

Forest and Wood Products Australia

Coordination of Timber Standards and Codes for the Forest and Wood Products Sector

Strategy Paper

Objective:

To increase the use of wood-based products through the efficient and effective development and/or maintenance of key standards, codes and handbooks that are developed through a consensus-based process. These documents may have the authority of an Australian or international standard (if required) or any other format to deliver the appropriate industry outcome.

The strategy has four parts:

1. An analysis of what existing (and/or new) standards, codes, and handbooks are important to current or new sales of wood-based products.
2. Consultation and engagement with FWPA members, levy payers and stakeholders to help better understand their needs, prioritise future activities, and improve industry understanding of the role of standards and the standards development process.
3. Cost-effective and efficient development and maintenance of consensus-based standards, codes and handbooks through Standards Australia or other pathways, where appropriate.
4. Uptake and adoption of standards, codes and handbooks by the wood-based suppliers, customers, specifiers and regulators in a timely manner.

Program 1 – Analysis

The first stage of the analysis is a collation of all relevant standards and codes that currently exist under the auspices of Standards Australia. Identifying those standards that are managed under the Timber Standards Coordination Group (TSCG) is relatively simple. However, there are a large number of standards in the built environment (e.g. windows, bushfire, insulation, waterproofing) that may have a significant impact on timber usage. Also, there may be standards outside the built environment that may be of interest to FWPA members and levy payers (e.g., pallets, biofuel pellets).

A database of all relevant standards and their key attributes will be developed to help manage future work activity. The suite of relevant standards will evolve overtime as some standards retire or the implications of a particular standard on timber usage become better understood.

The second stage of the analysis will be to undertake a preliminary assessment to establish the level of importance of the code or standard to members and stakeholders.

Every standard will have its own interest group and vocal supporters, but the reality is that FWPA has insufficient resources to undertake all possible standards work on an even-handed basis. Likewise, a

first-come-first-served basis has the potential to get blind-sided by unforeseen urgent and/or important projects.

The aim would be to prioritise all known standards work by the following criteria:

CRITERIA	Weighting	RATING	Maximum Weighted Score
1. Does it meet Standards Australia Net Benefit test?	15	Yes=1, No=0	15
2. Does the proposal deal with the revision or amendment of a standard that is referenced within the Building Code of Australia (BCA)	30	Yes=1, No=0	30
3. Will the proposal have a significant impact on the production or use of wood products in the Aust. market or export	15	Rate between 0 and 4	60
4. What is the proportion of co-funding of the proposed total cost?	10	Rate between 0 and 4	40
5. Does the proposal require the imprimatur of Standards Australia? If it's a referenced Standard adopt 15 points	15	Yes=0, No=1	15
6. Does the proposal have a significant impact on the reputation or public acceptance of the forest and wood products sector or its products	15	Rate between 0 and 2	30
TOTAL	100		190

A preliminary ranking has been applied to some of the existing standards and the results are summarised below:

Standard code	Category	Criteria 1	Criteria 2	Criteria 3	Criteria 4	Criteria 5	Criteria 6	Total Score	Priority
AS 1684	Framing	15	30	60	0	15	30	150.0	HIGH
AS 2870	Footings	15	30	45	0	15	30	135.0	HIGH
AS 1604	Treatment	15	0	45	20	15	30	125.0	HIGH
AS 1748	Grading	15	30	60	0	15	30	150.0	HIGH
AS 1729	Tools	0	0	15	0	7.5	0	22.5	LOW
AS 3818	Sleepers	0	0	30	0	7.5	0	37.5	LOW
AS 1860	Pt Flooring	0	30	30	10	15	15	100.0	MED
AS 2209	Poles	0	0	15	0	7.5	0	22.5	LOW

Priority ranking:

High importance rating(120 to 190)

Medium importance rating (60 to 119)

Low importance rating (less than 60)

Program 2 – Consultation

The success of FWPA in providing an industry service in coordinating standards and codes will be heavily dependent on creating an effective means of consultation across the whole of the forest and wood products sector.

Historically, consultation on standards has been largely restricted to discussion within specific product groups (e.g., panels, treated timbers, framing timbers) and some informal communication between representative associations. This reflects the high level of competition between product groups within the industry and even in the structure of Standards Australia's eight TM committees that are often product group focussed.

As a consequence, there are very few companies (or individuals within those companies) that have a strong grasp on the totality of the standards and codes that impact on timber usage. Also, the technical complexity of some subject matter makes it difficult for people to allocate the time and effort to understand the standards and codes in any great detail or they simply may not have the training or experience in the area concerned.

Therefore, creating mechanisms for effective consultation will not be a simple matter and will take time and perseverance.

The proposed mechanisms for consultation are the following:

1. Establish a network of interested parties

Across the sector, there are already a number of people that are actively involved in standards and codes who work within FWPA member companies, levy payers, industry associations or consultancies. The workshop held in July 2009 was attended by over 50 of these individuals, although only a minority were employed by FWPA member companies.

FWPA's new contact database (*ACT! by Sage*) will be used to manage a standards and codes network of interested individuals.

To help broaden participation, companies and associations will be contacted directly to help identify their key technical and marketing personnel that may have an interest in the development and maintenance of standards. Also, trade magazines and electronic media (e.g., Friday Offcuts) will be used to make people aware of FWPA's activities, the existence of the network and encourage people to participate.

The network will form the primary basis of consultation but will be supplemented by direct communication to key stakeholders and/or advertising within the trade media where required.

2. Regular update of activities

FWPA must be proactive and consistent in its communication to the network and the broader industry to reinforce its role as the overall standards coordinator for the sector.

A regular update of current and planned activities in the development and maintenance of standards and codes will be provided to the network. This will consist of a dedicated email newsletter and associated information pages on the FWPA website.

Industry trade magazines and electronic media will be used to help inform other stakeholders.

Over time, it is important that FWPA be viewed as a central repository on standards information and a conduit between the forest and wood products industry, other industry groups and the standards development community.

This will be assisted via close liaison with Standards Australia to monitor current and proposed standards development activity. In addition, regular contact will be maintained with other key organisations (e.g., HIA, MBA, other user groups) to ensure that FWPA is aware of potential issues early in the process to help avoid being blindsided.

3. Reference group

FWPA will establish a small Reference Group of industry experts to help ensure that standards activities are adequately reviewed and aligned with industry needs.

Members of the reference group will be drawn from the network and a preference will be given to individuals who are employed by FWPA members or levy payers.

It is anticipated that the reference group will provide advice to the FWPA standards manager, help prioritise work activities and help identify the commercial implications from current and proposed work activities. It is likely that reference group members will also play an active role in Standards Australia's committee process.

The terms of reference, membership and member recruitment process for the reference group will be developed to ensure it operates in a transparent manner for the interests of the overall sector.

4. Standards documentation management

To ensure that the reference group, network and other FWPA stakeholders have ready access to appropriate documentation, a new document management system will be developed. This system will utilise the same platform being proposed for "wiki-wood" and the FWPA website.

Key features of the system will include secure access to a central repository of key documents (e.g. committee deliberations, commentary, current standards, FWPA work program) and a shared workspace where participants will be able to view and review comments on key documents.

Program 3 – Development Progress

Industry representatives that have been involved in the development of standards and codes are concerned that the current process is too slow, often influenced by specific stakeholders and not well coordinated. Also, the new Standards Australia funding model suggests that the cost of standards development is going to increase substantially. FWPA will explore ways of improving the development process to save time and money and be inclusive to the broadest constituency across the sector.

Three key areas of concern have been identified with the Standards Australia development process: quality of some project managers; industry representatives; and, the structure of the committees.

Project Managers

With the user pay system now adopted by Standards Australia we need to streamline the process by reducing the time that project managers need to spend on a project. The highest cost imposed on anyone wishing to develop a standard is the cost of having a project manager involved in the process.

A new pathway recently introduced by Standards Australia will allow external parties to manage the process, engage industry experts to complete the body of work which will form the standard, then hand that work to the project manager to complete the process. The project manager is then limited to sending the draft standard out for public comment, check formatting and then release the standard.

This process will only work for the development of specialist timber standards. Other methods to save costs and time will have to be implemented when producing Standards that have a broad community and/or building industry interest (i.e. Construction in Bushfire Areas).

Committee representatives

Standards development is a consensus-based process and it is critical that representatives on various Standards Australia committees are truly representing the views of a broader constituency. Feedback from committee members is that individuals put forward personal views that can be at odds with the wider industry opinion.

Standards Australia has identified this as an issue that can stall the process in the development of standards and have put in place a Code of Conduct that committee members must follow. FWPA should develop a similar Code of Conduct so individuals must represent the views of the industry sector he or she represents.

FWPA will review the future representatives of the various committees and, where appropriate, have an FWPA representative on the relevant committees. This representative will be required to work from an accepted industry position and relay back to the network the outcomes from the committee discussions. Should any other contentious issues develop at committee meetings, the FWPA representative will report back to FWPA so the issue can be communicated to the relevant sector group for an industry position to be taken back to the table at Standards Australia.

A training program for representatives will be developed to ensure that the individuals are able to make an effective contribution to the committee process.

It is recognised that the development of an industry position may be problematic in some circumstances and this will require FWPA to develop its own consensus-based decision making process.

Committee structure

Concerns have been expressed about the performance of some of the chairs of Standards Australia's committees and the number of operating committees.

Many of the current chairs have been in the role for a considerable period of time and are recognised technical experts. However, a technical expert may not necessarily have the necessary process skills to manage effective meetings.

Another concern expressed by industry members is that the current number of TM committees is too large and can be restructured to combine some committees to reduce cost and add efficiencies. A more informed view of this will flow from the analysis within Program 1.

It is important to recognise that the TM committees are a Standards Australia structure. Therefore, FWPA will work with Standards Australia to ensure the timber industry has the most effective structure possible to produce timely, cost effective standards.

Other development pathways

Standards Australia is not the only pathway for the development of consensus-based standards or codes. Other arrangements may deliver the same outcome at a lower cost, but these pathways may not have the same “brand” value as Standards Australia unless the desired result is still an “Australian standard” which then invokes SAI Global publishing rights.

The Australian Building Codes Board has verbally confirmed that they are willing to assist the timber industry in delivering timely and cost effective regulation. The ABCB will be an option when considering how and what regulation we need to have nationally adopted.

An example of this could be in lieu of approaching Standards Australia to have a standard developed or amended (this will be limited to small but very important requirements). The proposal could be incorporated directly into the BCA without the need for a standard.

This would have minimal application however it is an option that could be considered from time to time. Where the BCA can potentially be a huge assistance to FWPA is when the industry wants to develop an Industry Standard.

Global-Mark is a new organisation that has been set up recently to directly compete with Standards Australia. Their primary focus to date has been the development of Eco labelling, but is keen to merge into other areas of standards.

They are currently applying for the appropriate registrations to develop standards and they would go under the name of National Standards. Obviously their services and fees would have to be measured against Standards Australia before considering using them.

Before any new standard or an amendment to an existing standard is considered checks should be completed to ensure there are no existing New Zealand or International standards that could serve the Australian Timber Industry.

Standards Australia has a policy to move to ISO standards. Where we identify an ISO standard that will be beneficial to the industry we should promote the benefits to the ABCB to get it referenced in the BCA.

This could also work for industry standards that are not referenced in codes but are required to ensure national consistency in the industry. These with other Standards, handbooks and codes could be listed on FWPA’s website.

Codemark is an accreditation scheme administered by the ABCB. State and Territory Governments have previously completed this function of accrediting materials and systems that comply with the Building Code of Australia, however their certificates are only valid in that one State or Territory.

As Codemark is a national acceptance scheme, no approval authority can reject a Codemark certificate that supports a building system or material.

This option may also have limited application but where it could be considered it would give as much confidence to specifiers or builders as an Australian Standard. In some applications it may be more cost effective and timely than producing a Standard.

Industry standards can be categorized in two ways: firstly large referenced standards like AS1684 that have huge sale potential and small but important industry standards that have limited sales capacity .

We need to consider the use of industry standards for both of the above. Standards like AS1684 are produced by timber industry experts and have the capacity to deliver large financial returns that the industry could use to fund other timber standards or codes.

Other standards may have limited sales but are extremely important to various sectors of the industry. These types of standards may be more cost effective if produced by industry over paying Standards Australia to produce them.

Before considering any alternative pathways it will be essential to understand the implications of any copyright held by Standards Australia. Legal advice needs to be obtained to confirm any copyright wouldn't be breached if an industry standard was developed to replace an out-of-date Australian Standard.

Initial views indicate industry experts have the intellectual property and this is not handed to Standards Australia. An example of this is the span tables in AS 1684. The tables are copyright and cannot be reproduced, but the calculations, formulas and software used to produce the span tables are not Standards Australia IP.

Program 4 – Adoption

Feedback by various sectors of industry indicated there is an issue with national adoption and use of standards and codes.

One of the key advantages of standards (up until now) is that they can improve user acceptance and reduce any problems associated with incorrect or misuse of products. Manufacturers and suppliers will gain a benefit by helping to reduce failures or breaches of regulations that receive bad press and undermine the benefits of using wood-based products. This will hopefully lead to an overall increase in consumption.

Improving adoption of standards must occur with both suppliers and users. Using the established network, FWPA will be able to keep members and stakeholders updated of newly developed or amended standards. In addition, staff training materials will be developed to assist better understanding by first-line sales staff of the implications of the standards.

For users of standards, FWPA can assist in encouraging the use of the latest codes and standards through its specifier marketing program. FWPA has previously funded activities to improve understanding of key standards (e.g. AS1684) for builders and carpenters and has developed technical bulletins for building specifiers.

Training programs help with the awareness of the change and insure the correct use and a consistent understanding and adoption of the new requirements. Also, when changes to standards and codes

occur, it provides a clear rationale to improving communication and strengthens relationships with users and specifiers.

Organisations that represent industry groups such as architects, engineers, building surveyors and builders will be approached to deliver training to their members on their behalf as part of a continuous professional development program.