

By JIM BOWDEN

MORE than 150 delegates at a timber treatment seminar in Sydney last month unanimously supported the formation of a united sector group to drive “a clear and positive” public message from industry about treated wood products.

The group – consisting of leaders in the timber merchant, plantation pine, timber preservation and timber importers sectors – was galvanised at an intensive one-day seminar, CCA - Where to next? held at Rose Hill on June 23.

The seminar was held in response to a high level of industry interest and reaction to the recent Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority decision on CCA treated timber products. The seminar provided delegates with vital information in relation to the APVMA decision, its interpretation by various interests and the future implications for the timber treatment industry.

In particular, the seminar examined and provided details of APVMA’s decision; assessed future use and implications of the decision on CCA treated products; examined the consequences of the decision, including interpretation and implementation; focused on market consequences for CCA treated products, alternative treated products and the treated timber industry generally; and discussed timber preservation technology, market perceptions and reality, including future demand for treated timber and alternative non-timber products.

A busy agenda at Rydges Hotel finished with a panel discussion by all 15 speakers, including one of the protagonists in the CCA debate, Dr David Loschke, APVMA’s affable American-born principal scientist.

Delegates were impressed that Dr Loschke, after presenting his keynote address, stayed to hear all seminar proceedings. Although he took the expected protective position on the use of chemicals, there was a great deal more emotion in his talk than scientific fact as to why APVMA had made its decisions on the use of CCA.

The seminar was also disappointed in Dr Loschke’s explanation as to why exhaustive analysis and presentation by industry of scientific and practical data had failed to influence APVMA to support the continued use of CCA in all applications.

Then, in the opinion of many observers, Dr Loschke defied logic when referring to APVMA’s recent approval of the continued use of 1080 dingo bait, based on scientific

data from the rural sector. In its initial findings, the APVMA said it was satisfied that the continued use of 1080 (Sodium monofluoroacetate) was safe for the environment. It played an important role in protecting native animal species by controlling feral animals including wild dogs, rabbits and foxes.

In a further logic-stunning conclusion by the APVMA, Dr Loschke displayed graphs that clearly showed carcinogenic levels in CCA were well below the safe level required by the World Health Organisation.

“Emotion has overlapped scientific fact. He’s trying to sustain the argument, trying to defend the indefensible,” one delegate remarked with just a touch of scepticism.

Chair and facilitator of the final panel session Simon Olding announced the action committee that would formulate a communication, marketing and science-based strategy targeting the general public, local government and the timber merchandising sector.

The committee comprises Kevin Collison, chief executive, Timber Building Materials Association, John Simon, general manager, Pine Solutions Australia, Bob Frost, chairman, Timber Importers Federation, and Wayne Lewis, chairman, Timber Preservers Association of Australia.

Actions by the committee are likely to include the need for coordinated attention in relation to better community advocacy, improved education and training for merchants and others across the supply chain about the properties of the various categories of treated timber.

The strategy will include presenting better information about treated timber for architects, specifiers and builders, and for state government entities and local government authorities.

In his welcome address, TABMA’s Kevin Collison said the seminar was looking for positive outcomes that would assist the treated timber industry to maintain and enhance its commercial prospects into the future. It certainly achieved this.

Dr Harry Greaves of the Timber Preservers Association said although the APVMA had not recommended removal of existing treated structures, the ambiguity in their final report had led to some concern, expressed particularly by local authorities.

“In addition, the public has reacted to a media-led negative spin on the APVMA’s final report, and the industry must now react to address possible lost markets as a result.”

Dr Greaves stressed the importance of complying with the APVMA proposals, even though they appeared scientifically unjustifiable.

“Improvements to plant operations, especially holding requirements for freshly-treated timber, will improve public and local government education and provide the option of alternative preservatives. All are positive strategies that the industry must embrace,” Dr Greaves said.

The extreme cost effectiveness of CCA as a timber preservative was a constant thread through the seminar. Jeremy Christmas, manager wood modification, Carter Holt Harvey fibre-gen in New Zealand, referred to alternative substitute water borne preservatives available in Australia including ACQ (ammoniacal copper quaternary), Tanalith E (copper azole), and Ruply (benzalkonium chloride plus permethrin).

He said Ruply was produced specifically for plywood. Although both ACQ and Tan E were more

“Chemical suppliers will continue to search for new preservative systems, addressing issues with metallic preservatives and light organic solvent systems, and they will explore non-metallic actives and novel carrier systems.”

Although the seminar addressed the APVMA decisions on CCA, it was pointed out by some speakers that it would be until 2007 at least before there were any changes to building codes relating to CCA products, including decking.

The Australian Building Code Board has asked the APVMA for a regulatory impact statement before it considers any changes to building codes. Indeed, the building codes for 2006 have already been set, so the industry is looking at 2007 before any changes can be applied in the interim period.

“That’s a year after changes in labelling, an interesting interregnum,” observed Dr Harry Greaves.

Points and summaries from the seminar will be provided to the Forest and Wood Products Research and Development Corporation, the Australian Plantations and Paper Products Council and other relevant bodies.

Seminar organisers said it was very likely a second seminar on timber treatment would be held next year to further assess manufacturing and market developments.

source: Australian Timberman July 2005

Action group will deliver a clear postive message

expensive than CCA, they appeared to be generally accepted replacements in North America and Canada.

Mr Christmas said although CCA treated timber would be restricted in residential applications in Australia, it would continue to be widely used and highly cost effective in many other applications.

“Water borne and LOSP alternatives currently available for H3 hazard classes will adequately replace CCA for these restricted applications,” he said.