

# Australian Hardwood Flooring Manufacturers.

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Having worked in the hardwood industry and the flooring game for most of my life, I have been to too many flooring inspections with issues that could have easily been avoided. And many come down to one simple issue – trying to rush something that only time and much care can do properly.

Too many times in the distant past, it became a modern and progressive thing for timber companies to investigate the process of drying timber with the one purpose and outcome in mind – let's shorten the time between Green and Final Drying. Great for managers to improve stock turns, or have less stock tying up cash – especially when you can take a process that takes anywhere from 6-12 months and reduce it down to a few months. Sadly, the result was more flooring issues, with variation in drying results across the run, sticker marks with Eucalypts, and unhappy customers resulting in very large credit claims. Mind you, there have been some systems that have worked ok, but more that haven't.

The initial key for manufacturers during the production of flooring, is the trust in the preparation and patience of the team that presented it to the moulder. The process of monitoring a flooring stack does not have a magic machine that measures and monitors every single piece of timber inside a pack, let alone a kiln charge.



In the drying yard, well it's this thing called weather (no not bloody climate), that has the largest impact on the initial drying process. Understanding your own back yard and its effect on your wood will deliver the most effective results prior to the next step of kiln drying. There are obvious disciplines that have no bending in the rules, such as the precision of racking timber, the absolute correction of strips/rack stick centres as well as the distance strips are placed from the ends. Once you have the packs perfectly made, you then hand them over to a forklift or loader driver to have the patience and training of stacking them

perfectly in your yard, onto bearers that are plumb bob straight to the height you have for the rows of packs.

Then you let time do its thing to this timber. Now some species will be stacked in large drying sheds for this process, others are wrapped in hessian, and then there are the lucky manufacturers with species that can handle being outside for this entire process. Monitoring this process is vital to understand the time it takes, with which you are dealing with 'green' timber to a point called fibre saturation. This is where the free water in the timber has been removed, and there is only water left in the fibres of the timber. Usually around 18% to 25% depending on the individual species. At this point, you can then take your timber from the yard and finish the drying process in a kiln chamber and dry it down to the MC that suits the area in which it will be installed – usually around 9-12% for most parts of Australia.

Preparation and patience  
are key, especially  
with timber flooring.

Now there are many books that explain the above in chapter and verse over pages and pages of great instructions; but, the very experienced and professional timber manufacturers have this all down to a fine art and know exactly when the timber is right to transfer from the yard into a kiln, based on the years and years of fine tuning to perfect their own production process.

And this is the part that will either give you perfectly dried timber that is stable, has almost no variation in MC and is basically ready to lay; or a future problem, not just for the manufacturer, but the wholesaler, the merchant, the flooring installer, the sander/finisher and ultimately the home owner.

No one is left unaffected if the above process is not done right.

The one thing I love about our industry is the way in which the individual companies share this knowledge, and then we also have industry experts that have documented and put into text this part of the drying process so that we as flooring manufacturers are armed with as much knowledge as possible to get this right. Yes, we have our own methods, do our own research with our species and profiles; but this one fundamental process is an immutable law that has to be followed perfectly.

And that's why maybe there are not thousands of people doing this – because it's not easy, and if it was, well...

Next issue I will delve into kilns and their importance for the next phase. **t**