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South West timber mill desperate for labour

DEMAND for WA native timber continues to be strong for Busselton's Whiteland Milling, so strong that the family-business is seeking new employees to join the team.

Established in 1981, Whiteland Milling began as a Sheoak sawmill producing furniture-grade timber and roofing shingles on a four-person manual bench.

These days, the sawmill operates multiple automatic benches, a twin breakdown saw, 13 drying kilns and a value-adding processing facility which produces timber flooring, decking, furniture components, mouldings and other pre-pressed products.

They process local Jarrah, Marri, Karri, Blackbutt and Sheoak, sourced sustainably through contracts with the Forest Products Commission (FPC).

To keep up with the demand, the Whiteland family recently built another sawmill specifically for processing Karri, installed two new drying kilns and invested in new machinery – with the total investment close to one million dollars.

Owner and sawmill Manager Neil Whiteland said the business employs 35 people, but sourcing reliable local labour continued to be a challenge for them.

“We have a large client base and supply to a diverse range of markets, including China, South Korea, Vietnam, Victoria, New South Wales and Perth,” Mr Whiteland said.

“We even still do the Sheoak shingles, used for Heritage buildings. We also do local orders – so if someone calls up and wants a small order for timber decking or something specific, we are happy to help.

“The demand for WA timber is there, one of our biggest challenges is finding labour. We have jobs, we just need willing workers.”

Neil has run the sawmill for 40 years while his son, Marc, a qualified cabinet maker, manages the nearby processing facility and has done for 17 years.

The business prides itself on its commitment to quality and minimising waste, with all residue sawdust, firewood and bark sold for commercial or domestic use.

Photos

NeilWhiteland: Whiteland Milling owner and sawmill Manager Neil Whiteland.

MarcWhiteland: Whiteland Milling Processing Plant Manager Marc Whiteland.

Whiteland_Marri: Marri boards processed by Whiteland Milling.

Whiteland_Boards: Tongue and groove Jarrah floorboards processed by Whiteland Milling.

Media enquiries

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About FIFWA

Forest Industries Federation WA (FIFWA) has been representing the interests of the Western Australian timber industry since 1895. The industry is a key driver of economic activity and jobs in Western Australia, contributing \$1.4 billion to the WA economy and creating about 6000 jobs in WA, with more than 90% of those in regional areas. The industry employs careful and comprehensive management policies to ensure WA's forests are sustainably managed. Less than 1% of the total forest area is harvested annually, with the area harvested then replanted. In 2001 WA became the first state to abolish harvesting old-growth forests.