

Heyfield Community Meeting

Vince Hurley

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Thank you Carolyn. Good evening. Thank you to everyone for taking their time to come tonight and show support for Australian Sustainable Hardwoods (ASH) and the Heyfield Community. It is great to see the hall absolutely full. We also have speakers and a screen set up in the carpark and that area is also full.

My aim tonight is not to go into the detail of how little of the forest is used for harvesting and regeneration, how regeneration occurs and the forest is managed for environmental outcomes. I am going to talk about ASH.

Many here tonight know about at least some or most of what ASH does.

ASH is Australia's largest hardwood sawmiller, timber processor and manufacturer of finished timber components including for windows, doors, staircases, furniture, panels and joinery, structural beams, cladding, flooring and many other products. ASH is not a multinational or corporate company. ASH is Victorian owned and that owner, Ron Goldschlager, who is with us tonight, and regularly at the mill and always thinking about ASH no matter where he is, is passionate about the business and cares for the people.

People are the most important part of ASH. We can have high tech equipment and systems, but it is the people make decisions daily, weekly, monthly and yearly that drive the business. So looking after people through having a safe place to work, having formal and informal ways to ensure their voice is valued and can be heard, having the drug and alcohol program and testing, physiotherapy, training and wellbeing programs are all part of the expanding overall wellness initiative. ASH is also a very active contributor to the community directly and through service groups, sporting clubs, schools, men's sheds, our friends at the Gippsland Woodcraft Group and many others. While all of these are great, there is no doubt the most important thing for our people and the community is having a secure well paid job. This supports everything else that goes on in the community.

While ASH products are sold throughout Australia and the world, our dominant market is Melbourne. Melbourne is the timber manufacturing hub of Australia. The competition for ASH products and for our customers, both manufacturers and merchants, are imports. ASH prides itself on competing with imports and targeting import replacement. We also pride ourselves on continuous improvement and innovation.

You may not realize how far and wide ASH's reach is and looking in the gallery on the website shows the huge number of projects and products we are involved in. As well as timber products worldwide, locally ASH is the largest supplier of sawmill woodchip to Australian Paper – used for making Reflex copy paper. Some of the green sawdust produced

by ASH is used for bedding in the chicken industry and the milking goat industry, both growth industries for Gippsland. Our IRONASH durable range is treated at Fishers in Morwell using the latest technology from the USA and customers from Morwell, Valley Windows, are here tonight, and I can see customers from Melbourne also in the audience. Our list of loyal local suppliers extends to many pages as does the harvest and haul contractors providing logs into ASH.

Being a manufacturer in Australia is not easy-now there is an understatement. ASH has to have everything link in the chain lined up: sawlog supply, processing and manufacturing, sales, marketing, and the customers in order to be successful.

Without the first link in the chain: efficient , quality, cost effective, critical mass of consistent sawlog supply, the business does not exist. ASH has looked at the problem and come up with a solution to cater for pressures that are being applied to the current resource, and together with the CFMEU, we will be working through some of those pressures with the Victorian Government recognizing that many of the pressures may be politically rather than physically constrained. It is a practical solution that includes changing the mix of sawlog, smaller sawlogs from a variety of sources, and refitting the production processes. With this ASH can continue.

While a solution is being discussed, it is still very important to maintain a presence, we do not want to be invisible. Send photos to Faces of Forestry, keep petitions and facebook going, be visible.

As part of process to ensure ASH is heard, hundreds of people have put together video's of what ASH means to them. Watching these videos, you cannot help but be moved by the stories. On WIN TV on Friday-day night there was story. For the past 12 years Mawarra, a centre for intellectually disabled in Warragul, has processed and pack door jambs for us. Pretty much the same 8 people have done this work. They love and are passionate about their work. This showed when some were interviewed. The supervisor said there is no way he can tell the workers their jobs are under threat or if it came to it, they do not have a job. He is hoping and praying he never will have that task. I am doing the same.