

# the AFRDI bulletin

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## Celebrating 25 years of progress at AFRDI

*by Peter McCutcheon, chairman of the AFRDI Board*

**I wasn't involved with AFRDI, nor indeed the furniture industry, when the institute was formed.**



**Nor am I au fait with the political unrest that prevailed when money was doled out to Tasmania by the Australian Government to compensate for its having its own way, i.e. bringing a halt to what was then perceived by the Tasmanian government as a need to exploit more hydro-electric power from the wild rivers of the State's south-west.**

Like a forced or arranged marriage, such beginnings, and the seed capital and premises given to establish AFRDI in the form of a political dowry, could well have led to a short business career, and then failure, followed by recriminations all round, with everyone wisely nodding and saying they knew such an arrangement could not possibly prosper.

AFRDI survived the arranged marriage. It was a lot of hard work just to survive, and to make its name as a start-up. The small staff had to become masters of many diverse tasks just to see that everything which was necessary for survival was indeed done. (Typical of any start-up, as many of you would know).

Then there were the 'experts' who said that it was just not possible for a Tasmanian based company to service an industry based, almost exclusively, on the Australian mainland.

**The nay-sayers however have been proven wrong. AFRDI has not only survived, but despite its structure as a not-for-profit serving industry, it has thrived.**

The past 25 years have marked a major reconfiguration of the Australian furnishing industry, corresponding with the rise of China as the manufacturing power base in our region. Through all this, AFRDI has moved forward, developing innovative standards, designing and making its own testing machines, and reaching out to the world for business. The staff has increased, its expertise has grown, and innovation is a hallmark of the company's business offering. In short, we have evolved as the industry has evolved.

AFRDI remains a small business, but it is a flexible business that adapts to circumstances presented to it and its customers. It demonstrates that the great Australian willingness to work, coupled with scientific and business know-how, is still a potent combination.

**I look forward to the next 25 years.**

**PICS: see page 9**

# Amazing claims about office chairs

Here we go again...the same broken record...you know the one, the AFRDI record that goes on about exaggerated user weight ratings for office chairs.

If we were being blunt, we would say that only a few chairs which are designed for and qualified under AS/NZS 4438 can pass the lowest (135 kg) level of the Rated Load testing regime without some modification.

We are pleased that a number of our clients have achieved Rated Load certification for an office chair. That's the difference that testing brings, versus 'weight ratings' by way of advertising alone. One 'rating' is hyperbole, the other is scientifically based.

We have said it before, and we will say it again. We need to protect our industry's reputation, and to that end, if you see examples of false claims, please let us know. Rest assured, we are taking all possible steps to bring a halt to what seems to be a growing practice...the practice of 'anything goes.'

**We know we are right in pursuing false claims, and Australian Consumer Law and the ACCC backs up our thinking.**

## New AFRDI Membership Structure

AFRDI is rationalising its membership levels.

The three new levels of membership are Associate, Gold and Platinum. The former rarely chosen Information and 10% membership is dropped, although AFRDI will honour benefits accruing until the current membership expires.

In greater detail, the new levels are as follows:

**Associate Members (currently \$400 pa)** receive the AFRDI Newsletter, are entitled to vote at general meetings of the Institute and access to advice on specification standards using the Institute's 1800 number

**Gold Members (currently \$725 pa) and Platinum Members (currently \$2,200 pa)** in addition to the benefits enjoyed by Associate members, receive a **discount\*** on services including testing and research.

**\*Gold Members are entitled to a 5 percent discount, and Platinum members receive a 20 percent discount. (i.e. regular testing more than pays for membership). A discount of 10% will still apply to AFA and FIAA members.**

**No discount** applies to testing of fabrics, foams or leather, and the testing of bunk beds to mandatory requirements only. Similarly, there is no discount on fees for the certification of bunk beds to mandatory requirements.

**Note:** Membership expires 12 months from the date of receipt of a completed application.

All three grades of membership are entitled to use the **Furntech Member Logo**. Details can be obtained by contacting the Institute.

# Careful parts selection enables chair to meet AFRDI's toughest office chair test

A chair produced by Brisbane-based Chair Solutions is the first in Australia to satisfy the requirements of AFRDI 142 Rated Load for Height Adjustable chairs at the 160 kg multi-shift level. This is currently the toughest test available for office chairs.

Owner of Chair Solutions, Carl Davies, is absolutely ecstatic and proud as punch, for the test vindicates his belief that careful selection of standard components can produce an office chair which is the very best in its class.

"We took a long hard look at the components we use, and then selected the best," Carl explains.

The chair which has achieved the 160 kg multi-shift rating is Chair Solution's Team Air heavy duty chair, a broad based (700 mm base) chair with a mesh back. Quality components were backed up with a high quality locally-produced ply seat base.



Highly pleased, Carl has already been on a tour of his dealer network, explaining in detail AFRDI's three testing levels for office chairs – the familiar AS/NZS 4438, with its suggested 110 kg user rating, and the two Rated Load standards, with testing points at 135 kg and 160 kg.

"My dealers are up against a lot of people who put really high user weight ratings on chairs, ratings we believe are just hot air, and I want to make sure all our dealers know what they are talking about when they recommend a certain chair.

"It would be easy to say that 160 kilos is enough," says Carl, "but already I feel we will be knocking on AFRDI's door to extend the Rated Load test upwards, to say something over 200 kilos, as I feel there's a place for it in the modern workforce."

If the foregoing suggests that Carl is a man more than fully engaged in his work, try the following. He freely says he has two wives: the first he married 24 years ago, the second (Chair Solutions) he became tied to 13 years ago.

# Chinese soldiers are getting too big for their tanks

## What does this headline have to do with AFRDI, and its testing regimes?

Quite a lot, as it happens, because we are vitally concerned with the relatively rapid changes occurring in human sizing, and have been developing new testing regimes which recognise these changes.

From the following article, published by the Wall Street Journal, it would appear that the Chinese have not been quite as assiduous in mapping the way that we humans are developing, with embarrassing and costly results.

The People's Liberation Army, one of the largest armed forces in the world, has released a study on the physical welfare of its thousands of troops. The study, published in the army's official newspaper, warned that Chinese soldiers have grown too tall and fat for some of their equipment. Rifle butts are too short for their longer arms and, more comically, soldiers assigned to tank divisions are sometimes too big for the tanks.

This is a problem with which the U.S. military is all too familiar: The Pentagon has been warning for years that rising obesity in the U.S. is reducing the military's ability to field and deploy appropriately fit service members.

But there's a big difference here: American troops are too big because they're unhealthily overweight. Chinese troops are too big because nutrition is better, particularly in childhood, and they're more healthily robust. The troops, the survey found, have an average waistline five centimetres (about two inches) larger than the average 20 years ago. But average height has increased by two centimetres. In other words, this is a good problem.

We are so familiar with China's rise that we often forget how recently it was much weaker and poorer. Malnutrition was widespread, particularly in rural communities, which meant that lower-class Chinese who went into the military were more likely to be underfed and underweight. So, as the Chinese military grew and modernized (which it had to do in large part by designing its own military technology because of trade sanctions), it designed its equipment around troops as they were. Now they've outgrown the old gear.

But a hard lesson has been learnt: The PLA report says it's measuring troops on 28 different metrics to figure out how to redesign military equipment for the now-larger force.

What's interesting about comparing the Chinese and American militaries' struggles with larger troops is that both problems are functions of development. As China becomes more middle class, its troops are less undernourished. But as countries go from middle-income to high-income, their populations also tend to become more obese. The same economic growth that made Chinese soldiers healthier may also, if it continues, some day make them less healthy, as has happened in America.

# Product safety online just as important as with ‘bricks and mortar’ trading

AFRDI is acutely aware that some online traders in the furniture industry appear to have adopted a viewpoint that ‘anything goes’ when it comes to product description. In particular, the AFRDI logo or other IP is frequently attached to goods which have never darkened AFRDI’s testing doorstep. The following (edited) news release from the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) clearly shows that false product descriptions are subject to Australian Consumer Law.

The ACCC’s new publication, **A guide for business: Consumer product safety online**, outlines best practice tips for online sellers and marketplaces.

“Australian consumers are increasingly looking to online stores to purchase consumer products but the online environment creates some unique product safety challenges and requirements that online suppliers need to be aware of,” ACCC Deputy Chair Dr Michael Schaper said.

For example, while a consumer can quickly and easily check the mandatory ingredients list of a cosmetic product while in-store (*or the details of an office chair Ed.*) they are unable to do this online unless the details are clearly displayed.

“The ACCC is concerned that some online sellers, particularly those based overseas, may not be aware that all businesses supplying to Australian consumers have the same obligations under the Australian Consumer Law (ACL).”

Businesses breach the ACL if they sell banned products, do not meet all requirements of mandatory product safety standards or fail in their obligations related to product liability, consumer guarantees and misleading and deceptive conduct.

“Businesses must remember that the Australian Consumer Law applies regardless of whether products are sold in a ‘bricks and mortar’ shop, in an online store or via an online marketplace, and regardless of where the seller is based, I encourage all online suppliers to download a copy of the free report,” Dr Schaper said.

The report is available [here](#) on the Product Safety Australia webpage.

## Apply for R&D assistance now

A reminder that any companies with a standard year of income of 1 July 2012 to 30 June 2013 and wishing to apply for the R&D Tax Incentive must lodge their registration application with AusIndustry by **30 April 2014**. The R&D Tax Incentive that helps businesses offset some of the costs of doing R&D. The Program aims to help more businesses do R&D and innovate.

The two core components are:

- a 45 per cent refundable tax offset (equivalent to a 150 per cent deduction) to eligible entities with an aggregated turnover of less than \$20 million per annum
- a non-refundable 40 per cent tax offset (equivalent to 133 per cent deduction) to all other eligible entities.

**As a Registered Research Agency, AFRDI is able to carry out research on your behalf which may be eligible for the tax break. Call us on (03) 6326 6155 to discuss how we may assist your development work.**

# FURNITURE INDUSTRY NEWS

**Recently, we ran a story about the awarding of million dollar plus damages awarded following the collapse of a chair in a Canberra office.**

Now comes a claim from a Gold Coast Hospital security guard, who is suing for \$205,000 after his chair collapsed at work.

However, the Queensland Government counter-claims that the 43-year-old, Jason Bartlette, was swinging on the seat and that he is 'obese'. In a statement of claim lodged to the Southport District Court, Mr Bartlette alleges the hospital was using defective chairs on June 7, 2012, when one broke underneath him.

Mr Bartlette, who weighs about 104kg, complains of ongoing back pain as a result of the incident and alleges professional negligence on behalf of the State Government department. But State Government lawyers painted a different picture in a response to the allegations.

"The incident occurred as a result of the plaintiff applying excessive pressure on the chair by leaning back in the chair such that its front legs were raised off the floor," the document says. "Prior to 7 June 2012, the (hospital) had issued an oral and written instruction to the plaintiff not to lean back on the chairs supplied for his use at work."

*from the Gold Coast Bulletin*

**Ed: Assume for a moment that a chair in the workplace has not been tested and certified by AFRDI. Any subsequent failure leaves little defence against possible claims that duty of care towards an end user has been properly observed.**

**The California State Assembly has passed a bill to make mattress recycling mandatory.**

The bill aims to reduce the number of mattresses that are sent to landfill or disposed of illegally,.

The bill's sponsors say it creates a recycling program with a dedicated funding mechanism. It will use existing infrastructure for transporting used mattresses to recyclers, and minimise costs to both consumers and the government.

The bill revolves around the recycling process being funded by a nominal fee collected on the retail sale of polyurethane and box spring mattresses.

*from resource recycling.com*

## **Unsafe sofas and beds?**

A BBC television program has shown how sofas and beds from some of the UK's largest furniture retailers are breaking the country's tough flammability laws, and thereby risking the lives of customers.

Furniture from Argos, Homebase, Tesco, Harveys and Amazon was shown not to comply with fire regulations, and that the foams and fabric were easily able to be ignited, and would go on, in the words of the program, to cause major conflagrations.

The BBC also claimed that labels required by law to be displayed were shown not to comply and appeared to be fake. Products to which these labels were attached were independently tested and were shown not to pass the statutory required tests.

*from furniture news.net*

# US introduces new standard for bedside sleepers

To prevent deaths and injuries to children, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) has approved a new federal mandatory standard to improve the safety of bedside sleepers.

A bedside sleeper is a bassinet-type product that is secured to an adult bed, has fabric or hard sides and may have a lower side adjacent to the adult mattress. The sleeper is intended to provide a sleeping environment for an infant up to approximately 5 months of age, or when a child begins to push up on his or her hands and knees.

The new federal standard incorporates by reference, the voluntary standard (ASTM F2906-13), *Standard Consumer Safety Specification for Bedside Sleepers*, and requires bedside sleepers to comply with recent modifications required for bassinets in federal standard 16 C.F.R. part 1218. The new bedside sleeper federal standard also includes two recent modifications to the ASTM voluntary standard to address fabric-sided enclosed opening entrapment hazards and consumer mis-assembly when components are missing.

CPSC has received a total of 27 product-related safety incident reports associated with bedside sleepers dating from January 2001 to May 2013. These incident reports include four fatalities that occurred between 2007 and 2009, which were associated with fabric-sided openings on the products.

In the past five years, the Commission has approved new stringent federal safety standards for children's products, including full-size cribs, non-full-size cribs, play yards, baby walkers, baby bath seats, children's portable bed rails, toddler beds, infant swings, bassinets and cradles, and hand-held infant carriers.

## Remember the relatives and friends!

From AFRDI's sustainability team leader Dr Lee Bowkett comes a timely reminder for hospitals and other institutions where visitors are common.

"Anecdotally, I have heard of hospitals upgrading beds and patient lifting equipment to safely support patients weighing into the bariatric range (300 kilos).

"Just an observation, but I think it could be prudent that hospitals also upgrade their visitor chairs.

"Weight issues can often run in families, such visitors could easily impose loadings beyond the safe capabilities of ordinary waiting room chairs."

**Ed: Most waiting room chairs, if they have been tested at all, are nominally safe for a person weighing up to around 100 -110 kilos. AFRDI recommends that all fixed height chairs that are placed in areas where there is no control over who occupies the chair should be tested at least to the minimum 135 kilo point of AFRDI's Rated Load (RL) Standard, to ensure that institutions exercise appropriate duty of care. The RL Standard can assess chairs right out to 300 kilos.**

# STANDARDS UPDATE

**AS/NZS 3813: 1998 Plastic monobloc chairs.** Standards Australia have accepted a proposal to review this Standard and the project is well under way. The committee met in February to review weathering and strength trials against the current draft. The committee is now working to update the draft. The public comment phase is anticipated mid 2014.

**Review of Standards AS/NZS 4442: 1997 Office Desk and AS/NZS 4443: 1997 Office Panel Systems and Workstations.** Standards Australia have accepted a proposal to review the standards for office desks and office panel systems / workstations with the aim of updating requirements to clarify and improve the test methods to accommodate design developments and workplace design changes that have been introduced over recent years.

A Working Group has been convened by Standards Australia, and the second WG meeting was held in February and made good progress on the draft. An ergonomics sub-group was formed to review the latest anthropometric data.

**Amendment of Standard AS/NZS 4610.3: 1999 Furniture – School and Educational – tables and storage furniture – strength, durability and stability –** has been approved by Standards Australia. The first meeting of the working group was held in April .

## BIFMA and HPD Collective form collaborative partnership

In the US, the Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturers Association (BIFMA) and the Health Product Declaration (HPD) Collaborative have formed a partnership to develop a standardized chemical identification, assessment and disclosure protocol for the office furniture industry that also aligns with the ANSI/BIFMA e3 Furniture Sustainability Standard and level® Certification Program.

“We need to unite the programs that are asking product manufacturers for information into one common process that uses one common language,” said HPD Collaborative Executive Director John L. Knott, Jr.

According to BIFMA Executive Director Tom Reardon, BIFMA will engage raw material and component suppliers, other organizations, and expert sources of chemical information to help develop consistent and reliable chemical information that is comprehensive in nature.

BIFMA and HPD both point to significant emerging chemical protocols as a driving factor in this partnership.

“Some of these protocols have been recognized in LEED v4, including Health Product Declarations, Cradle to Cradle, and GreenScreen. Section 7 of ANSI/BIFMA e3 also includes a chemical methodology and level certified products have been recognized in the LEED Rating System with Pilot Credit 80,” explained Reardon. “Our goal is to develop a standardization process that effectively unites these protocols into a single, accessible process.”

*from bifma.org*

# AFRDI turns 25, and looks forward to a strong future serving the furniture industry



AFRDI's chairman Peter McCutcheon and the institute's longest-serving staffer, Jill Stancombe, cut a cake marking the Institute's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Jill, who looks after administration at AFRDI, and is the voice that usually answers the phone, has been with the institute since 1995.

As Jill remarks, the Institute has come a long way since then, growing both in staff and in the scope of work it handles.

**BELOW:** AFRDI board members and staff after an enjoyable celebratory lunch.



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Standards, Testing and Product Certification for Commercial, Domestic and Nursery Furniture in Australia and New Zealand