



## Case Study 5: Innovation Solutions to Specific Skills Shortages (Green Triangle)

### Regional Skills Shortage Innovation Working Group

#### When innovation deals with a historical challenge

The Regional Skills Shortage Innovation Working Group was established to explore solutions for building and maintaining a sustainable pool of skilled forest harvesting operators in the Green Triangle region. The challenge facing this region was in regards to the large upswing in demand for harvesting services over the next years, as the large proportion of the plantation hardwood estate reaches maturity.

Traditionally, businesses in this sector have largely engaged employees on a 'rise and fall' basis or an annual seasonal consideration. This approach creates regular challenges in ensuring that sufficient numbers of employees with the right skills are available at key times in the harvest cycle. In the current context, availability of skilled people is a strategic consideration due to the area of forests that are maturing and becoming available for harvest.

The ForestWorks Innovation Skills Program (ISP) assisted the Regional Skills Shortage Innovation Working Group through funding and the facilitation of a series of initial workshops to build the right links, generate ideas and identify a solution for the problem.

The group consisted of four forestry businesses from across the supply chain (two forest plantation managers, one harvesting and haulage contractor and one saw-milling operator), and representatives from other industry organisations (one forestry-training provider, Forestry South Australia, and the Department of State Development South Australia). The group met for the first time in late July 2014 under the leadership of a committed local forestry expert.

Unlike the other Innovation Working Groups (IWGs) in the program, this group chose from the onset to prioritise its attention on funds needed for a particular solution to the problem. While the scale of focus evolved further to involve the whole supply chain and seek a tailored 'on the job' training solution from an expert in

the field (Box Hill Institute), the process for generating ideas and discovering options did not evolve.

From the start, the group had a firm view of the issue and solution, influenced possibly by a range of factors: the nature of the problem, low levels of pre-existing trust within the group about a facilitated process and reservations about a possible success. Hence, the ability to generate multiple viable alternatives for consideration was reduced.

### **The group adopted an industry-government collaboration approach**

Familiar with one another, the region, and the issues before them and with a set intention to concentrate attention on engaging with Government, the group felt comfortable from an early stage to proceed without further direct expert facilitation and involvement from the Innovation Skills Program.

The group engaged the relevant State Government to result in Government funded training and related services. The group is currently working on proposals for further funding for training from another State Government and the Federal Government.

This group has been successful in focusing on an outcome and pursuing it with a targeted focus. This case study has been written, as with most of the IWGs, before the solutions generated by the groups have been implemented, and feedback on the success of the initiation is not yet available.

Of interest is that through seeking government funding, a considerable structure and arrangements for a training and employment project is imposed. This may well prove that, in fact, securing government funding set the participants down a pathway of developing a structured solution for the issue at hand.

