



AS FEATURED IN *BUSINESS IN FOCUS*  
OCTOBER 2014



# SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS, COMPETITIVELY PRICED

*WeatherTex is an Australian owned and operated company that offers builders, architects and homeowners an exterior cladding solution that is unique across the industry – a product that is naturally sourced, lightweight and easy to work with, competitively priced, and sustainably and ecologically produced, all while guaranteed not to rot, split or crack for twenty-five years.*









**Written by David Barratt**

**B**eing Australian owned and operated is an important point of pride for the company that has experienced considerable ongoing growth over the years. For more than fifty years, Weathertex has provided employment for more than one hundred local residents of the community in which it produces its products, implementing values based upon the ideals of teamwork, engagement, caring, community and quality.

"We are the only Australian owned and operated external timber cladding manufacturer in the marketplace – worldwide market place actually," says Paul Michael, owner of Weathertex.

Currently, Weathertex is in the middle of celebrating fifty years of providing Australians and the world with what is perhaps the best, easiest to use, longest lasting and most environmentally aware external cladding products available.

For its birthday, Paul and company have decided to give presents to the company's customers and suppliers. More than twenty-five thousand dollars worth of exciting gifts is on the table, including an all-inclusive trip for two to Las Vegas, valued at more than ten thousand dollars.

The celebration is to acknowledge the longevity of fifty years while promoting brand awareness and awareness of the company's range of products within the external cladding market, explains Paul.

The manufacturing facility used by Weathertex has been in continuous operation since 1939 in Raymond Terrace, New South



Wales. The factory has an air about it of days gone past, until you see the incredible technology the company has developed and incorporated into the production process. Advancing efficiency and sustainability, Weathertex continues to invest heavily in the technology in place at its factory in order to support ongoing production and development, improve painting facilities and introduce modern computerisation systems.

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"The factory is 1939 – seventy-five odd years old – we've invested a lot of money in refurbishing parts of the factory which are very old, but we are also incorporating new technology, such as our state of the art monitoring and control system in place which monitors the production parameters all the way ►►









► from the boilers, to the pulping process, to the board making process, the presses and the board and sheath paint lines.”

The factory was previously owned by the Masonite Corporation, which owned and operated the premises until it was sold in the mid 1950s. Originally, the factory produced only Masonite products, with the Weathertex product being introduced much later, in 1964. (The Weathertex product can be thought of as an evolution of Masonite, though it is a very different product.)

It changed ownership two more times, before it was purchased by Paul and his business partner in 1998. In 2003, he bought out his partner and has operated the company independently ever since.

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In the last eighteen months, the company has invested upwards of two millions dollars in new equipment to continue to enhance and improve its production efficiency, and to continue development of new and innovative products to bring to market. A number of these are to be introduced in the latter half of this year.

Describing Weathertex’s diverse range of products, Paul explains, “It’s a timber cladding product that’s all external with the unique feature and benefit that it has a below zero carbon footprint since it is produced using 97 per cent timber and 3 per cent natural wax.”

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**“The company utilises only sustainable plantation grown timber and PEFC certified sources.”**

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Weathertex’s production process begins with timber. The company utilises only sustainable plantation grown timber and PEFC certified sources in order to provide high quality products that will stand the test of time without endangering the environment.

The logs used by Weathertex to produce its cladding solutions are chipped before being processed using high pressure steam. The resulting fibres enter what is referred to as the wet process stage, during which natural wax is added and the product passes through a board machine which shapes and presses the product into thirty-five millimetre thick layer. This ‘wet-lap’ is about sixty per cent percent moisture by volume.

At this stage, the wet-lap is pressed for thirty minutes between steam plates where it is cooked before finally being pressed between heavy steel plates which emboss the beautiful patterns which provide a number of natural looking finishes to the product.

After being pressed and planed down to a consistent nine and a half millimetre thickness, the nearly finished boards are ripped down to profile widths, primed, cured, painted, and wrapped, ready to be shipped for building projects across Australia and beyond. ►►









► One of the many key features of Weathertex's line of products is the sustainable nature of material sourcing and production process.

"In the last ten years, we've got two coal fired boilers and a gas boiler – about ten megawatts each – and we've put a wet scrubber on the exhaust, which means the exhaust of those boilers is at the same high quality as the gas fired boilers," he says. "A number of large building companies are focusing on environmentally sustainable building practices, so our product lends itself particularly to that."

From the perspective of waste control and management, Weathertex provides the only solution that provides a high quality secondary product in terms of waste. Waste material from the production and installation process of the company's cladding products actually makes an excellent, environmentally friendly mulch material. "They don't have to take it away to a dump, they can put it through a mulcher, and it becomes a bark mulch which can be put into garden beds, which saves a lot of waste and cost for builders on site."

With a major movement across the building industry to incorporate ecologically sound products and practices, Weathertex is well-positioned to take advantage of the opportunity this shift in

consciousness provides. "As the environmentally focused builders continue to grow in Australia, they recognise that our product is a sustainable timber cladding solution at no additional cost."

This is a major point of differentiation for the company, as most providers of ecologically friendly building material charge a premium above and beyond the industry norm for products. "The uniqueness of our product is that we can provide a below zero carbon footprint product that is still at a competitive price."

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Keeping in mind not only its bottom line, but also the well-being of the community in which it operates and the planet on which it lives, Weathertex is well aware of the environmental cost the production of many building products have on the Earth's ecology. The production of a single cubic metre of concrete releases four hundred kilograms of carbon and production of a single cubic metre of aluminium releases more than eighty tonnes of carbon into the atmosphere.





"In the manufacture of Weathertex," explains Paul, "Ten kilos of carbon is stored, which is why we have a better than zero carbon footprint. Ten more kilos is stored in our product than is released in the manufacture."

With great sustainability credentials and a competitively priced product, Weathertex is able to offer a unique and valuable proposition for architects, builders and homeowners.

Over the last two years, with the marketplace's shift in focus toward sustainable products and practices, Weathertex has made an effort to focus the branding of its products to most accurately represent the true values and benefits that the product offers. "We have rebranded Weathertex to better represent this change. We've created an image of a house with a green tree to depict and promote an increase in awareness around sustainability, and we've invested into a new website which promotes brand awareness of our green features and benefits and highlights our products, both from a feature perspective, as well as price."

Of course, Weathertex's cladding products are environmentally friendly and competitively priced, but the company's product range also offers a range of other features that are equally as appealing to consumers.

The company's lightweight product, weighing in significantly lighter than competing product, is a breeze to handle and

simple to install compared to other products in the marketplace. Perhaps most importantly, it is easy to cut with standard wood-working tools and does not produce harmful dusts or chemicals.

"You don't need a cutting room, whereas with many products with silica in them, you have to have breathing masks and cut in a pressurised cutting room, whereas our products can be cut anywhere, including inside, quite safely."

Looking into the future, Paul expects the company to continue its trend of growth, with a doubling of size in the next two years, with the previous eighteen months significant sales figures putting the company well on track to meeting that goal.

"We've continued to increase our number of business development managers externally in the market to continue to help create demand and push through to the builders, architects and designers."

Paul also expects continued growth abroad, with major markets opening up in both France and Holland accounting for a significant portion of international exports.

With its focus of providing sustainable timber cladding solutions for customers at no extra costs, Weathertex can expect to continue to provide its high quality products to suit all application in the residential, commercial and renovation markets across Australia and beyond. ■





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