

MEDIA RELEASE

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Virtual reality takes school children on the renewable forestry journey

Teachers from across the country were recently given the opportunity to experience and learn about innovative virtual reality (VR) teaching resources developed by ForestLearning, a program of Forest and Wood Products Australia (FWPA).

The ForestVR™ toolkit for schools will educate students on the renewable cycle of timber in an immersive and engaging way, while overcoming the problems around inaccessibility and safety of visiting physical forests and manufacturing plants.

Following the completion of 360-degree filming at 28 different locations across South Australia and Victoria's Green Triangle region, New South Wales and Queensland, footage was used to create seven VR video experiences and five virtual 360 tours.

Beth Welden, ForestLearning Program Manager, said these virtual tours have been designed specifically for school students, to tell the renewable "seed-to-shelter" pine story and the "forest-to-fine-flooring" Spotted Gum story in a fully immersive way.

"This is a novel way of engaging students, allowing them to visit places they wouldn't normally have the opportunity to access as a school field trip. We hope to provide meaningful educational experiences, aligned to the Australian Curriculum, that truly engage students on sustainable and renewable forest and wood products," Welden said.

Ric Sinclair, Managing Director at FWPA, said the ForestVR™ toolkit is a great example of the organisation's commitment to embracing new and innovative ways to communicate important messages to the community.

"We are wanting today's young people to grow up with an appreciation of the sustainable and renewable nature of our forests. As the decision makers, voters and consumers of the future, it is important that today's school children have an affiliation with wood and are fully aware of the benefits," Sinclair said.

The ForestVR™ toolkit was launched at the 2019 Geography Teachers' Association of Victoria's Annual Conference. During the showcase, teachers had the chance to experience and test the VR experiences first-hand using headsets, and were given the opportunity to provide feedback.

A number of accompanying ForestVR™ teaching resources were also explored during the teacher workshop, which were developed in partnership with ForestLearning by the Geography Teachers' Association of Victoria and the Design and Technologies Teachers' Association of Victoria. The teaching resources aligned to the Australian Curriculum help teachers to incorporate VR immersive experiences, virtual 360 tours and spatial mapping exercises into their teaching units using forest and wood products as a context for learning.

The aim of the workshop was to enable the teachers to become more confident adopters of VR tools and technology and to receive practical teaching tools, tips and tricks for using ForestVR™ within their classrooms.

The conference was also used as an opportunity to recruit teachers to trial the ForestVR™ toolkit in their own classrooms, which will form part of a pilot phase before a refined version is released more broadly later this year.

Welden said it was exciting to see the new technology and resources in the hands of teachers and to hear their positive feedback, following the year of hard work that led to their development.

“We were enthused by the positive reactions of the teachers. We are confident that with their input, we will deliver a robust, engaging and industry-first suite of resources,” Welden said.

The ForestVR™ experiences and teaching resources can be found at the [ForestLearning website](#). The virtual tours can be experienced using a tablet, iPhone or a VR headset.

Lesson plans in the form of teaching and learning resources will also be launching soon, following school trials and feedback.

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