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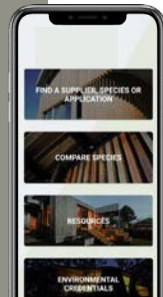
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Land prices at record highs

AFFORDABILITY remains a key constraint in solving the housing crisis and land prices are not helping. The latest HIA-CoreLogic Residential Land Report (click here to purchase) shows land prices rising faster than CPI and building materials

“The median price of land sold nationally increased by 7.6 per cent compared to the previous year, much faster than the rise in the cost of other goods and services in the economy,” stated HIA Economist Maurice Tapang.

“The median price of



The rising cost of land is contributing to housing unaffordability.
Image Shutterstock/doublelee

land sold nationally in the September quarter 2024 was a record high \$366,510.”

Capital cities drove the figure with their median price up 9.2% over the year

to \$408,160, led by Perth at 38.6% and Brisbane at 21.2%. Sydney, with significantly weaker home building activity than other capital cities, still recorded 7.2%.

Buyers are seeking to maximise their bang for buck, either through clever builds on smaller lots or regional options. While the median price in the regions has increased a slower 2% to \$281,910, areas such as the Illawarra and Geelong have seen lot sales have increased by over 50% compared to the previous year, thanks to their proximity to capitals.

A note from the Publisher

WE hope everyone had a wonderful Christmas and New Year.

It was nice to publish our first issue for 2025 last week. We always appreciate the rest and the change to routines, but it is good to be getting back to our Timber and Forestry Industry and 2025 is shaping up to be a big year.

Last week we highlighted several pieces, including an international exchange program for young foresters which Australia is part of, NTHA courses available to help your business with sales and customer service and the science behind timber framing being

safe and reliable in bushfire-prone areas – just to name a few.



At the end of 2024 we celebrated with Vida who marked 10 years in Australia. You can catch up on any issues you have missed by downloading them from our website from the Publications tab.

We would like to draw your attention to the Seminar being held in Melbourne on Thursday February 13th at Jasper Hotel. The seminar includes 8 speakers and will focus on a range of opportunities, emerging markets in India and the current too long-term timber demand in China. See the DANA

– GINKO advert on page 6 and click on the available link for full seminar details. Places are filling fast, and the single day won't keep you away too long but will arm you with lots of valuable information.

Are you in the market for a large electric forklift? The Adaptalift group has a discounted promotion running on the CB3000 but only until the end of February. See the full details in our machinery section on page 13. Adaptalift will supply and service your Combilift forklift and this of course includes the entire range.

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Forestry Australia mentoring program

Applications for the valuable program close on Monday.

FOR the fourth year, Forestry Australia is running a nine-month mentoring program that pairs experienced forestry professionals with those earlier in their careers who are seeking professional development, opportunities for knowledge sharing and career growth.

The program has successfully helped both mentors and mentees to deepen their understanding of and connections within the industry and been extremely well received by past participants.

Mentors and Mentees are encouraged to invest one hour a month at minimum to meet (in person or online). Forestry Australia also recommends that mentees additionally dedicate approximately 8 hours per month to prepare for each meeting – including goal setting, pre-reading, planning and pursuing development opportunities, and reflection activities. The result is the ability to target areas where mentees will gain most from the relationship and where mentors will be able to give the most directed advice.

Applications for the 2025 program are currently open. Forestry Australia provides a tool kit of resources that support participants to

ensure effective and sustainable knowledge transfer, skill acquisition and maintaining momentum.

Key themes we explore each month in the tool kit include:

- Establishing your career and learning goals
- Time management for life
- Building networks and professional connections
- Values and ethics in business

“[The resources] were great topics to explore and develop to help me understand my strengths, weaknesses, where I can improve and what attributes are important for my career,” said James Kidman of Victoria’s Otway Tonewoods, who was a 2023 Mentee.

“I highly valued the experience and we will continue to catch up with my mentor into the future.”

Specialist applicants are also encouraged to apply. Otway Tonewoods provides carefully selected sawn timber products for musical instruments, for example. The only criteria are Forestry Australia membership, a passion for forest science, forestry, and forest management and a desire to improve your professional knowledge for mentees, or, for mentors, to share your



James Kidman of Otway Tonewoods was a 2023 mentee. Photo: courtesy Forestry Australia

knowledge, invest in the future of the sector and help others.

Participants in the 2024 program were similarly enthusiastic about the experience.

“My mentor was great in supporting me through this program,” said one mentee. “I appreciated their mentoring style and how they allowed me to morph the program into something that I needed. I felt supported and guided the entire time and felt comfortable to ask any and all questions or advice.”

Another said, “Congratulations to everyone who put this program together and everyone who participates in it. It has been a valuable experience for me, thank you for the opportunity.”

Mentors were also appreciative of the experience, with one saying, “My

mentoring journey this year has been both a rewarding and somewhat unique one with my very busy and talented mentee juggling a higher degree thesis project while transitioning out of a long-term position. They are considering where their next career move will take them and this very challenging engagement for both of us will continue into 2025 as they explore options and finds exciting new opportunities.”

At least one mentee is looking forward to being on the other side of the relationship, telling Forestry Australia: “Mentoring is an amazing way develop yourself and others. I am grateful for mentors in my life and thankful that I can contribute to the development of others through the Forestry Australia Mentoring Program, which has provided me with a new network and sense of belonging in the forestry profession.”

The program is exclusive and free for Forestry Australia members, including new members. Click here for more on membership.

Applications close at midnight on Monday 3 February 2025, then mentors and mentees will be virtually introduced on 28 Feb before the program officially kicks off in March and closes at the start of December.

If you have any enquiries regarding application, or would like to know more about the Mentoring Program, please contact admin@forestry.org.au

“MENTORING IS AN AMAZING WAY DEVELOP YOURSELF AND OTHERS”



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Timber futures seminar

WOODSOLUTIONS has announced the first Timber Futures Seminar, directed at an audience of design and build professionals. The event will highlight the latest advancements in timber design and construction, offering solutions to global economic and environmental challenges in the built environment.

The seminar features a great line up of expert speakers, with keynote by Andrew Waugh of Waugh Thistleton Architects, a global pioneer in sustainable timber construction.

Attendees will gain insights into how timber's innovative applications are driving sustainable and economic solutions for the construction industry.

Waugh will discuss timber's role in addressing economic

and environmental challenges, alongside academics Dr Duncan Maxwell and Dr Richard Nero. All three speakers will help attendees to understand timber's potential to transform the built environment in response to global challenges like climate change and resource efficiency.

In addition to learning how advanced timber systems can shape the future of design and construction, attendees will be able to connect with industry professionals and peers over light refreshments.

This event is designed for



Dr Duncan W. Maxwell is an Associate Professor at Monash University and leads the Future Building Initiative. Photo: courtesy Monash University

architects, engineers, builders, and students, offering a platform to explore cutting-edge research, and stay at the forefront of sustainable building practices.

Kevin Peachey, Head of Built Environment Programs at WoodSolutions and Forest

& Wood Products Australia, emphasised the event's significance, saying: "We are pleased to welcome Andrew Waugh to Australia for this seminar. His visionary work across the globe demonstrates how timber can address Australia's economic and environmental challenges.

"This is a unique opportunity for our design and build professionals to learn from one of the leading minds in sustainable architecture and explore how timber can play a transformative role in the future of construction."

When: 10 February 2025, 4–7 pm

Where: Carrillo Gantner Theatre, Sidney Myer Asia Centre, Room B02, Swanston St, Parkville, Vic

Cost: \$100

To register, click here.

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Koala Park a focal point

The park has become a symbol for those opposed to native timber harvesting.

FOR activists determined to make native timber harvesting the scapegoat for koala habitat losses, the proposed Great Koala National Park (GKNP) is proving a handy rallying point.

As reported in previous editions of T&F Enews, research has shown that selective native timber harvesting of the type carried out in the area did not adversely impact koala density, nor the nutritional quality of koala habitat (click here to download the report). Additionally, while the park is waiting to be gazetted, volumes harvested in the proposed area have declined.

Nevertheless, as has been the case since the announcement of the GKNP, environmental groups have used it to demonise the timber industry. Earlier this month, a few hundred protestors gathered in Coffs Harbour calling for the park to be gazetted and for harvesting to cease immediately.

On Friday, the ABC ran another major story featuring three separate



Despite the biggest risks to koala habitat being development and agriculture, the animals are still used as a weapon to fight against native timber harvesting. Photo: Shutterstock

environmentalists who gave lengthy personal appeals for the koalas and spoke about the 'dangers' of logging, while ignoring the fact that vastly more koala habitat in the area has been damaged or destroyed by development and agriculture. Nameless spokespeople for the forestry sector were given a short space for factual rebuttals (click here for the story).

Sadly, the repetition of these stories is having an effect on the Australian public. Forest Futures, an initiative of the Australian

Climate and Biodiversity Foundation, has released polling showing that voters in five key battleground seats have backed an end to native forest harvesting.

For context, the group is pro-plantation timber – rightly

“THERE WAS CLEAR SUPPORT FOR GOVERNMENT INCENTIVES TO INCREASE TIMBER PLANTATIONS

acknowledging the need for timber as a sustainable construction material – but against native timber harvesting. The Pyxis Polling and Insights survey report (click here to download) shows that in Richmond, Eden-Monaro, Lyons, Brisbane and Griffith a majority of respondents supported the view that logging of native forests on public land should end and timber should be sourced only from commercial plantations.

In better news, all five marginals also showed clear support for government incentives to increase timber plantations and were concerned about jobs within the timber and forestry sectors, including wood product manufacturing and funding for forest management jobs and improved fire management.

Despite media reporting biased against the timber industry, it is clear that at least some of our messages are cutting through. This election year is a good time for us to start being louder about the remainder.

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ACCU debate heats up

Tasmanian timber leaders join condemnation of new ACCU model.

LAST week, *T&F Enews* reported on the critical response from Timber Queensland to a new proponent-led model for the Australian Carbon Credit Units (ACCU) program. The Tasmanian Forest Products Association (TFPA) has now echoed comments from the Tasmanian Minister for Business, Industry and Resources Eric Abetz, calling out serious flaws in the same model.

Proposed by the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, the Improved Native Forest Management in Multiple-use Public Forests Method (INFM) calls for the slowing down or stopping of native timber forestry in publicly owned

across Australia – including in Tasmania. In effect, it would end all but a small privately owned part of the native timber industry across the country.

Despite the model being supported by the Federal Government, it has been revealed NSW undertook no consultation with the Tasmanian Government before it launched the plan.

TFPA Independent Chair, Sarah Courtney, said the model tries to force the Tasmanian Government to march in lockstep with the radical proposal by the NSW Government.

“The model proposed by the NSW Government, and backed by the Federal Government, would see the end of sustainable native forestry in



TFPA Independent Chair, Sarah Courtney. Image: courtesy TFPA

Tasmania,” Courtney said.

“Our industry has bipartisan support in Tasmania. But this looks like another case of a mainland state trying to impose its opinions onto our island.”

Courtney said it was pleasing to see both Minister Abetz and Federal Shadow

Minister for Fisheries and Forestry, Senator Jonno Duniham calling out the absurd hypocrisy in the model presented by the NSW and Federal governments.

“Both the Tasmanian Government and Federal Opposition understand the importance of forestry for Tasmania’s regional communities,” Courtney said

“That’s why the TFPA is joining with them today to call on Prime Minister Anthony Albanese to immediately dismiss this proposed model and show that the Federal Government supports Tasmania’s regional communities, and the thousands of people employed in our sustainable forestry sector.”



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- China SW log and sawn timber 5 & 10 year supplier predictions
- China domestic hardwood forests, harvest overview
- China pulp industry and imported woodchip demand trends
- 2024 imported woodchip suppliers to China

- Opportunity for/threat of South China eucalyptus plantations harvest impact on future China woodchip import demand
- Future harvest predictions for Australian hardwood plantations
- Alternative markets for Australian eucalyptus pulpwood
- The role that tree carbon is playing/could play in Australia
- India -- A market for Australian SW and HW logs

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FEBRUARY

10: Woodsolutions Timber Futures Seminar – 4.00pm - 7.00pm, Carrillo Gantner Theatre, Parkville, VIC. For more details and to register, visit <https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/woodsolutions-timber-futures-seminar-tickets-1202833931669?aff=MediaRelease>

12: Forestry Australia Webinar - Managing deer in forestry settings – ONLINE EVENT, 12.30pm-1.30pm (AEST). For more details and to register, visit <https://www.forestry.org.au/webinar-managing-deer-in-forestry-settings/>

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

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

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

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.sydneybuildexpo.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

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.

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/>

SEPTEMBER

2-3: Timber Queensland Biennial Conference "Doing Timber Business in Queensland" – Brisbane. For more information, email admin@timberqueensland.com.au

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>

23-24: Field Trip – Vietnam.

Have some news to share?

Send media releases, news stories, events, any timber and forestry news related information with us anytime to Nicky, Donyale and Jess -

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Apprentice initiative welcomed by most

A boost of \$10,000 in incentive payments to apprentices is seen as a positive step towards better retention and completion.

ON Friday, the Albanese Federal Government committed to establishing a Housing Construction Apprenticeship stream in response to the *Strategic Review of the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System*.

Under the scheme, from July 1 2025, eligible apprentices will receive \$10,000 in incentive payments, on top of their wages, over the life of their apprenticeship to work in housing construction.

Apprentices will receive \$2000 at six, 12, 24 and 36 months, and at the completion of their apprenticeship.

The announcement from the PM's department said the strategic review had "found cost-of-living pressures faced by apprentices are steering people away from taking up apprenticeships."

It went on to say: "Encouraging more people into apprenticeships will ensure we have the workforce to deliver our Homes for Australia Plan, an ambitious target to deliver 1.2 million homes over the next five years."

"It builds on the Albanese Labor Government's plan to support more students and trainees through expanding Free TAFE and slashing HECS fees for university students."

This is coupled with other initiatives including maintaining the 2025 Priority List and extending current Australian Apprentice Training Support and Priority Hiring Incentive payment settings by six months until 31



Industry has called for added support for employers while welcoming the boost to apprentices. Image: Shutterstock/Claudine Silaho Weber

December 2025, increasing the Living Away From Home Allowance from 1 July 2025, and increasing the Disability Australian Apprentice Wage Support payment from 1 July 2025 to support employers taking on apprentices with a disability. A similar set of initiatives is supporting the clean energy sector.

On the whole, the initiative has been well-received within the construction sector. HIA called it "a key piece to addressing skills shortages".

HIA managing director Jocelyn Martin said, "[The] announcement of a \$10,000 incentive to boost the number of skilled workers in key housing trades is a welcomed response to the crippling labour shortages the residential building industry has been faced with for decades. HIA has long called for milestone apprentice incentives to grow the domestic workforce.

"The five \$2000 incentive payments staggered

throughout the course of an apprenticeship in the residential building industry will support the retention of an apprentice and combat the concerning non-completion rates we continue to see. Increasing the living away from home allowance could also see greater activity in regional areas that struggle to attract key housing trades."

However, she noted that there was more to be done on the supporting employers side, particularly for SMEs, which take on 60% of apprentices, and also in cultural change within the industry.

"Retention rates are much better for apprentices through industry-based mentoring

“MENTORS CAN OFFER SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE TO YOUNG PEOPLE ENTERING THE WORKFORCE

programs, including group training organisations, where pastoral care is a key aspect," Martin said. "Mentors can offer support and guidance to young people entering the workforce.

"We need to attract more people to careers in the construction industry, we need to ensure that there are enough employers creating the employment

opportunities and providing the on-site work experience, and we need well-resourced VET providers delivering high quality training.

"HIA's All Hands On Deck found that if Australia is to reach the Housing Accord target of 1.2 million homes in the next five years there needs to be an injection of 83,000 trades people into the workforce.

"We can only make housing a priority if we have a workforce capable of building the homes we need to reduce the barriers to home ownership," she concluded.

Master Builders Australia was also supportive of the initiative.

"Labour shortages are currently the biggest handbrake on fixing the housing crisis," said CEO Denita Wawn.

"Coupled with government

From P 8

funding of fee free vocational education and training, there is no better time to pick up the tools and become a tradie.

“The revised staggering of payments is something Master Builders Australia has long called for, so there is a financial incentive for apprentices to complete their training. Around 50% of all apprentices do not complete their training – the new staged payments approach will hopefully see the rate of completions increase.”

Wawn also approved the release of the strategic review, saying, “Master Builders has worked closely with Dr Iain Ross AO and Ms Lisa Paul AO PSM who led the review, and we sincerely thank them for listening to the concerns of employers and the broader building and construction industry.

“Employing an apprentice comes at a cost. Not just their wage, but the hours spent teaching them, covering their training costs, and managing the associated administration, and helping them navigate the workforce which all adds up. A robust incentive system must provide assurance and minimise risk. It should mean that the employer does not shoulder the entire cost burden for the 50% of apprentices who do not complete their studies.

“A better incentive system should free an employer to focus on training and teaching: this is especially important in the first and second years.”

Other industry groups including Master Plumbers Australia and New Zealand echoed these sentiments. Meanwhile, the Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia (ITECA) criticised the changes’ limited scope.

Troy Williams, ITECA chief executive, said: “This initiative is a welcome boost for apprentices entering residential construction and clean energy careers, but it does little for people aspiring to work in industries outside these sectors, where the skills gap is just as urgent. Both businesses and aspiring apprentices will miss out.

“Supporting apprentices in the construction and energy sectors is important, but this measure fails to address the needs of the small businesses in other parts of the economy. It also lets down employers that are looking to take on an apprentice. Without meaningful support

for employers, the pipeline of skilled workers will continue to remain under threat.”

It’s not an outsider position: Wawn said, “Builders would like to see this payment expanded to other areas of the building and construction industry that are also facing chronic shortages and crying out for more apprentices. Without roads, rail, sewerage and water, we can’t build more homes for Aussies.

“We are disappointed that the high costs associated with hiring and training and apprentices has not been recognised as yet – 98% of businesses in building and construction are small and they are doing it tough.

“Master Builders continues to call for a robust incentive system that supports employers and minimises the risk with taking on an apprentice who may or may not complete their training.”

“A ROBUST INCENTIVE SYSTEM MUST PROVIDE ASSURANCE AND MINIMISE RISK



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New illegal logging rules start

Changes to Australia's illegal logging laws start on 3 March.

FOR timber importers and processors, it's time to check that you and your operation are familiar with and ready to transition to the new arrangements regarding Australia's illegal logging laws.

Illegal logging is the most valuable environmental crime in the world, estimated to cost the global community around \$240 bn per annum. In addition to being directly linked to species extinction for both fauna and flora and wider environmental destruction, illegal logging has close links to organised crime and funding war and has been linked to murders and corruption in multiple countries.

It's not just an 'over there' problem, some high-value Australian timbers have also been logged illegally and it's estimated that up to 10% of our timber imports could come from high-risk sources every year.

Under Australian law, illegal logging means 'the harvesting of timber in contravention of the laws of the country where the timber is harvested'.

This includes a wide range of illegal activities, such as:

- logging of protected species,
- logging in protected areas,
- logging with fake or illegal permits and
- using illegal harvest methods.

If you import wood, pulp or paper products into Australia, or process Australian grown raw logs, the updated laws affect you. You have legal responsibilities and need to know your obligations.

The Australian Government has helpfully pulled together guidance regarding the new legislation and rules for affected parties, click here for the webpage.

In short, from 3 March, the new rules will replace the existing Illegal Logging Prohibition Regulation 2012 and introduce changes to due diligence requirements. The onus is on importers of timber and/or timber products, or processors of Australian-grown raw logs to understand changes to due diligence requirements.

The fundamental steps for due diligence requirements will remain unchanged, that is:

- a written due diligence system,
- information gathering,
- risk assessment,
- risk mitigation and

- record keeping.

The requirement to respond to a request for information from the department also remains the same. However, there are key changes to some steps, as follow.

The three risk assessment methods in the current Regulation (Country Specific Guidelines or State Specific Guidelines, Timber Legality Frameworks and Regulated Risk Factors) will be replaced with two distinct risk assessment pathways for:

1. Certified timber and timber products/raw logs
2. Non-certified timber and timber products/raw logs.

There is a new repeat due diligence exception. This will allow you to rely on a previous risk assessment and risk mitigation measures if you import or process the same timber, timber products, or raw logs from the same supplier within a 12-month period. You can use this exception regardless of the certification status of your timber or timber products.

There is an exemption for processors who are also the person/entity who harvested the raw log.

In addition, the Amendment Act introduces powers for the department to undertake certain activities, two of which will not be fully implemented until the department has the necessary IT systems and regulatory framework in place. These two reforms are:

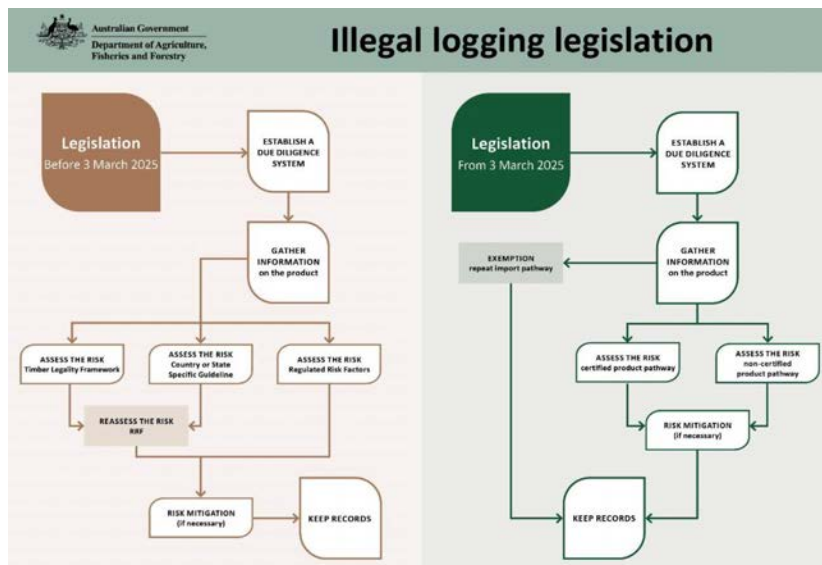
1. The use of timber testing technologies to verify product claims related to species and/or origin.
2. The notification requirement to receive due diligence information prior to the importation or processing of timber products.

The department has recently undertaken a timber testing trial to understand how best to implement timber testing activities under these new powers and will provide further details on these reforms once the systems for both are operational and the implementation plan is finalised.

ACCOUNTABILITY

With respect to publishing details of criminal convictions, civil penalty orders, orders of enforceable undertakings under the Act and anonymous timber testing results on the Department's website, it advises it will only publish instances of breaches where non-compliance is repeated or very serious and where it is considered in the public interest to do so.

The intent of these new powers is to inform the regulated community of findings that will assist due



The department's action flow chart regarding the new rules. Image: Australian Government website

From P 10

diligence efforts, to encourage compliance with the laws and educate the public and consumers to encourage selection and purchase of legally harvested timber and timber products.

However, the Act allows for significant financial penalties and even prison time for those who breach it.

The advice for importers makes clear that if you believe your wood, pulp or paper product may include illegally logged timber, you should not import it.

Similar advice and penalties apply to domestic processors, who should ensure all logs have been legally harvested.

More flexible enforcement options including injunctions, enforceable undertakings and tiered offences. These will provide options to ensure compliance responses can



Timber logged illegally, such as here in the Peruvian Amazon, may be acquired by organised criminals with far larger distribution chains. Photo: CC by JYB Devot

remain proportionate to the level and nature of non-compliance.

The Department has committed to continuing to work with individuals and entities to educate and facilitate future compliance.

These changed legal requirements will involve changes to internal processes. In order to support compliance within the regulated

community, for the first six months of the Rules being in effect (from 3 March 2025 – early September 2025), the Department will conduct audits as usual, but will focus on education and guidance for non-compliance matters relating to the application of new/changed due diligence arrangements.

However, it may still take further action for non-

compliance matters relating to due diligence requirements that remain unchanged.

While customs brokers and overseas suppliers are not directly impacted by the new rules, their work will be affected by customer enquiries and information requirements, and so the webpage above also contains advice for them.

For people who suspect they are aware of illegal logging imports or processing, the Department recommends they call 1800 803 006 for a confidential discussion or use an online form available by clicking here to make a report, which can be anonymous.

The Department regularly publishes illegal logging e-updates. Click here for details. There is also a link to join the illegal logging mailing list on the same page, or you can email questions to IllegalLogging@aff.gov.au

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Conservation efforts succeeding

Conservationists find positive glimmers amid general decline in genetic diversity.

IN the most comprehensive global analysis of genetic diversity ever undertaken, an international team of scientists has found that the genetic diversity is being lost across the globe but that conservation efforts are helping to safeguard species.

The landmark study, published in the pre-eminent scientific journal *Nature*, was led by Associate Professor Catherine Grueber from the School of Life and Environmental Sciences at the University of Sydney and a team of researchers from countries including the UK, Sweden, Poland, Spain, Greece and China.

The data spans more than three decades (from 1985-2019) and looks at 628 species of animals, plants and fungi across all terrestrial and most maritime realms on earth.

Two-thirds of the populations analysed are declining in genetic diversity but conservation efforts designed to improve environmental conditions, grow populations and introduce new individuals for breeding – for example habitat restoration and animal translocations – are sustaining, and in some cases increasing, genetic diversity in populations.

Associate Professor Grueber said: "There is no getting around the fact that biodiversity is declining at unprecedented rates across the globe – but there are glimmers of hope. The action of conservationists is reversing these losses and helping to create genetically diverse populations that can better meet the challenges of the future."



1/ **The study's authors include (L-R) Katherine Farquharson, research lead Associate Professor, Catharine Grueber and Dr Robyn Shaw.** Photo: courtesy of the University of Sydney

2/ **Golden bandicoots released in Western Australia have maintained their genetic diversity.** Photo: courtesy Colleen Sims, WA Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions



The team of scientists used innovations in genetic analysis to gain new insights from studies carried out decades ago. Creating a common measurement scale, they were able to make comparisons between studies, even when they used different methodologies and collected genetic data in different ways.

"This kind of comprehensive global study would not have been possible even 10 years ago," Grueber said.

"Advances in genetics and statistics have given us new tools that mean we can

continue to learn from studies long after they were carried out – a huge benefit when we are looking at populations and trends on a global scale."

Conservation efforts that could improve or maintain genetic diversity include translocations – where animals are moved between populations to benefit a species or ecosystem – habitat restoration, population control – where some individuals are removed to improve conditions for those that remain – and controlling feral or pest species, as well as work to promote the health of habitats.

Successes include the reintroduction of the golden bandicoot into areas in Western Australia with no loss of genetic diversity in new populations. These populations have benefitted from the introduction of Indigenous burning regimes a decade ago, which have seen total fire incidence decrease by 40% in those parts of the Kimberley, increasing the food supply for small mammals like the bandicoots.

Other successes were the release of arctic foxes from captive breeding programs in Scandinavia, the translocation of greater prairie chickens into existing populations in North America, and the effective treatment of disease within black-tailed prairie dog populations, which has improved the health of colonies in north-central Montana in the US.

The authors hope the findings will encourage more conservation efforts and lead to increased protections for populations that are currently not managed.

Co-first author Dr Robyn Shaw from the University of Canberra said, "Despite successes, we can't be complacent. Two-thirds of the populations analysed are facing threats, and among these populations less than half received any kind of conservation management. It's vital that we learn from what is working so that we can protect species in the long-term."

To read the complete paper, search Shaw, Robyn E., Farquharson, K., et al., 'Global meta-analysis shows action is needed to halt genetic diversity loss' (*Nature* 2025).



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NSW plantation fire grants welcomed

The Minns government has announced new fire protection projects to help protect southern NSW plantation forests.

THE NSW Government's \$13 million Plantation Fire Protection funding package has met with a warm reception from industry.

Announced last week, the package endorses funding for 15 local projects which will form a network of enhanced fire protection initiatives across the Murray region, including Greater Hume, Snowy Valleys, Cootamundra-Gundagai, Albury and Wagga Wagga LGAs.

Approved projects include:

- \$1,100,000 for the upgrade of Ellerslie Range Fire Trails Program. The trails are strategically important to protect at-risk plantation estates in the Snowy Valley which includes the Southern Cross Forest complex, Green Hills and Bago State Forests;
- \$983,339 for the upgrade and maintenance of priority fire trails in Bondo, Bago, Carabost and Jingellic State Forests;
- \$5,720,000 for Tumut Aerodrome, to improve water supply for aerial firefighting and the construction of hangar for fire suppression aircraft;
- \$100,000 for two high volume trailer mounted water pumps for rapid refilling of water transport trucks and fire tankers, to be housed in the Bondo forest depot and Ardrossan forest depot;
- \$329,490 for a network of Remote Automated Weather Stations to provide data to the Bureau of Meteorology to inform fire preparedness and response across the region;
- \$145,625 for firefighting water storages in strategic locations exposed to uncontrolled fires



From left, Campbell Sanderson (FCNSW), Darren McPherson (Hyne), Mick Ivill (AWU), James Jooste (AFPA), Dr Joe McGirr MP, Dean Hawkins (Visy), The Hon. Tara Moriarty, Brett Webb (AKD), Kristina Kaminski (Hyne), Luke Hayden (CFMEU), Carlie Porteous (SWG), Rab Green (AKD) and Jacob Lazarus (Southern Cross Forests). Image: SWG

- for both private and public plantation land in the Ellerslie forests area to the west of Adelong, forest areas to the west of Humula, Carabost State Forest and Murruguldrie State Forests;
- \$456,000 for two bulk tankers to transport firefighting water, to be housed at Green Hills;
- \$387,106 for specialist tractor and mulcher, based in Tumberumba, to undertake growth suppression and non-burn hazard reduction in key fire corridors;
- \$1,537,800 for an all-terrain firefighting machine with water tank and high flow water pumps that will deliver large volumes of water in difficult plantation situations to be housed in the Tumut area;
- \$828,139 to expand the PSN (Public Safety Network) radio network for plantation workers, across the Murray region;
- \$325,000 for three additional fire detection cameras on Mt Ikes, Table Top and Mt Flakney to complete the network monitoring

the Murray Valley timber plantation estate;

- \$220,000 for the Australian Fire Danger Rating System – which provides critical data to assess fire risk across the Murray region;
- \$767,500 to upgrade of cabins in five fire towers to ensure early detection in Munderoo Fire Tower (Snowy Valleys), Tumorrana Fire Tower (Snowy Valleys), Burngoogie Fire Tower (Wagga Wagga), Kendall Fire Tower (Snowy Valleys) and Kangaroo Fire Tower (Cootamundra-Gundagai).

Together these projects will be administered as a pilot program, with monitoring and evaluation to be undertaken by Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) to help determine the potential to broaden this program across the State.

SELECTION AND IMPACT

Ranging from latest technology fire detection cameras to aerodrome-based water

supplies for firefighting, the projects have been identified to collectively deliver the maximum fire protection, hazard reduction and response capabilities for plantations and communities in the region.

A panel of government and industry experts identified the projects by analysing existing arrangements and identifying gaps and opportunities.

While the projects will protect plantation resources, they also provide increased protection for the local residents and businesses of the area.

The projects were identified by representatives from the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS), the DPIRD and the Softwoods Working Group (SWG), facilitating additional input from plantation owners, local councils, Forestry Corporation and other fire authorities.

The SWG described the investment as a “crucial step”.

SWG chair Dean Anderson said: “The 2019/20 bushfires had a devastating impact on our communities and industry, with significant losses to plantation resources that are essential for the future of NSW's housing and construction sectors. This funding represents a proactive approach to fire prevention, detection, and rapid response suppression.”

SWG said that it was forward to working closely with program recipients, to ensure these measures are effectively implemented.

“The collaboration between government, industry, community and fire authorities

Opal workers locked out

Timber suppliers affected by aggressive owner action.

A ROUGH period at Maryvale's Opal paper mill continues with the recent lockout of 300 production workers over an industrial dispute.

Opal and the CFMEU Manufacturing Division are currently negotiating a new Enterprise Agreement for production workers at the mill. Two weeks ago, seven workers undertook a legal six-hour work stoppage as protected industrial action. The action was in response to no movement from management in 14 negotiation meetings over changed conditions that lowered worker conditions and pay while also making rostering and crewing numbers less certain.

In response, mill management – Opal is owned by Japanese multinational Nippon – decided to implement a legal lock out of production team members.

Force Majeure clauses are being invoked on contracting businesses who supply timber to the mill, sending the repercussions cascading through the community, where



Last year, AMWU members responsible for maintenance at the mill also fought Opal against their conditions being rolled back. Photo: courtesy AMWU

the mill is a major employer.

Australian Forest Contractors Association general manager Tim Lester warned that timber stocks already in the mill wood yard mean there could be further delays for deliveries once production restarts.

"Timber deliveries to the mill have stopped, and the forest services businesses involved have received confirmation of Force Majeure," Lester told this publication.

"Our estimates and advice [show] that more than 120 people from contracting businesses will be directly affected, with flow-on impacts

for a large number of families and businesses in Gippsland."

Contractors in the region have already faced significant disruption after the sudden closure of native timber harvesting in Victoria led to the closure of Australia's only white paper line at the mill, which had manufactured copy and office papers – most notably the Reflex brand. The mill has continued to process eucalypt and pine for packaging papers.

Lester said: "It is unclear how long the situation will last although the current expectation is about four weeks. However, there are likely to be further delays in timber

deliveries recommencing as the stockpile of timber already in the wood yard clears."

A media statement from Opal said the previous protected industrial action taken and upcoming notified action by the CFMEU prompted the move towards an indefinite lockout.

"Unfortunately, given the protected industrial action taken and upcoming notified action by the CFMEU, which includes planned rolling shutdowns of the mill's infrastructure, we cannot operate our paper production facilities," said the statement.

The ACTU has described the lockout as "extraordinarily harsh" in a media release.

"Locking out more than 300 workers indefinitely without pay is unfair and unreasonable," said ACTU secretary Sally McManus.

"It hurts these workers, their families, and the whole community. The union movement calls on Opal to end this disproportionate action and negotiate a fair deal with their Maryvale mill workers."

From P 14

has been instrumental in shaping these initiatives," said Carlie Porteous, SWG executive. "We commend the NSW Government for recognising the importance of this industry and taking decisive action to mitigate future fire risks."

Minister for Agriculture and Regional NSW, Tara Moriarty said: "The Murray region was hit particularly hard in the 2019/20 bushfires and we lost a significant stock of our future housing timber – we can't afford to lose anymore.

"These projects will play a vital role in protecting the remaining critical timber supplies in the Murray region as we move into the [current] bushfire season and beyond. These same timber plantations will produce the quality timber our NSW housing sector so desperately needs now and for generations to come, so it's important to find ways to protect them from bushfires.

"I am confident this program will build resilience into this important regional industry through measures that deliver improved fire prevention, detection and response,

making our communities safer in the process," she concluded.

The announcement was personal for Independent Member for Wagga Wagga, Dr Joe McGirr, who lives in the region and witnessed the impacts of Black Summer. He said: "Memories of the disastrous Dunns Road fire five years ago are still fresh in local minds, so these measures to reduce the fire risk in the Snowy Valleys are very welcome.

"The softwoods industry is an economic powerhouse for the local economy so it's

essential that all steps possible are taken to protect livelihoods and businesses that depend on safe and secure plantations."

The practicality of the funding targets was especially appreciated. "The enhancements at the Tumut aerodrome will be an important addition to the region's firefighting capacity," said McGirr.

"This is the result of positive collaboration between industry, the Rural Fire Service, Snowy Valleys Council and government and I congratulate all involved."

Logging versus palm oil

Researchers have compared the two, and one is a distinctly lesser evil.

ONE message that the Australian timber harvesting industry has repeatedly emphasised is that closing down the domestic native timber supply will lead to increased imports from countries where harvesting is less regulated and less sustainable. The emphasis has been on our near neighbours in Malaysia and Indonesia, where logging is a major export and logged areas are often subsequently converted to palm oil production.

This is a true statement, but at the same time, recent research shows a clear way to lower the impact of logging in those countries.

A team led by the University of Oxford has carried out the most comprehensive assessment to date of how logging and conversion to oil palm plantation affect tropical forest ecosystems. The results demonstrate that logging and conversion have significantly different and cumulative environmental impacts.

Previously, most similar studies have focused on a limited number of factors, making the overall impact on the whole ecosystem difficult to assess. In this new study, the researchers looked at over 80 metrics describing multiple aspects of the structure, biodiversity and functioning of the tropical forest ecosystem – from soil nutrients and carbon storage, to photosynthesis rates and numbers of bird and bat



1/ Palm oil plantations in West Kalimantan, Indonesian Borneo. The differences with the adjoining forest are clear to the eye. Photo: courtesy Nanang Sujana/CIFOR.org

2/ Professor Andrew Hector, Professor of Ecology, Plants for the 21st Century at the University of Oxford, was senior author on the study. Photo: University of Oxford

species. These were measured in study sites in three areas of Sabah, Malaysian Borneo that were either in undisturbed old growth forest, logged forest (moderately or heavily logged) or in previous logged forests that had been converted to oil palm plantation.

In total, logging and conversion to palm oil both had widespread impacts, affecting most of the measured properties – 60 of the 82 ecosystem metrics. However, there were clear differences between the two.

Logging mostly impacted factors associated with forest structure and environment. Even low levels of selective logging focusing on trees with particular commercial qualities alter the system. For example, when older, larger trees are removed, this creates gaps in the canopy, enabling rapid-growing species to emerge that have very different characteristics, including less

under the single layer of oil palm that follows conversion from logged forest.

Senior author Professor Andrew Hector said, “One of the key messages of the study is that selective logging and conversion differ in how they impact the forest ecosystem meaning that conversion to plantations brings new impacts that add to those of logging alone.”

The results demonstrate that logged forest can still be valuable for maintaining biodiversity and should not be immediately ‘written off’ for conversion to oil palm plantations.

Professor Ed Turner (University of Cambridge), who co-led the study, said, “A key message of this work is that old growth, intact forests are unique, but secondary logged forests are also valuable and important in terms of their biodiversity and ecosystem functioning relative to the much-reduced levels seen in the oil palm plantations that are increasingly replacing them.”

Reading the study, it is clear that working with our neighbours to encourage this more Australian-style of cyclical logging, where forests are left to recover or actively replanted rather than converted to agricultural use may help to improve environmental outcomes in the region. An important consideration will be economic incentives that encourage the long lead times associated with timber harvests, or other investments that disincentivise transition to palm oil.

[Click here for the full study.](#)

Source: University of Oxford



dense wood and thinner leaves that are more vulnerable to herbivores.

Converting these logged forests to oil palm plantations, however, has greater impacts on biodiversity that go beyond those of logging alone. Species of birds, bats, dung beetles, trees, vines, and soil microorganisms all showed greater reductions in abundance and diversity on plantations compared with logged forests. This is likely due in part to the major changes in plant food resources and the shift to hotter and drier microclimates

“ LOGGED FOREST CAN STILL BE VALUABLE FOR MAINTAINING BIODIVERSITY ”

Student mass timber winners

THE Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat (CTBUH) has just named five winners for the 2024 Mass Timber Student Design Competition, reports leading architectural and design events website Bustler

Teams from universities in the US and Canada competed for the prize and winners were chosen for their ability to reflect on the meaning of tall buildings in modern societies.

Each winning design was considered also for its capable use of prefabricated components or volumetric modular approaches in such a way that highlighted the benefits of utilising mass timber for rapid development. This year's competition focused mainly on the use of mass timber in multi-storey buildings through the lens of affordable housing that emphasises rapid development.

First prize went to T-LINE, designed by Jixuan Li, Linru Wang, Luyan Li and Yingxi Dong of Columbia University. The design is envisioned to sit on an under-utilised rezoned Bronx industrial lot beside a future train line, maximising amenity for inhabitants and minimising the requirement for car space.

The seven multi-storey buildings have eco-focused specifications, from their primarily CLT structures to green roofs, ample natural light through the careful staggering of building heights and arrangement, plus natural cross ventilation.



1/ **T-Line integrates housing, transport and recreation in a vibrant community.**

2/ **Live, Laugh, Learn makes teachers' lives easier in a beautiful environment.** Images: courtesy CTBUH

Designed as a community hub as well as homes, the interiors include running tracks and climbing walls to help residents stay healthy without having to leave home, as well as shared bike parking and ready access to green spaces.

The CTBUH jury was impressed with how well the design captured the spirit of the prize, with their notes saying: "In the rapidly developing Bronx neighbourhood of Morris Park, there's a growing population and one of the city's largest job centres. However, the area is predominantly industrial with low-density single housing and a persistent shortage of affordable housing over the past decade. To address this need, the design merges a low-carbon footprint with energy efficiency to build a vibrant, eco-conscious community. Featuring 286 units, it utilises mass timber to promote sustainability and liveability."

The second-place getter was Live, Laugh, Learn by Marco Zhou of California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. Zhou designed teacher accommodation designed to address Hawaii's critical teacher shortage, where the high cost of living has been a significant factor in poor retention. The highly ventilated four-storey units are perfect for the island climate.

Third place went to Green Gables by Cindy Duan and Julie Chen of Yale University, which uses an adaptable modular approach to redevelop a dilapidated affordable housing project in New Haven, Connecticut. Fourth was awarded to 131 W 133rd St by William Pyle, Yuka Imada, Eduardo Cabrera, Philippe Martel and Caroline Harris of Columbia University, where the modular CLT design fits perfectly into the streetscape and is designed for easy assembly and disassembly.

The fifth-placed design is PreFabulous by Olivia Loncar-Bartolini and Rick Schutte of the University of Toronto. It uses a mixture of modular units sized to their transportation and prefabricated panels to quickly and efficiently construct affordable housing, situating the units on under-utilised public school grounds in New York and bringing people back to the hub of the city.

For the full story, and to see all the images and design notes, click here.

Source: Bustler



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