



## Safeguard Submission

April 20, 2026

Ref: INF20260326\_0 Safeguard

e: [Productivity Commission](#)

### Reference: Safeguard Submission into Import of Fabricated Structural Steel

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#### Business Overview

**Company Name :** HF Hand Constructors Pty Ltd

**ABN:** 8406 4718 770

#### Locations

South Kempsey  
NSW 2440

#### Size Of Business

Number Of Employees      58  
Approx Tonnes / Year      1000

#### Products Manufactured

HF Hand are a Steel Fabrication & Installation Contractor, privately owned and based on the Mid North Coast of New South Wales. The following list of items (and referenced PC codes) are fabricated in our facility in Regional NSW and shipped across Australia for installation.

- Structural steel - 7308900052
- Fabricated structure steel for mining products – 7308900052 & 7308900056
- Fabricated plate work for mining projects - 7308900056
- Fabricated ventilation ducting for motorway & rail tunnels – 7308900052 & 7308900056
- Fabricated steel bridges - 7308100001
- Fabricated steel sign posts and gantries for roadways -7308900052
- Fabricated tanks and storage facilities – 7308900056 & 7308900057
- Fabricated walkways, stairs & handrails - 7308900057



## Safeguard Submission

### On behalf of H F Hand Constructors Executive Summary

#### Executive Summary: Fabrication as the "Seed" of Sovereign Capability

H F Hand Constructors submits this document to address a critical misunderstanding in current industrial policy: steel fabrication is not merely an "industry" in isolation; it is a **foundational sovereign capability**. From defense and mining to agriculture, civil infrastructure, and residential construction, fabrication serves as the invisible engine—the "seed" of all manufacturing—that translates raw materials into national progress. You cannot have a **"Future Made in Australia"** if you do not have the hands, machines, and regional workshops capable of making it.

As a cornerstone of the Mid North Coast's industrial landscape for over 100 years, H F Hand once operated across three sites, including Mt Thorley. Today, we have been forced to consolidate into a dual-site operation in Sancrox and South Kempsey. These sites represent the "front line" of a regional economic battle, facing an existential threat from an unprecedented surge of imported, low-cost steel fabrication that undermines local commercial logic and threatens our national self-reliance.

With Global sourcing ramping up after the GFC in 2009, the decline of our workforce over the past 15 years is visibly noticeable —contracting from a peak of over **190 employees to just 58, including 18 apprentices** —is the first domino in a sequence that threatens our entire regional ecosystem. This 70% reduction in staff jeopardizes the viability of local TAFE institutions and the "borderless" supply chain that services Australia's metropolitan centers. We are not an isolated case; operations across regional Australia are shrinking. While some Australian companies have gained media attention for growth, that growth is often occurring in the United States. While this may look like success on a global scale, it does not translate to employment here in Australia or support the families and communities of the Mid North Coast.

#### Business Overview and Market Realities

As a specialist steel fabrication and installation contractor, H F Hand Constructors generates an annual turnover of \$13M–\$15M, primarily through the manufacturing of structural steel, bridges, and mining equipment (Tariff Codes 7308.90 and 7308.10). Despite our high-quality output, market data confirms a staggering price disparity that our clients cite frequently: landed Chinese light fabricated steel for high end mining projects is priced at below **\$4000.00 per tonne**, while the Australian cost of production sits at circa **\$9,500 per tonne**.

This 170% price gap is not a reflection of business inefficiency, but rather a market failure driven by uneven global labor standards. While the COVID-19 pandemic briefly highlighted the value of our local responsiveness and supply certainty, procurement reverted offshore the moment global logistics stabilized.



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### The Erosion of Cross-Sectoral Capability

The Productivity Commission must view fabrication as a linchpin capability. Its loss creates a "hollowed-out" economy where vital sectors like resources, transport, and utilities lose their primary insurance policy. A mining site or a major road project in New South Wales cannot wait for a 8-week international shipping cycle for a critical repair. By allowing regional fabricators to fail, the government is effectively dismantling the infrastructure required to support its own sovereign agendas.

The "skills" born in fabrication are far more advanced than traditional manual labor; they are a sophisticated blend of heavy engineering, specialised intricate work and digital literacy. Our facility relies on a multi-disciplinary workforce where highly trained tradespeople work side-by-side with, precision CNC machinery and augmented reality quality systems.

This concentrated density of skill—comprising technicians, specialized engineers, draftsmen, and project managers—is the primary engine of our national innovation and feeds our universities their research and development projects. If this workforce is allowed to shrink any further, we will lose the "critical mass" required to adopt new technologies and maintain a competitive edge. Once this professional infrastructure is lost, these specialized skills evaporate from the region and nationally, making it nearly impossible to rebuild the capability or the operational equipment required for future defense or infrastructure projects.

### Conclusion and Proposed Way Forward

The current market conditions are unsustainable. H F Hand Constructors calls for a temporary safeguard measure to provide the "breathing space" necessary to protect our remaining talent and reinvest in the next generation of apprentices. This is not just about protecting one company; it is about securing a foundational piece of the Australian economy. The loss of fabrication is a structural failure that will ripple through every farm, mine, defence operation and metropolitan project across the nation. We urge the Commission to recommend safeguards that recognize the true value of industrial foundations and the essential nature of the fabrication capability.

Yours sincerely,

**Yours Faithfully**  
**HF HAND CONSTRUCTORS PTY LTD**

**Ian Bird**  
**General Manager**