Newsletter

Edition #1 - March 2025

Dear $[UD:FIRST_NAME||]$,

Welcome to the First Edition of the Murray Region Forestry Hub Newsletter for 2025!

At the Murray Region Forestry Hub (MRFH), our team is committed to keeping you up-to-date with the latest developments, challenges, and opportunities within the forestry sector and the communities that support it.

This newsletter will feature political and policy updates, funding opportunities, and much more.

Your voice matters to us! We encourage you to engage with us by sharing your thoughts and suggestions. Together, we can enhance appreciation for our forests, our industry, and the communities we proudly serve.

Thank you for being an integral part of our community!

Message from our Hub Chair

The Deed of Variation with the Australian Government's Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) has been signed, securing funding for projects until 30 June 2027 and the administration and wind up of the Murray Region Forestry Hub (MRFH) by 31 August 2027. A further $54,000 has been provided for the remainder of the 2024/25 financial year to communicate what has been discovered, developed and reported upon by any of the Forestry Hubs or entities funded by the Federal Government; these communications have been labelled as extension services. This further funding for extension services was dependant on the submission and approval of a workplan. Carlie Porteous did a terrific job in turning this around in a short time frame and obtaining approval for the MRFH to upgrade our website, produce high quality handouts summarising issues of importance to the MRFH and undertaking an event in cooperation with the Victorian North East Catchment Management Authorities to engage local land holders on the merits and potential of commercial softwood plantations.

Now that funding has been secured for future projects, and remembering our collective task is to advise the Federal Government using the information we garner and develop; we need to ensure we target those issues that are inhibiting the development or sustainability of the forestry sector in the Murray Region. Reviewing what we have achieved to date and setting the priorities going forward will be a focus of upcoming meetings this year as our remaining 27 months will fly by very quickly.

Regards

Dean Anderson
Chair SWG & MRFH

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Message from our Hub Manager

Infrastructure

The hub is fast completing a number of projects including the MURR-2024-024 Infrastructure Needs and Optimisation Assessment and the extension to this, the MURR-2024-024a Structuring an Engagement process for successful High Productivity Vehicle Trials - MRFH. The MURR-2024-024 is currently being reviewed in detail by the Working Group and is expected to be signed off by the Steering Committee when it next meets. The project will provide an insight into the infrastructure needs of the region in order to enable efficient supply chain movements for primary materials and finished goods into, within, and out of the region.

Blackberry

The completion of the Blackberry project and strategic plan (MURR-2022-016) has been met with much enthusiasm. Local government, as well as state and federal Members of Parliament have shown significant interest in the reports which highlights some very important issues:

- The available information sourced in the report(s) suggests that at all levels of government, the blackberry is categorized as ‘Asset Based Protection’ only, suggesting the return on investment is minimal and lacks government spending priority. Yet, in many reports, such as the report completed by the Natural Resources Commission, it is ranked as the most problematic.
- The reports suggests that despite the lack of coordinated government funding, there is an overall desire to work collectively, with a long-term strategy to manage the blackberry infestation to manageable levels.
- The cost of managing blackberries for softwood plantations as well as the production loss incurred through competition for land is significant. It is estimated that the production loss can be up to 5 mean annual increment (MAI) or cubic metres per hectare.
- **Costs for managing Blackberry infestation in forestry areas within the MRFH boundary is approximately $5.16m/year**.
- **Overall costs, including lost production based on a MAI of 3m3 is nearly $42million/year.**
- Regional impacts were quantified in the report in order to understand the flow-on impacts associated with production loss. **The total potential reduction on regional economies in the Hub is $306million/year.**

Land use comparison

MURR-2024-026 **Land use review and comparison: The relative contribution of “environmental plantings” and harvestable timber plantations to regional economies in NSW and northern Victoria.**

This is an exciting project that the Hub is conducting in conjunction with the Central West Forestry Hub. The project was recently awarded to Indufor after a process of independent review and scoring. Blair Freeman and the team have spent the last couple weeks in the region conducting stakeholder interviews and looking at the land use changes in the region. It aims to understand current trends and reasoning behind land based carbon projects, compare the economic and sequestration performance of both methods, and then provide a factual analysis of their socio-economic contribution to regional communities. The project is intended to be completed by the end of this financial year.

Community Sentiment project

The combined team of Fishbowl PR and Oakland Consulting will soon be conducting focus group interviews with stakeholders from various geographic regions in the community and with varying relationships to the forestry industry. The first stage to this project is to understand how to meaningfully obtain community feedback that will inform the hub, its members and provide useful advice to government. If you want to be involved, but haven't been directly contacted, please get in touch!

Extension Services

The Hub is excited by the opportunity to conduct limited extension services as part of the extended agreement with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. The Hub members have agreed to prioritise the Hub website upgrade as one of the key projects and have contracted local web designers Beal Collective to complete the work. Keep an eye out for the new website over the coming months.

Additionally, the Hub will host an informative landholder workshop; "Diversifying Farm Income: The Role of Trees in Agricultural Success". The forum will be held in late June and is supported by the North East Catchment Management Authority, the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority and the Wangaratta Rural City Council. The workshop aims to provide information to land owners on the opportunities for trees on land for various economic and land benefits. Keep an eye out for more information on the workshop!

Next Meeting Dates

16 May 2025

15 August 2025

21 November 2025

Regards

Carlie Porteous

MRFH Hub Manager & SWG Executive Officer

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International Day of Forests

21 March 2025

The theme this year for the International Day of Forests is **Forests and Foods.** Celebrating the crucial roles of forests in food security, nutrition and livelihoods. Held on March 21st each year, the day places a focus on the importance of forests worldwide.

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Australian Timber Industry Launches Landmark Future Framing Initiative

Leading companies in Australia's timber construction sector have joined forces to launch the **Future Framing Initiative (FFI)**, a groundbreaking collaborative program aimed at revolutionising the lightweight timber framed construction industry.

Under the governance of Forest & Wood Products Australia (FWPA) and leadership of newly appointed Project Management Committee, chaired by, **Ian Tyson**, the FFI will focus on modernising timber design standards and strengthening the industry's competitive position.

Source: FWPA

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AFWI National Open Call for Research Round Two

Expressions of Interest

NOW OPEN

AFWI's National Open Call for Research is returning for a second round, inviting Expressions of Interest (EOI) for projects that deliver transformative, industry-focused research to support Australia's forestry and forest products industries. This call encourages innovative ideas that lead to commercial outcomes, which tackle industry challenges or entrepreneurial opportunities.

Source: AFWI

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RBA Lowers Rates - Assessing the Impact on Housing and Inflation

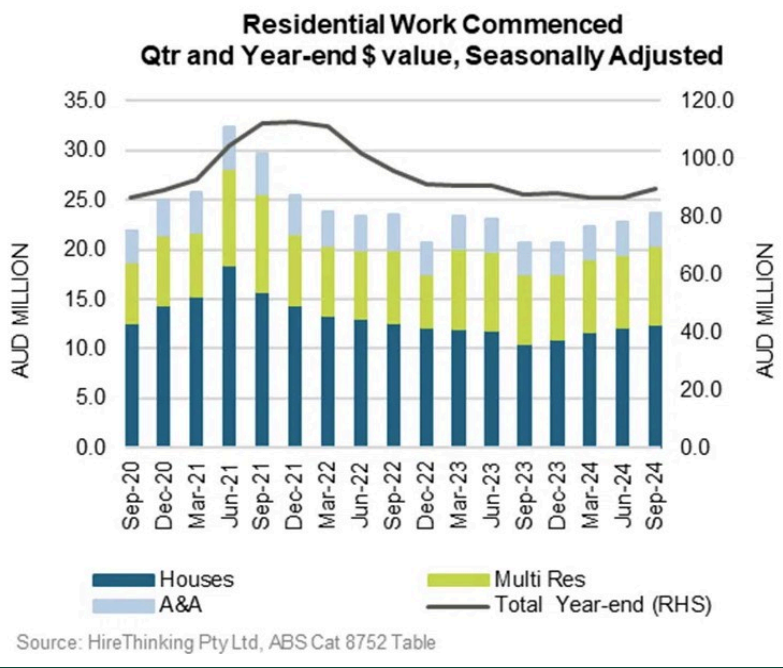
It's down, but how many more to come?

One could hear the collective sigh of relief across the country when the RBA announced on Tuesday, February 18th, to *"…lower the cash rate target to 4.10."*

After 13 consecutive rate rises from 4 May 2022, when headline inflation was running at 6.1%, inflation came back to 2.4% in the December quarter.

Significantly, underlying inflation, as measured by the trimmed mean, was 3.2% annualised and 0.5% for the quarter. This was the lowest quarterly increase since June 2021.

Source: FWPA



Source: HireThinking Pty Ltd, ABS Cat 8752 Table

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NHVR Log Haulage Industry Code of Pratice

The NHVR have released the Log Haulage Industry Code of Practice (here). The code was co-developed in 2021 by industry and presented to the NHVR. It has undergone significant changes in order to better clarify requirements and bring in changes as a result of rigorous industry testing outcomes.

From the NHVR page: 'The Log Haulage Industry Code of Practice is a practical guide that assists parties in the Chain of Responsibility (CoR) for forest log haulage to comply with their primary duty and other obligations under the Heavy Vehicle National Law (HVNL). It does this by identifying hazards to public risk and proposes controls that can be implemented to eliminate or minimise risk.

The code isn't just for log haulage contractors. CoR parties in this sector include businesses that own or manage forests; harvest contractors who cut and stockpile logs; centralised dispatching businesses; harvest or transport contractors who load truck; and mills and other businesses that receive logs.'

The Hub strongly suggests its members review the code in detail and provide feedback to the NHVR by 18 April.

Australia's Farm, Fisheries & Forestry Gross Value Growth (2014-2024): Trends & Insights

An update from the desk of FWPA's Statistics and Economics Program

In the last ten years, between 2014 and 2024, the Australian agricultural sector has experienced steady growth of 4.7% per year.

The gross value has increased from around $56 billion in 2014 to $88 billion in 2024. The agricultural industry sub-sectors include crops, industrial crops, horticulture, livestock, livestock products, fisheries, and forestry.

Source: FWPA

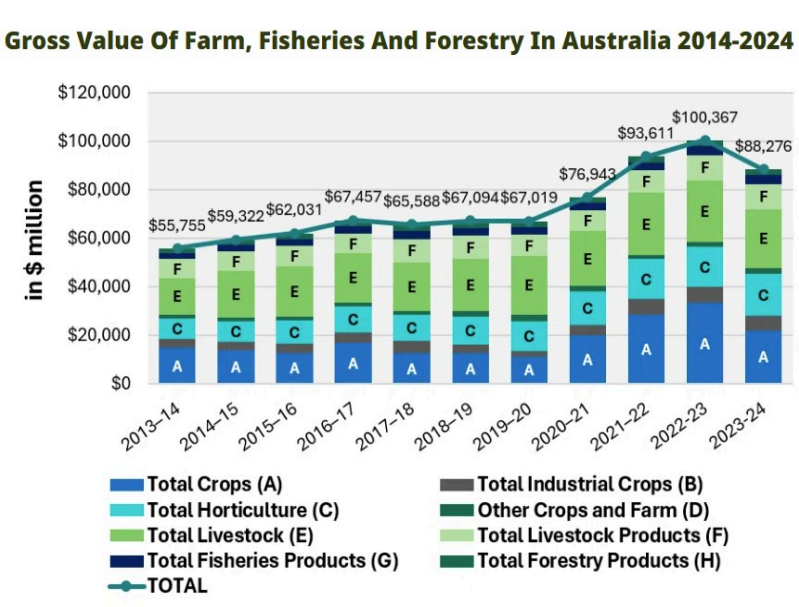

Figure 1: Gross Value of Farm, Fisheries and Forestry Australia 2014-2024 Sources: Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, ABS, ABARES, FWPA Analysis

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Softwood Sales and Softwood Prices Update

The June 2024 **monthly softwood sales** were 220,953m3, down 10.0% from the previous month. However, the monthly data continues to move around, with increases in May and February offset by negative periods. The more stable year-end measure shows a progressive decline in sales volume since May 2021, when sales peaked at 3.19 million m3. In June 2024, the year-end volume was 2.71 million m3, a decline of some 481,784 m3.

Source: FWPA

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FWPA launches More Houses Sooner report

More Houses Sooner is the first and only in-depth study to project the total dwellings required by 2034 to reach equilibrium and affordability levels. The research indicates Australia needs to deliver approximately 2.48 million new dwellings to keep pace with population growth and address historic unmet demand. This equates to roughly 225,400 new dwellings per year.

Source: FWPA

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Introducing the new FWPA Data Dashboard

A Comprehensive Tool For The Forest and Wood Products Industry.

We are excited to launch the new **FWPA Data Dashboard** an essential tool designed to empower Australia's forest and wood products industry with access to crucial data, insights and forecasts. This innovative platform, available as a complimentary benefit exclusively to full levy-paying FWPA members....

Source: FWPA

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