

case study



Product
Certification

ACCREDITATION... PROVIDES CONFIDENCE IN CONFORMITY ASSESSMENT

Case Study: Engineered Wood Products Association of Australasia (EWPAA)

Trusted JAS-ANZ Accreditation Benefits Industry Association, its Members and their Customers

The Engineered Wood Products Association of Australasia (EWPAA) is a not-for-profit industry association which represents all plywood and laminated veneer lumber (LVL) manufacturers in Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and Papua New Guinea.

It is funded voluntarily by its members and supported by affiliate members who supply goods and services to the \$600 million industry. It is also a JAS-ANZ accredited certification body.

Business Challenge

Association members manufacture and supply traditional interior, exterior and marine plywood products, as well as a wide range of modern engineered wood products including structural plywoods used for formwork, residential and commercial flooring, wind and earthquake bracing, and feature cladding; and LVL and I-beam products used in commercial and residential structures.

For these applications, products must be reliable, durable and 'fit for purpose'. Failure could cause structures to weaken, resulting in compromised safety and possible loss of life. Under the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation 2001, employers must ensure that formwork complies with AS 3610, which specifies the requirements of plywood's structural properties. The strength, or 'stress grade' of plywood is designated an 'F-value' – the higher the F-value, the stronger the plywood. Plywood used as formply has a stress grade of F11 to F27, with F17 being the most common grade. The standard requires each sheet of plywood to be marked to indicate that it complies with the requirements of the standard and to show its stress grade.

The Solution

To address the need for consistently safe and reliable engineered wood products and to educate its members about the importance of the need to have fail-safe processes in place, the EWPAA launched its industry-wide quality control program in 1963.

In 1996, the association was accredited by JAS-ANZ and its Quality Control Program and Product Certification Scheme formally recognised as a product certification program for the engineered wood products industry.

According to Simon Dorries, General Manager, EWPAA, undergoing JAS-ANZ accreditation gave the association the independence, impartiality and credibility that is essential for a representative industry body. "It was about adding value to industry, making sure that products were safe, reliable and fit



*Simon Dorries, General Manager
of EWPAA.*

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for use," he explained. "Our members recognise how important it is to be able to trace their certification to JAS-ANZ."

EWPAAs product certification scheme is based on the requirements of the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) Type 5 system. Under this system, a production facility must maintain a documented process control system, conduct in-mill end product testing and implement rigorous internal audit procedures.

EWPAAs representatives audit 19 sites twice a year. Each site supplies samples daily for testing by the EWPAAs National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA) accredited laboratory in Brisbane. Members of the EWPAAs team also carry out market surveillance, inspecting random products and checking the measurement of various parameters such as labelling, thickness, length and width.

"Other certification bodies operate commercial plywood certification schemes in different geographic areas," Dorries said. "However, we run our scheme to add value to our members' businesses, not to make a profit. We test 12,000 samples each year; you couldn't do that commercially, the cost would be prohibitive."



Certified formply is marked with an F value, along with both the EWPAAs and JAS-ANZ symbols.

As well as carrying out product certification and quality control, the EWPAAs six full-time staff, five casual laboratory technicians and contract auditors offer industry-based training courses, develop standards and codes, and provide technical information via the association's website.

Improved Quality Benefits Members and Users

According to Dorries, using formalised and audited processes that comply with international standards assists EWPAAs members to build quality into their products. "Applying proven processes ensures that they offer reliable products," he said. "It also helps them build in cost efficiencies by reducing reject rates and repair costs, and increasing productivity. Ultimately, the end user benefits by purchasing fit-for-use products at minimum cost."

Delivering a World-Class Certification Scheme

Dorries explained that being accredited by JAS-ANZ enabled the association to deliver an effective and credible world-class certification scheme. "JAS-ANZ has helped us to improve what we do to world's best practice," he said. "It's given us the capabilities and skills to audit to a world-class level, and our management systems in the office are now more robust; we've definitely benefited."

Dorries said that JAS-ANZ continues to offer its knowledge and experience to help EWPAAs improve its processes. "Because JAS-ANZ accredits organisations across a broad range of industries and sectors we find its assistance invaluable," he said. "We're narrowly focused on engineered wood products, so it's fantastic to have external input. JAS-ANZ brings the world to us."

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Easy Access to the Highly Regulated Japanese Market

The EWPAA is recognised as a registered overseas certification body (ROCB) by the Japanese government. This means that the EWPAA can certify manufacturers to apply JAS-ANZ accredited certification to their products directly, allowing members to export their product directly to Japan.

Dorries said that the process of achieving ROCB certification can be an expensive and protracted process. "Because we already had the JAS-ANZ system in place, however, we found that it was much easier to achieve than it might have been," he said. "This has given our members easier access to Japan's highly regulated market. If the product is not certified, there's no market for it in Japan."

Saving Lives

The EWPAA's technical market development program promotes the use of plywood and LVL which have been certified against Australian standards as reliable and fit for use. "You pay a premium for the certified product, but we needed to educate people about the value of that," Dorries explained. "For example, three people died in the 80s as a direct result of fraudulently labelled imported plywood materials, which were labelled as being stronger than they really were. This is why the safety and reliability aspect of having a certified product is so important."

Recently, association members suspected that samples of imported formwork plywood were being falsely labelled with the JAS-ANZ accreditation symbol. The EWPAA tested 10 sheets of the material, which was labelled with a certification number based on a report from a non-accredited laboratory. The material failed tests for bonding quality, reliability and safety. JAS-ANZ subsequently confirmed that the manufacturer was not listed on the JAS-ANZ register and that the JAS-ANZ symbol was being used illegitimately.

"This product is used in critical structural applications, both during concrete forming and as a safe work platform during erection," Dorries said. "Thankfully the manufacturer has undertaken to JAS-ANZ that it will no longer use the JAS-ANZ symbol and that it will cover/ paint over the symbol on any product remaining in its warehouse. We'll be monitoring their adherence to this promise."

Results

According to Dorries, being an industry association accredited by JAS-ANZ has firmly established EWPAA as a technical authority in the Australasian engineered wood products industry.

"The JAS-ANZ scheme signifies trust and credibility," Dorries said. "We are confident in our internal processes. Our members are confident in our auditing processes, and in turn their customers are confident in the quality and safety of products supplied by the members. This way, JAS-ANZ helps us all to win."

More Information

More information on the EWPAA is available at www.ewp.asn.au

The Joint Accreditation System of Australia and New Zealand (JAS-ANZ) is the peak accreditation body for Australia and New Zealand. It accredits conformity assessment bodies (CABs) who provide certification and inspection services. Accreditation by JAS-ANZ demonstrates the competence and independence of these bodies. www.jas-anz.com.au