

SMARTtimbers farm forestry cooperative raises \$100,000 in joint venture

Lismore-Derrinallum area, in south west Victoria, has successfully just raised over \$100,000 from among its membership. The joint venture follows a less formal syndicate of members that last year raised \$20,000 to purchase and market about 16 tonnes of milled Sugar gum (*Eucalyptus cladocalyx*) timber.

“The cooperative has sold nearly all that parcel, and proved the process,” says Andrew Lang, the cooperative’s chairman. “This new unincorporated joint venture structure will be the way we will go from now on, buying logs from members or firewood cutters, value adding the timber, and marketing it into the demand we have developed. We have recently installed a show area at the Timber Advisory Centre at 180 Whitehorse Road, Blackburn. This will give owner builders and architects better access to our Sugar gum and cypress products. The cooperative would expect to sell the bulk of the parcel within six months of milling, and have a series of distributions of the proceeds over the year.”

“This approach gives the cooperative a more stable product flow into the markets we are developing. While our main product is a highly durable decking, we have been selling lots of cladding, and have had good sales of flooring and panelling. Our most recent product is heavy decking that is going into the Gellibrand River bridge of the Old Beechy rail trail. It is exciting to have sugar gum selling into sizeable public works projects”.

SMARTtimbers cooperative began with a group of farmers and private forest owners receiving some start-up funding from both the Australian and Victorian governments. “Our principal support has come from the Central Victorian Farm Plantations Committee, which accesses and distributes Australian Government investment to increase the planting on cleared farm land. They have had the vision to see that the commercial approach that we have had from the beginning is the way to get real progress. At the same time it is frustrating to have not had the state government support to let us go faster, when we know we are on the right track for driving sustainable farm forestry. It really feels like a race against time, with the supply of native forest logs to industry being cut off very fast, and global warming changing our environment even faster.”

SMARTtimbers cooperative is keen to attract new members who are interested in developing a sustainable management approach with their Sugar gum plantations. This includes better coppice management, keeping the hollow-bearing habitat trees at any harvest, or new plantings of sawlog woodlots.



Photo: SMARTtimbers Directors (L to R) Sandy Macmillan, Michael Rowe, Andrew Lang and David Fiskin admiring their product.

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Photo: Sugar Gum decking in situ at Deans Marsh, Victoria



Photo: Sugar Gum cladding in situ, Sky High restaurant, Mt Dandenong, Victoria

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