks

left the Huon Valley, but was denied financing after a lengthy back-and-forth with head office (click here for the full story).

Diana Hallam, CEO of the Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA), came out strongly against the decision, saying, “Bendigo and Adelaide Bank needs to stick to banking and stay away from greenwashing. If the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) acknowledges the science behind the sustainable management of native forests, then surely the Bank can also. The Bank is treating native forestry as an extractive industry, not what it is, a renewable industry.”

Hallam said that AFPA has heard of further examples of the Bank failing to support valued community businesses in the sector.

“Australian native forestry operations and the businesses that work in the supply chain are part of an essential and sustainable sector that harvests (and replaces) just 6 in every 10,000 trees in Australia's native forests,” said Hallam. “Whether they be forest managers, contractors, harvesters, in transportation,

or processing and manufacturing in mills, this sector is clean and green and it needs long-term committed financiers to support the regional communities it underpins. Communities Bendigo and Adelaide Bank purports to support.”

While the bank has used environmental policies to justify its position and

boost its green credentials, the action is likely to have a perverse outcome.

“The fact is, if native forestry ceases to exist in Australia, we will be forced to import all of our hardwood timber and fibre for products like home furnishings, decking and furniture – from places with lower environmental standards than Australia – and that means worse environmental outcomes for the planet” Hallam said.

“We will have replaced an industry governed by world-leading environmental standards and substituted it for one with worse environmental credentials. Leaving the lights burning throughout the night in any of the Bank's offices, flying directors to meetings and driving fuel motor vehicles is far more a risk to the environment than the work Australia's family forestry contractors are involved in.

“The science is clear, managed native forests support the climate, communities and the economy. I challenge Bendigo and Adelaide Bank to reverse its decision on native forestry finance,” Hallam concluded.

# Timber framing is safe and reliable in bushfire-prone areas

THE debate on the 'right' materials to use when building homes in bushfire-prone areas often sparks fierce opinions and misguided claims.

While some advocate for alternative materials, timber framing remains a viable, safe, reliable and effective option when designed and built in accordance with modern practices. It's time to set the record straight and address some of the myths that have driven unnecessary fear about building with timber.

One common misconception is that timber frames ignite easily and pose a higher risk of destruction in bushfires compared to steel. However, this oversimplified view ignores the science. Timber-framed houses built in bushfire-prone areas must be designed and constructed in accordance with the Australian Standard AS 3959 Construction of buildings in bushfire-prone areas.

AS 3959 provides solutions for timber-framed houses from lower bushfire threats through to an extreme threat referred to as Flame Zone. AS 3959 makes no distinction between using a timber-framed or steel-framed building!

Timber, unlike unprotected steel, remains relatively stable at elevated temperatures. Steel, on the other hand, begins to lose strength and can melt or buckle well before reaching the extreme heat generated by a bushfire if unprotected.

This was seen during the 2009 Black Saturday fires in Victoria and countless other events, where steel was no more invincible than timber,



and many steel homes suffered the same fate in the face of ferocious flames.

Another important factor is the role of the surrounding environment. Studies and expert analysis repeatedly confirm that the fuel load around a property – the dry vegetation, debris, and landscape management – is a significant determinant of whether a home survives a bushfire. Building materials alone do not dictate safety. A home surrounded by cleared defensible space and properly managed vegetation is far more likely to survive than a steel-framed house that is overgrown with combustible plants. It's time we stopped stigmatising timber and started focusing on smarter overall designs and landscape strategies.

What's more, guidelines for building in bushfire-

the contrary often originate from industries with vested interests, perpetuating myths for commercial gain.

The growing intensity and frequency of fires globally can no longer be ignored, and climate change is a significant driving factor behind this alarming trend. By continuing to rely heavily on materials like steel and concrete,

which are produced through energy-intensive processes that emit vast amounts of carbon dioxide, we are exacerbating the very crisis that fuels these catastrophic bushfires.

Conversely, timber offers a sustainable alternative that actively combats climate change by storing carbon throughout its lifecycle. Utilising timber for construction not only reduces our carbon footprint but also aligns with long-term climate action goals. By choosing timber, we are not just building

safer, smarter homes in bushfire-prone areas – we are investing in a solution that mitigates the climate crisis and the rising severity of bushfire events it continues to create.

The reality is that no building material, steel included, can stand up to the



**1/ Design choices including insulation that prevented heat transfer, low-flame spread timber and clearing a boundary saw this timber-framed and -clad home designed by Chasen Architecture survive the recent Palisades fire.** Image: courtesy @ChasenGreg on X/Twitter

**2/ Rural fire crews race towards Glenn Innes during the Black Summer fires.** Image: Shutterstock/Stu Shaw

prone areas, such as using ember guards, managed building sites, and strategic design methodologies, are applicable to all construction types. Timber homes, when constructed to meet the AS 3959 Bushfire Attack Level (BAL) requirements, are every bit as capable as steel or other materials at resisting a bushfire. Claims to



# Rubbish risk in Tas forests

SUMMER in Australia means getting out into the great outdoors. Sadly, some parts of the outdoors are less great than others. Sustainable Timber Tasmania (STT) has noted an uptick in waste being dumped in its forests, despite comparatively low costs for tip fees in the state, possibly driven by cost of living pressures.

Stephen Rymer from Sustainable Timber Tasmania told David Reilly on ABC's Tasmania Mornings, "It's a big problem for us. We have lots of cases of rubbish dumping of all different sorts of rubbish, including sometimes hazardous waste and car bodies, which they set on fire and cause fires we have to fight.

"It's unsightly, it can be dangerous, and it costs us a lot of money to tidy up. We've had lots of cases of people dumping asbestos and some



**Illegal dumping in Tasmanian forests causes risks including fires, as well as making natural reserves unsightly.** Image: courtesy STT

clinical waste dumped. It's not what you want to be finding when you're out doing your job in the forest."

Churchill Fellow and waste expert, Brad Mashman, told Reilly that Tasmania is in fact the best state for recycling and responsibly disposing of rubbish, but asbestos has historically been an issue, as have tyres. He noted that dumping led to increased costs down the line. "You

either pay up front to have the waste managed appropriately or you pay through your rates or you pay when you purchase the product. There is no free lunch in waste," he said.

Bert, a caller to the show who drives around the state as a service tech, said that in the past six months he had seen a noticeable worsening of dumping, describing it as "just unbelievable. Someone will pull up on the side of the road and dump the contents of their trailer or their car without any due consideration of the environmental impact, all to save a few dollars. It's quite disgusting and it's got really bad."

Rymer says that STT is working closely with the EPA to identify and prosecute offenders, including through the use of trail cameras, but dumping has led to the closure of some forest areas and cost some \$50,000 per annum in tip fees, plus the labour costs involved in management. He called for anyone witnessing dumping to report it to STT, police or the EPA.

To hear the full interviews, click [here](#) and [here](#).

material bias.

Timber-framed homes have a place in bushfire-prone areas, and their use should not automatically raise alarm bells. What matters is how we design and build them, as well as how we manage surrounding vegetation and community preparedness. Blanket statements dismissing timber are both scientifically inaccurate and counterproductive. The focus must be on promoting practical, evidence-based strategies instead of

politicised fearmongering about building materials.

The way forward for communities in bushfire-prone areas should be based on thoughtful planning, sustainable practices and respect for fire-smart guidelines. Timber is not the enemy; mismanagement, reckless land practices and misinformation are. It's time to embrace timber as part of the solution to combat climate change, not unfairly condemn it as part of the problem.



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full force of a catastrophic bushfire fuelled by high winds, extreme temperatures, and towering flames. The Santa Ana winds in California or the blazing infernos wrought by Australia's Black Summer are clear demonstrations that environmental factors outweigh material choice in the scale of destruction. It is building design, adherence to bushfire construction standards, and proactive land management that provide real solutions – not uninformed

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