

# Safeguarding market access for Solomon Islands sawn timber

## PHAMA Plus Performance Story

Sawn timber plays an important role in the Solomon Islands rural economy, supporting an estimated 6,500 households and providing thousands of formal and informal jobs.

However, the sector operates alongside a much larger round-log export industry that has placed significant pressure on forest resources. Annual harvest volumes have been estimated at around five times the sustainable yield, heightening concerns about long-term resource depletion and the future viability of forest-based livelihoods.

In recent years, changes to importing-country regulations — including Australia's Illegal Logging Prohibition Act 2012 (as amended in 2024) and New Zealand's Forests (Legal Harvest Assurance) Amendment Act 2023 — increased the risk that Solomon Islands sawn timber exporters could lose access to key markets unless they were able to demonstrate timber legality and traceability. Importers signalled that failure to meet these requirements would result in restricted or suspended market access.

In response, PHAMA and PHAMA Plus worked with industry and government partners to support the sawn timber sector's transition towards certified, traceable supply chains, helping exporters to meet new market requirements while laying the groundwork for improved forest governance and longer-term sustainability.

### Results at a glance

Through a Chain of Custody (CoC) certification pilot, 3 Solomon Islands timber exporters — Value Added Timber Association (VATA), Hatanga and Top Timber — achieved certification in January 2026, safeguarding continued access to high-value Australian and New Zealand markets. In 2025, those businesses secured an additional AUD445,000 in profit as a result of compliance-certified exports, and approximately AUD1.41 million of income flowed to community suppliers reaching around 1,400 households.

The pilot lays the groundwork for protection of more than AUD17 million in exports and up to 400 formal jobs and over 3,600 supplier jobs.



## What is Chain of Custody certification – and why does it matter?

Chain of Custody (CoC) certification verifies that timber products originate from legal sources and that their movement through the supply chain can be traced and audited. For exporters in Solomon Islands, CoC certification has become a requirement for continued access to Australia and New Zealand markets.

While CoC certification does not, on its own, guarantee sustainable forest management, it represents an important first step towards improved forest governance. It provides importing countries and buyers with assurance on legality and traceability, while creating a foundation for future progress towards Sustainable Forest Management certification.

## What did PHAMA Plus do?

PHAMA Plus worked in partnership with industry, government and buyers to support certification and system strengthening, including:

- Supporting the establishment and strengthening of the Solomon Islands Timber Producers and Exporters Association (SITPEA) as an industry coordination body
- Facilitating collaboration between exporters, government agencies and international buyers and experts
- Designing and implementing a replicable CoC certification pilot
- Supporting the recruitment and training of certification managers, the majority of whom were women
- Providing technical assistance on traceability systems, record-keeping and due diligence
- Supporting improvements in workplace health and safety practices
- Funding and facilitating mock audits and third-party certification audits
- Assisting SITPEA to establish levy mechanisms to support the ongoing costs of certification.

## Choosing stewardship over short-term gain

In Small Malaita, timber producer and community leader Gordon Mwakamwane has taken a long-term approach to forest management. Rather than cashing in through logging on his family's land, Gordon chose to work through the Value Added Timber Association (VATA), supporting small-scale, cooperative sales and selective harvesting.

In Eliote Village, the community harvests just two mature trees per hectare, leaving the remaining forest intact, and plants ten trees for every one felled. High-value species such as Vitex and Rosewood, which take generations to regrow, are managed carefully to ensure long-term returns.

As VATA's General Manager, Gordon oversees exports that return up to 90 per cent of sales to resource owners, demonstrating that sustainable harvesting can deliver greater and more lasting benefits than short-term logging royalties. His experience shows how stewardship and value-adding can protect forests while supporting livelihoods for future generations.



*VATA General Manager Gordon Mwakamwane*



Without the long term support from Australia and New Zealand through the PHAMA Plus program, I don't think the Solomon Islands Timber Producers and Exporters Association would have achieved certification. Our sincere thanks for helping with training and strengthening our systems and networks.

Raphael Aremaea, SITPEA Coordinator



## What should happen next?

To consolidate gains from the Chain of Custody (CoC) certification pilot and support the sector's longer-term transition:

**Apply learnings from the SITPEA CoC certification pilot** to expand certification to additional sawn timber exporters. Learnings may also inform the development of traceability approaches for other primary producers in the Solomon Islands, particularly agricultural producers facing similar market access requirements.

**Strengthen business planning and financing arrangements** across the sawn timber sector so that certification costs are treated as a routine cost of doing business and can be sustainably absorbed by exporters and industry associations over time.

**Use CoC certification as a pathway toward broader adoption of Sustainable Forest Management practices**, recognising that improved traceability and governance systems are a necessary first step toward longer-term forest sustainability outcomes.

**Promote improved harvesting, replanting and restoration practices** to reduce pressure on forest resources and support the long-term viability of forest-based livelihoods.

**Continue to strengthen inclusive participation**, including opportunities for women, youth and people with disabilities in compliance, management and technical roles, building on the gender and inclusion outcomes demonstrated through the certification pilot.