

Public submission

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Submission

**RIFCO Trading Pty Ltd
and
DGI Sales Pty Ltd**

SILVERWATER, SMITHFIELD AND DUNGOG, NSW

We are a second generation family business – I am managing director and am 2nd generation, my sister, brother and brother-in-law also work here. The family has 11 younger members coming along in the 3rd generation. We employ 28 fulltime and 5 parttime staff – 5 being family. My parents founded the business in 1955 and we will celebrate 50 years in 2025. We have a deep commitment to the business.

RIFCO is a family owned and run business manufacturing fine Australian made bathroom furniture since 1975. We have an extensive range of bathroom cabinets and mirrors, including a solid timber range. That range is stocked exclusively in Reece showrooms – there are 400 showrooms nationwide. All our products are proudly made in Australia and our products have also featured on popular TV show The Block.

<https://www.rifco.com.au/>

DGI Sales is also family owned. We acquired this 50 year old business in recent times. It is Australia's leading manufacturer and wholesaler of glue-laminated solid timber (DGI Glulam), after humble beginnings in a boatshed in Balmain. DGI was RIFCO's largest supplier and now we are vertically integrated. Dungog is the primary manufacturing plant for the company, which also operates in Sydney.

<https://dgi.com.au/>

Timber demand is strong

Our business is all B to B we are not dealing directly with the end customer. We manufacture and supply timber items for customers across Australia, however Sydney is our biggest market.

We deal with architects and specifiers who really lead trends through the market. Sustainability is central in customers' priorities. Timber has the strong environmental credentials. It is also just a beautiful and lasting and versatile material.

We tend to focus on the more discerning end of the market and those clients will pay for solid timber, where others may have to work with a veneer finish for example. We make an exclusive timber bathroom range available only through Reece showrooms.

Some of our product is in landmark buildings including Sydney Opera House and the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra, which is such a beautiful building. The Sydney Olympics also used beams manufactured by DGI in one of the venues. All of those commissions are meticulously specified and planned.

We are currently doing work that will be in some prominent city buildings. We just began work on a piece for the [REDACTED] restaurant development in Surry Hill. That us for a bespoke 50 metre long solid Australian timber bar. Our work is manufacture we are not the installer as such. The bar will be spectacular and so durable it will be there for a hundred years and more.

On top of those major clients we provide solid timber products for so many projects. So really we can make anything required – we have an order to make a Butcher's Block which will be for [REDACTED] to stage food and cooking displays. Fireplace mantles in solid timber are going into homes now in sleeker form and we make traditional mantles for heritage homes.

The future should be strong

I am very proud to be a manufacturer of Australian hardwood timber products, which has a very bright future if the NSW government does not make a terrible policy decision.

Timber is a genuinely "green" material. Every piece of native Australian timber is unique and it is sustainable too.

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Our clients have a very high awareness of sustainability – they are professionals who do their homework on materials.

I am confident that there are no scientific or environmental grounds that warrant stopping harvest of timber in NSW forests that have native timber. A set of loud campaign groups do not represent the views of most people in NSW.

It is very important that we have Australian natural timber product. Since COVID happened there has been a distinct jump in customers specifying only Australian grown timber. They do not want imported timber. I think people have an awareness that we do have an established best practice in our forest management, which improves all the time. A lot of smart technology is used in the forests now and that's a big advance. My information is that both very well educated people are involved in forest management and there are very experienced people at every step in the timber value chain. The mills do a fantastic job. Our staff and no doubt in other businesses love working around timber. It has a magical quality we respect.

The timber industry has been around 100 years plus and there's a reason for that, the forest managers regrow the areas where trees have been harvested. In fact on in NSW state owned forests that is 100% the law.

We are pleased that biodiversity is a priority in forest management and there's extensive koala population research that is proof that state forests are doing way better than some people must have expected. Certainly this is not being widely shared by the Minister for the Environment but it should be – it is taxpayer funded research. So the government should be very pleased because closure or even reduction of our NSW State native forest timber supply is entirely unnecessary to 'save the koala'. Please consult these articles which link to the CSIRO and Dr Brad Law reports.

<https://woodcentral.com.au/csiro-aussie-koala-numbers-are-10x-higher-than-estimates/>
https://www.nkmp.org.au/docs/NKMP_2024estimates_report_150424.pdf
<https://woodcentral.com.au/koalas-can-thrive-in-nsw-state-forests-amid-new-park-push/>
<https://woodcentral.com.au/ex-csiro-top-scientist-timber-link-to-koala-threat-is-poor-science/>

Detailed social licence research done by StollzNow Research just last year found there is strong support for the industry both in Sydney and other parts of NSW. A key finding (page 5) was **69% of NSW people think native forest harvesting is important for NSW**. It goes to show how wrong a noisy minority can be, with no regard for businesses and thousands of other people whose livelihood's and families and mortgages and car payments and school fees and food on the table depend on that timber being available.

<https://woodcentral.com.au/major-study-confirms-nsw-native-forestry-has-social-licence/>. The report is found at https://nenswforestryhub.com.au/upload/documents/reports/articles/230830120831_20230823ForestrySocialLicensetoOperateinNorthEastNSW-StollzNowResearch.pdf

Our business has to be investing to keep improving our processes and developing new products and innovation. This is a motivated supply chain and I know the that mills pay research levies (<https://fwpa.com.au/research-hub/>) to keep improving the industry at that end. There's also a sophisticated research and development community in universities and government units. The Australian timber industry is not a cowboy outfit.

Thousands of jobs are in this value chain and I am not sure if policy makers realise that upon harvest, as unprocessed timber begins its journey along the value chain it is a really big industry. Thousands of people and businesses play a role.

Many of them are family businesses like us. Small business is the biggest employer in Australia and is the backbone of the economy.

Right now we are afraid that our wonderful family business may be shattered because the Minns government might stop the main state forest grown supply of NSW native timber species. Australian timber is the heart of our business. The bulk of RIFCO sales revenue is from our solid Australian timber bathroom mirrors and cabinets.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit this information. I cordially invite panel members to come and see our business in Sydney. It would be a pleasure to show you.

Samuel Fletcher
13th October 2024