

MumbaiWood 2026 – Business Opportunities and Challenges

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Context

Event: MumbaiWood 2026

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MumbaiWood is Western India's only trade fair focused on woodworking and furniture production technologies. It gathers leading brands, manufacturers, technology providers, material suppliers, and solution partners, with participation from more than 30 countries and retailers across the region.

WPMA was part of a joint New Zealand industry and government pavilion at MumbaiWood with the aim of promoting NZ Pine, plus capturing emerging opportunities for export growth. This report provides an overview of MumbaiWood highlighting future business opportunities for export growth and challenges from trading within India.



The NZ Contingent at MumbaiWood

1. Executive Summary

Participation in MumbaiWood 2026 provided valuable insights into India's rapidly expanding timber and wood products market. The event highlighted strong demand for both commodity timber products and emerging opportunities for higher-value wood products, engineered wood solutions, and sustainable building materials.

Despite the opportunities, several challenges were identified. The main ones being the price sensitive market conditions, strong international competition, regulatory and operational complexity, plus credit risk management which make it a difficult market to currently generate a worthwhile profit margin. However, it is hoped that the removal of the 5 to 11 percent tariffs on NZ timber, lumber and their derivatives (pulp, paperboard) as part of the India-NZ FTA will lead to more competitive and profitable margins.

Advice received during an NZTE session prior to MumbaiWood acknowledged that it is important to focus on partnerships and developing relationships with local traders. Regular engagement and communication are essential as a means of building trust with Indian customers. A focus should be on long-term commitment rather than quick market entry approaches. Prior to and during MumbaiWood relationships were initiated with key organisations, such as the Kandla Timber Association, Bombay Timber Merchants Association, and the Association of Furniture Manufacturers and Traders.

While India remains a highly price-sensitive market, discussions with participants during MumbaiWood confirmed growing recognition and support for NZ premium wood products within the Indian market.

2. Discussion

2.1 India Market Outlook

Market Drivers

India's timber demand is being driven by:

- Rapid urbanisation
- Large-scale infrastructure investment
- Expanding manufacturing sector
- Housing construction growth
- Growth in packaging and logistics industries
- Rising middle-class and affluent consumer segments

Market detail gathered during the visit suggests timber consumption may grow from approximately 57 million m³ to around 98 million m³ by 2030, reflecting significant long-term growth potential. India currently imports approximately 44 million m³ of timber and wood products annually, creating opportunities for international suppliers. India softwood sits at an estimated US\$1.060 million, with hardwoods the current dominant timber.

Major suppliers of timber and lumber to India include:

- Germany
- Brazil
- United States

- Sweden
- New Zealand (logs, pulp)

2.2 Market Opportunities for New Zealand

Industrial and Commodity Products

Strong demand currently exists for:

- Industrial-grade pine
- Logs
- Pallets
- Packaging timber
- Cable drum manufacture

The packaging sector remains one of the largest end users of imported timber and is expected to continue growing alongside India's manufacturing and export industries. This is more for log exporters due to the type of products required and the low-cost margins.

Emerging High-Value Markets

Particularly encouraging was the interest from:

- Architects
- Interior designers
- Premium home builders
- Modular furniture manufacturers
- Specialist timber importers
- Younger construction professionals (under 40)

Applications discussed included:

- Interior appearance products
- High-end residential construction
- Second homes and holiday properties
- Modular kitchens
- Wardrobe systems
- Furniture manufacturing and other uses, e.g. picture frames
- Bespoke design projects

New Zealand pine was consistently recognised for:

- Sustainability
- Visual appearance
- Light colour
- Straight grain
- Consistent quality
- Traceable supply chains

Market feedback suggests these attributes provide New Zealand with a competitive advantage in premium market segments.

Potential was identified for:

- LVL (Laminated Veneer Lumber)
- CLT (Cross-Laminated Timber)
- Plywood

- Engineered wood panels

These products were viewed as particularly suited to:

- Modular construction
- Furniture manufacturing
- Kitchen systems
- Wardrobe manufacturing
- Sustainable building solutions

Customers identified certification and traceability as essential purchasing requirements.

2.3 Competitive Environment

Despite the opportunities, several challenges must be acknowledged.

Key Challenges

1. Price-sensitive market conditions
2. Strong international competition
3. Established domestic supply chains
4. Regulatory and operational complexity
5. Payment and credit risk management
6. Requirement for trusted local partners
7. Competition from alternative building materials
8. Differences in local building standards and specifications
9. Use of WhatsApp for communications vs e-mail

Industry participants emphasised that margins can be challenging and success often depends on relationship quality rather than product specifications alone.

2.4 Recommended Market Entry Strategy

Discussions with experienced operators highlighted several consistent themes.

1. Focus on Partnerships First

A common observation was:

Test partners thoroughly before committing significant resources.

Success is heavily dependent on selecting capable importers, distributors and local representatives.

2. Get Commercial Structures Right

Before market expansion:

- Credit terms must be carefully managed.
- Distribution structures should be clearly defined.
- Customer ownership should be understood.
- Supply chain responsibilities should be documented.

3. Remain Customer Focused

Regular engagement with end users is essential. Recommendations included:

- Stay connected directly with customers.
- Understand changing customer needs.
- Maintain frequent communication.

- Build trust through responsiveness.

4. Scale Gradually

Industry advice was consistent:

Scale only after repeat demand has been established.

India rewards long-term commitment rather than quick market entry approaches.

2.5 Marketing and Positioning Recommendations

A key theme that emerged was the importance of selling value rather than simply selling timber.

Position New Zealand Pine Around:

- FSC and sustainability credentials
- Traceable forestry
- Design flexibility
- Natural beauty
- Consistent quality
- Reliable supply

Additional Recommendations

- Lead with certification and sustainability.
- Look at sponsoring design talent and industry awards.
- Invest in training and education initiatives.
- Engage architects and designers early in project development.

2.6 Cultural and Relationship Insights

India remains a highly relationship-driven business environment.

Relationship Building

Key factors for success include:

- Building trust over time
- Regular face-to-face engagement
- Demonstrating long-term commitment
- Investing in personal relationships

Communication Preferences

While English is widely used for business:

- WhatsApp is a preferred communication tool.
- Telephone conversations remain important.
- Email alone is often insufficient.

Business Etiquette

Helpful insights included:

- Ask about family and personal interests.
- Cricket can be an effective conversation starter.
- Understand local festivals and cultural events.
- Be aware that direct disagreement may sometimes be avoided.
- Storytelling can be more effective than direct sales approaches.

Time Horizons

The market generally favours:

- Patience
- Consistency
- Long-term market development

Several stakeholders noted that market success often takes years rather than months to achieve.

Industry Networks

A strong network approach was recommended.

Useful channels include:

- Industry associations
- Regional timber groups
- Importer networks
- Furniture sector associations
- Design and architecture communities

Many industry networks now operate extensively through WhatsApp groups and industry forums, providing opportunities for ongoing engagement and market intelligence gathering.

3. Conclusion

The Indian market represents one of the most promising long-term export opportunities for New Zealand's wood processing and manufacturing sector. Demand growth is being driven by urbanisation, infrastructure investment, housing construction and increasing consumer interest in sustainable materials.

Although there are challenges, emerging demand from architects, designers, modular construction companies and furniture manufacturers presents a compelling opportunity for exploring further the higher-value New Zealand wood products within the Indian market.

Success will depend on building trusted local partnerships, managing commercial risk carefully, maintaining direct customer engagement and taking a long-term market development approach. The strong interest observed at MumbaiWood, combined with the quality of contacts generated, suggests there are genuine opportunities for New Zealand exporters willing to invest in the market over time.

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