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# STANDARDS IN TURMOIL

*Restructuring of Standards Australia has thrown the timber industry into a spin, and the preservations sector appears to be particularly affected, writes Arch Wood Protection executive **PETER CARRUTHERS**.*

**T**he major problem arises from the reinvention of Standards Australia under a new ‘business model’ – essentially with a strong focus on cost recovery, and being a for-profit entity rather than an under-funded industry service.

Now, if you want the organisation to develop a Standard for your industry or product category, you (collectively) will have to pay the full cost. No more free riders; no more unaccounted benefits; no more unfunded committee efforts – no pay... no Standard!

In a review conducted earlier this year by the Forest & Wood Products Association (FWPA) it was clear that the timber industry is broadly represented in the Standards process, and has been very effective in developing and using Australian Standards to develop the market and legitimise its products. (Competing material industries such as steel, plastics and masonry appear to have been less effective in this arena – choosing to develop and promote their own industry standards.)

The wood industry will need to manage this situation carefully – particularly given its propensity to be a loose coalition of warring tribes.

It is good to see that a broadly agreed and funded FWPA strategy and structure to manage the Standards process has developed, including establishment of a standards manager role within FWPA. But there is still some way to go on this issue, particularly within the Timber Preservers Association of Australia (TPAA), some elements of which indicated a strong preference to row their own boat outside the FWPA structure.

While there are several important amendments waiting to be released in the AS1604 series (detailing preservation standards), there is a lot of collective frustration with current delays, and concerns that the FWPA-hosted mechanism will not roll out for some time.

Opinion is sharply divided in TPAA between those who recommend “going it alone” on the AS1604 amendments and those who would stay with the broader industry struc-

ture, despite short-term inconvenience.

An appeal to TPAA members and stakeholders to raise a separate fund, sufficient to complete the 1604 amendments with Standards Australia, was unsuccessful. Some will be disappointed with the outcome while others remain staunchly of the view that the initiative was not an appropriate use of TPAA funds and resources. My view is that a delay to the outcome of a few months is unlikely to disadvantage the preservation industry overall.

Of greater concern, and perhaps not adequately appreciated is the risk of decoupling the joint Australia/New Zealand standards and diverging requirements for others. Against the tide of increasing cooperation, transparency and economic integration between the two countries, balkanisation of our treating and other wood industry standards will stymie trade and lead to increased costs and loss of competitiveness. This would be a lose-lose outcome for producers and users alike in both countries. **lw**

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