

**FCIA**

FLOOR COVERING  
INSTITUTE  
of AUSTRALIA

MARCH & APRIL 2025

# UNDERFOOT

NEWSLETTER



THE FCIA HOSTS ITS FIRST  
TRADESHOW FLOORTEC  
FCIA GALA 2025 IS  
THE BIGGEST ONE TO DATE

UNDERSTANDING APPRENTICE OF  
THE YEAR AWARDS PROCESS

# FLOORTEC 2025: AUSTRALIA'S PREMIER FLOORING SHOW LAUNCHES WITH IMPACT

written by: Fiona Wischniewski , FCIA Group

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Underfoot Mar-Apr 2025

The flooring industry came together in a big way on **28 February 2025** with the launch of **FCIA's inaugural FloorTec Trade Show**, held at the Grand Hyatt in Melbourne. As the only dedicated flooring show in Australia, FloorTec marked a significant milestone for the industry—bringing innovation, education, and networking together under one roof.

Proudly sponsored by **RLA Polymers**, this landmark event offered a dynamic platform for professionals across the flooring sector to engage, learn, and connect.

FloorTec provided an ideal setting for exhibitors to showcase their latest products and solutions, directly interact with industry professionals, and address real-time questions and challenges. For attendees, it was an opportunity to meet suppliers and manufacturers, offering practical, cutting-edge insights—particularly focused on the commercial flooring space.

A key highlight of the event was the **speaker series**, where industry experts tackled some of the most relevant and complex issues facing today's flooring professionals. Topics included:

## Waterproofing

Troy Hogan & Craig Hildebrand, RLA Polymers

## Navigating Building Contracts

Aaron Martin, Managing Director, Procom Flooring

## Australian Standards vs. Manufacturer Instructions

Don Considine, Senior Flooring Consultant, ATTAR

## Slips

Matt Potent, Tarkett

## Acoustics

Dale Richter, Premium Floors

Adding to the energy of the day, four apprentices demonstrated their craftsmanship live on the show floor. Their work was a testament to the next generation of talent in the flooring industry—and they did an outstanding job representing the future of our trade.

## A Big Thank You to Our Sponsors and Exhibitors

We extend our sincere thanks to our platinum sponsor **RLA Polymers** and the many exhibitors who made the day such a success:

- Accu-Cut Brockie International Inc
- ARDEX Australia
- Australian Flooring Supplies

- Belgotex
- Clever Choice
- DTA Australia
- F. Ball and Co. Ltd
- Flooring Protect
- Gerflor Australasia Pty Ltd
- Husqvarna Construction Division
- Intafloors
- Kevmor
- Mapei Australia
- MJS Floorcoverings
- Nexus Adhesives Pty Ltd
- Oxtek Solutions Pty Ltd
- Plastral Pty Ltd
- Premium Floors
- RBM Plastic Extrusions Pty Ltd
- ResiLoop
- Southern Diamond Tools
- SRS Worldwide
- Tarkett Australia Pty Ltd
- Urban Turf Solutions

## Looking Ahead to 2026

The success of FloorTec 2025 has set a strong foundation for the years ahead. We're already looking forward to making next year's event even bigger and better.

If you'd like to contribute, provide feedback, or suggest ways to enhance the 2026 event, we'd love to hear from you. Please contact us at [info@fcia.org.au](mailto:info@fcia.org.au)

Let's continue to build a stronger, smarter, and more connected flooring industry—**together!**







FLOOR COVERING  
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# FLOORTEC 2026

27th February 2026, Melbourne (location TBA)

Email [info@fcia.org.au](mailto:info@fcia.org.au) for more details and early registration information.  
Sponsorship opportunities for the event are available.



*Save the Date*

## FCiA Gala

28TH FEBRUARY 2026

PLAZA BALLROOM, 191 COLLINS ST, MELBOURNE



FLOOR COVERING  
INSTITUTE  
of AUSTRALIA

Email [info@fcia.org.au](mailto:info@fcia.org.au) for more details



# CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE: FCIA'S THIRD ANNUAL GALA BALL

written by: Fiona Wischniewski , FCIA Group

On Saturday, 1 March 2025, the Flooring Covering Institute of Australia (FCIA) held its spectacular third annual Gala Ball – a night dedicated to honouring the remarkable achievements within the flooring industry.

Themed “A Touch of Gold,” the event truly sparkled, with 450 guests embracing the glamour. From subtle accessories to statement pieces, the golden theme added a stylish flourish to an unforgettable evening.

The night was expertly hosted by industry favourite Stuart Budge, whose passion and energy set the tone for an uplifting celebration.

For the first time, the Apprentice Awards recognised outstanding apprentices not only from FCIA in NSW, SA, ACT, and Tasmania, but also from our partnering Victorian training organisation TFIA. This exciting expansion made the selection process more competitive than ever. The awards were judged on the following criteria:

- Career and study progression
- Teamwork and communication
- Attitude and work ethic
- Trainer feedback

## Apprentice of the Year Winners:

### First Year

Winner: Tyge Jeffery – TFIA, Carpet Call Shepparton

Nominees: Toby Jennings (TFIA), Heath Spinks (TFIA), Anthony Brown (FCIA)

### Second Year

Winner: Karli Rann – FCIA, Coffs Harbour Carpet Court

Nominees: Lincon D’Augello (TFIA), Cooper Hoffman (TFIA), Gavin Handy (TFIA)

### Third Year

Winners: Harley Gallagher – FCIA, Leeton Floors & Jarrah-Lee Kouwenberg – FCIA, Choices Flooring Port Macquarie

Nominees: Lachlan Green (TFIA), Saxon Buckley (FCIA), Zac Barnes (TFIA)

### Fourth Year

Winners: Jack Nicolls – FCIA, GS Tiles and Floor Coverings & Anthony Miller – TFIA,





Macdonald Floor  
Nominees: Matthew O'Keefe (TFIA), Alex Bonner (TFIA)

#### Special Awards

Graduate Apprentice Recognition Award  
(Sponsored by The Flooring Magazine)  
Winner: Logan Buckley – Buckley's Carpet Court

#### Employer of the Year

Winner: Coffs Harbour Carpet Court

#### Commercial Project of the Year – Inaugural Winners

For the first time, the Commercial Project of the Year Award was introduced, showcasing some of the most innovative and high-quality commercial flooring projects in Australia. The top finalists included:

Dept. Health Sirus Building Office Fit Out (ACT) – Inline Floors

Queens Wharf Project (Brisbane) – Master Floor Group

Truganina Community Centre (Melbourne) – Cotter Floors

JLL Office Fitout, 101 Collins St. (Melbourne) – Premrest

Blackwater & Moranbah Hospitals (NSW) – Submitted by Tarkett

No.1 Sydney Harbour Penthouse & Apartments (NSW) – Embelton

ARUP, 123 Albert St. Office Refurbishment (Brisbane) – Continental Carpets

#### Winners:

Truganina Community Centre – Cotter Floors

Queens Wharf Project – Master Floor Group

#### FICA Award – Industry Choice

The prestigious FCIA Award, voted on by industry peers, was awarded to Bob Foletta – Interface. Bob's commitment, generosity, and lifelong passion for the flooring industry made him a standout



# MEET SOME OF YOUR WINNERS

written by: Niranjan Peter , FCIA Group



**2025 First Year Apprentice Of The Year: Tyge Jeffery, Carpet Call Shepparton, VIC**

Tyge started his flooring apprenticeship at 15 whilst he was still finishing secondary school. He was drawn to becoming a tradesman because he wasn't enjoying school. He is a passionate learner and enjoys the variation involved in laying floorcoverings. Tyge really enjoys vinyl planks however he's excited to see what else he will learn in his apprenticeship.

Tyge enjoys mountain biking and loves to hit the trail when he is not on site completing his apprenticeship. He is looking forward to being fully qualified in the next few years and hopes to continue working with the team at Carpet Court Shepparton.



**2025 Second Year Apprentice Of The Year: Karli Rann, Coffs Harbour Carpet Court, NSW**

Karli decided to give an apprenticeship in flooring a try after her previous employer closed their business. Her favourite aspect of being a flooring installer is being able to see all the different types of houses/buildings designs and how much of an impact flooring has on what a place looks like. Karli hopes to have a long career with the team at Coffs Harbour and is looking forward to being fully qualified.

When she is not laying floor or doing her book work Karli enjoys spending time with her family and friends.



**2025 Third Year Apprentice Of The Year: Harley Gallagher, Leeton Floors, NSW**

Harley found his flooring apprenticeship whilst he was scrolling on Facebook. He knew he wanted to get into a trade but had no idea that installing flooring was an option. Since starting his apprenticeship 3 years ago he has grown to appreciate the workmanship required to transform the floorcoverings in a space. In the coming years he hopes to run his own flooring business as an independent contractor.

In his spare time Harley enjoys going fishing and playing golf and he loves a medium rare scotch fillet. He also has been a long-time supporter of the Canterbury Bankstown Bulldogs. We are proud of Harley's achievements, and we are excited to see where the industry takes him.



**2025 Third Year Apprentice Of The Year: Jarrah-Lee Kouwenberg, Choices Port Macquarie, NSW**

Jarrah-Lee started her career in flooring through her father recommending her to apply for an apprenticeship that was advertised at Choices Port Macquarie. She was looking to work in a career which was hands on and found that in

flooring. Jarrah-Lee enjoys learning on the job and enjoys the variety of ways to lay floor coverings. She also enjoys working in different locations and enjoys traveling for her job.

In her spare time Jarrah-Lee enjoys camping, 4WD driving and beach trips with her dog. We are sure that Jarrah-Lee will continue to impact flooring industry with her outstanding work.



**2025 Third Year Apprentice Of The Year: Jack Nicolls, GS Tiles & Floorcoverings, NSW**

Jack is in his final year of his apprenticeship and has ambitions of becoming a contractor. He found a career in Flooring Installation after his cousin who also works as an installer recommended, he give it a try. Jack's favourite aspect of working in flooring installation is the joy he's able to put on the face of his customers.

On his days off Jack likes to spend his time playing Golf or touch football, working out at the gym or watching the Bulldogs play in the NRL. We look forward to seeing Jack's future successes in his flooring career.



**2025 Third Year Apprentice Of The Year: Anthony Miller, Macdonald Floors, VIC**

Anthony grew up in Shepparton, Victoria and is a proud Yorta Yorta man. He started his career in flooring in 2021 when he stumbled upon an interesting job opportunity through an indigenous employment program. He had no prior experience working in the industry but gave it a shot. From there he began to excel in his apprenticeship where he found great pride in seeing the finished floor coverings he had worked on.

Outside of his apprenticeship the father of one enjoys spending time with his family. He is also a proud fan of the Essendon Bombers. Anthony has ambitions to one day run his own installation business and we are excited to see Anthony graduate from his apprenticeship.



**2025 Graduate Apprentice Recognition Award: Logan Buckley, Buckleys Carpet Court, NSW**

Logan followed in the footsteps of his father and grandfather by joining the Flooring Industry. His family own to stores and he is a proud third generation carpet layer. He chose an apprenticeship because he knew he did not want to work in an office environment. We asked Logan a few questions about being an installer and his achievements.

What is your favorite part of flooring installation?

My favorite part about the flooring installation is that no two days are the same we are always working in different houses with different products and it's really rewarding to see the improvements we can make to someone's house.

Where do you see yourself in the next few years?

Still installing floors and I hope to have a team of offsidars and apprentices that I am teaching to help the industry grow and ensure it's strong future.

What advice would you give to others who are thinking of starting an apprenticeship in flooring?

Pay attention to the techniques of whoever's teaching you so when it comes time for you to have a go you have a better understanding of how it's done and don't be afraid to ask questions.

It can be a lot of hard work at times but if you are willing to work hard and stick with it you will have the opportunity to earn a lot of money and help set up your future.

# A LEGACY OF PASSION AND PURPOSE: BOB'S ONGOING COMMITMENT TO THE FLOORING INDUSTRY

written by: Fiona Wischniewski , FCIA Group

For anyone who's spent time with **Bob Foletta**, it's quickly clear—he doesn't just work in the flooring industry, he lives and breathes it. From humble beginnings as a mechanical engineering apprentice to becoming a respected voice across the sector, Bob's journey is one shaped by resilience, curiosity, and an unwavering dedication to doing right by his trade and the people in it.

Bob's move to Sydney at a young age marked the beginning of a new chapter, one that eventually led him into the flooring industry—a space where he found both professional satisfaction and a deep sense of belonging. He credits much of his success to the guidance and encouragement he received early on from supportive managers. That mentorship, he says, made all the difference—and it's something he's passionate about paying forward.

"Support can change everything. That's why I believe in being there for the next generation, the way others were there for me," Bob shared.

In conversation with industry colleague Fiona, the two reflected on the quiet, often informal mentorships that shape careers. Fiona noted that some of her most important guidance came from those who led by example rather than title—a sentiment Bob strongly agreed with.

He comments that this mentorship is seen in the dedication and challenging role of Trade Teachers who are working with our future tradespeople while mentorship is also a critical role for senior managers in private business.

Throughout his career, Bob has seen the flooring industry evolve dramatically. He pointed to innovations that now allow installations over higher moisture content floors as a game-changer, especially for builders facing tighter deadlines and trickier conditions.

Bob's approach to change? Embrace it.

He's a firm believer in lifelong learning, and it's clear he views challenges as opportunities in disguise. Whether it's the push for **sustainability**, the use of **recycled materials**, or leveraging **technology** to refine manufacturing processes, Bob has always kept his eyes on progress.

Still, he's the first to acknowledge the hurdles. *"Sustainability is something we have to take*

*seriously—not just for compliance, but for our future. Recycling, reducing carbon footprints—it's tough, but it's necessary,"* he said.

When it comes to advice for young professionals, Bob doesn't hesitate:

*"Say yes to change. Keep learning. And get involved. This industry needs fresh ideas, and it needs people who care."*

Bob has long championed involvement in industry bodies and standards committees as a way to give back and shape the future of flooring. Even as he steps back from his current role, retirement doesn't mean retreat. He plans to stay active in technical and standards work, continuing to mentor, contribute, and ensure knowledge is passed on to those coming up behind him.

Because for Bob, it's never just been about floors—it's about people, purpose, and paving the way for those who will build the future of the industry.

Well done, Bob! Thank you for everything you've done to support and grow our industry.





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# SELECTING THE APPRENTICES OF THE YEAR

written by: Fiona Wischnewski , FCIA Group

The Apprentice Of The Year is the pinnacle honour we can award apprentices for their efforts whilst they get themselves qualified. Educating the future of our industry is a fundamental function of the FCIA Group and it is important that we highlight those who commit whole heartedly to their apprenticeship. The process of selecting the right winners for each level is not one we take lightly and allows us to reach out to the industry to gain nominations thus shedding light on our future rising stars.

The first step in identifying standout apprentices is to reach out to our vast network of trainers and assessors to submit their nominations for each year level. The criteria for nominating candidates are the following principles:

- Career and study
- Teamwork and communication
- Attitude
- Feedback from employer and trainer

From there all nominations are taken to a selection committee which consists of award sponsors, trainers and FCIA leadership where we deliberate and decide on the winner for each year. This process allows us to separate the range of nominees from the eventual winners. The winners are then announced at our Annual Gala where the apprentices are present and commended on stage in front of the industry.

Our hope is that the experience will push them to continue to perform their apprenticeship at a high level whilst also inspiring their peers to strive for the same recognition.

We spoke with this years Second Year Apprentice Of The Year winner Karli Rann about the experience and her apprenticeship to date:

How have you found the last two years of your apprenticeship?

*My apprenticeship has been great so far. I am surrounded by co-workers who only want the best for me, and I am in a very supportive workplace. Also, the FCIA has been very helpful and accommodating with everything.*

How did it feel to win the Apprentice of the Year Award?

*It felt great!! It was awesome to be a part of the Floortec demo and then win the award. I feel like it gave me a boost of confidence regarding my skills.*

How do you feel about building a future in floor installation?

*I am excited to be part of building the future of floor installation because it is a great trade and I would love to see more young people and females involved.*

What advice would you give other young people who are interested in joining the industry?

*Give it a go! When I was finishing school, this job would not have even crossed my mind but now I love it and I am excited to see where I end up.*

What are some of the challenges you have faced so far?

*Confidence, for a while I was worried about how I would go considering I had never done anything like this before.*

How has the team at Coffs Harbour Carpet Court supported you through your journey?

*My workplace has been very supportive during my apprenticeship so far. The installers have been patient with teaching me and the sales team are always there to answer any questions that I might have.*







# REASONS TO INSTALL PET DEFENCE® UNDERLAY EVEN IF YOU DON'T HAVE PETS

written by: Paul Verschaeren, Airstep Australia

With a name like Pet Defence® we can understand why people may think that this premium underlay is only for those who have four legged family members sharing their home. And we'll agree that that was the main focus we kept in mind when designing this particular underlay - we have plenty of other premium options after all. But that doesn't mean that Pet Defence® is only suitable for homes with pets. In fact, we think it's a great solution for pretty much any situation where you're wanting a luxurious residential underlay. That's why today we're outlining five reasons to install Pet Defence® underlay in your home, even if you don't have pets.

## Its Waterproof

The breathable moisture barrier that's built into our Pet Defence® underlay helps prevent small spills from leaking through to your subfloor. This means your risk of damage to your subfloor from spills on the surface is significantly decreased. This may not sound all that important, but when you consider the fact that a damp subfloor can lead to issues with mould and mildew (and could even see your floors sinking or collapsing in extreme cases) it becomes a major benefit.

## It Helps Prevents Stains

Did you know that a large chunk of carpet stains are actually due to spills sitting within your underlay or subfloor and rising back up into your carpet? This is because cleaning up a spill at a surface level doesn't necessarily get rid of the entire mess, therefore allowing the issue to manifest as persistent marks on your carpet. Another benefit that Pet Defence®'s breathable moisture barrier provides is that it helps prevent this from occurring, as it keeps spills from sinking lower than the surface. This makes them much easier to clean up and means there's less risk of persistent issues.

## It Helps Build A Healthier Interior Environment

Because Pet Defence® is both hypo-allergenic and anti-microbial, it can help you create a healthier interior environment. By providing these benefits, Pet Defence® can assist in improving the indoor air quality in your home, so you can breathe easier both literally and figuratively - especially if you've got asthma or allergies.

## It's Compatible With Underfloor Heating

If you're looking for an ultimately comfortable and luxurious flooring option, you can't go past Pet Defence® with your favourite plush carpet and underfloor heating. Thanks to a 10mm thickness and 100kg/m<sup>3</sup> density, Pet Defence® can assist your carpet in feeling better underfoot, and it's compatible with underfloor heating, so you can maximise the luxe vibes in your space.

## It Has A Lifetime Guarantee

Finally, when it comes to installing something as important as your floors, you want to know that the materials you're using are built to last. That's Why Pet Defence® comes with a Lifetime of the carpet guarantee. This means that your underlay will last as long as your carpet, so you can enjoy the benefits outlined in this blog for years to come.

So, when it comes time to lay new floors in your home, ask your flooring specialist for Airstep Pet Defence®.

# MEET THE TEAM: FIONA WISCHNEWSKI

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Underfoot Mar-Apr 2025

Fiona Wischnewski began her career as an Executive Assistant at the ACM Training Centre, where she discovered a strong passion for vocational education and training. Supporting apprentice and trainee programs early on gave her valuable insight into the VET system and the positive impact quality training can have on individuals and industry.

Following a merger that formed the Australian Industry Group (Ai Group), Fiona moved into the role of Training Coordinator, where she gained hands-on experience across areas such as Workplace Relations, Work Health and Safety, Leadership, and Environmental Impact.

Her career continued to progress as she took on more senior roles, becoming RTO Account Manager and later National RTO Manager at Ai Group. In these positions, she led a large team, ensured compliance with government standards, and provided ongoing support to both trainers and students.

In 2020, Fiona joined the Floor Covering Institute of Australia (FCIA), initially contributing to the development of training resources. She was soon appointed General Manager of the newly established FCIA Training Academy, and in October 2021, she stepped into the role of CEO. Her leadership journey reflects a long-standing commitment to people development, industry growth, and the transformative power of training.

**Fiona's key responsibilities within the business are:**

## **Business Development and Growth**

- Lead strategic planning and operational performance across the FCIA Group, ensuring alignment with Board goals and industry needs.
- Drive membership growth and industry engagement through innovative training solutions and strong stakeholder relationships.
- Manage budgets, funding applications, and identify new business opportunities to support sustainable growth and national training delivery.

## **Culture and Team Management**

- Build and lead a high-performing team through effective leadership, development, and succession planning.
- Oversee daily operations and foster a collaborative, client-



focused culture that meets service standards.

- Ensure a safe, inclusive, and compliant workplace in line with WHS, EEO, and environmental regulations.

## **Quality Assurance and Compliance**

- Ensure ongoing compliance with ASQA and state funding bodies in partnership with the National RTO Manager.
- Act as the Dedicated Consumer Protection Officer and keep the Board informed of any compliance concerns.

## **Industry Communication, Collaboration and Cooperation**

- Represent FCIA at industry events, school and trade days, and collaborate with suppliers and manufacturers to promote training initiatives.
- Work with the Marketing & Communications Officer to ensure timely and relevant content across social media, EDMs, and the website.
- Explore and evaluate self-regulation and warranty options to support long-term industry standards.

We asked Fiona a few key questions to get a better understanding of who she is as a person.

## **What are your greatest achievements to date?**

My greatest achievements to date include raising my son with love, resilience, and strong values, while simultaneously working my way up through dedication and perseverance to achieve my role as CEO. Balancing parenthood with a demanding career



has taught me strength, patience, and leadership—both at home and in the workplace.

**What's your favourite thing about your role at FCIA?**

- Everyday is a challenge
- Working with such a great group of people from manufacturers, suppliers, retailers, commercial contractors – whom all have the same goal
- I have a great team
- Feels like we are getting things moving within the industry

**What are you focused on in the business now?**

Busy year ahead, some of the items we are focusing on include:

- Growing FCIA and FCIA Training Academy within the flooring industry
- Working with each sector of the industry retailers, manufacturers/suppliers and commercial contractors to identify their pain points and work on solutions
- New training process to make training more suited to our apprentices and get great outcomes
- Getting into schools and sports clubs to get Flooring noticed as a trade
- Attending career days (with other companies and employers) to get flooring noticed
- Creating booth package to go to companies who want to attend Career days in their region
- Online training programs for manufacturers, employers and apprentice supervisors
- Grant for SA
- Self Regulated Flooring License
- Updating training material
- Updating vinyl hand book
- Planning FloorTec Trade Show and Gala Ball for 2026 (27 and 28 February 2026)

**What are you most looking forward to in 2025?**

Seeing some of these projects being completed.

**What's your dream vacation destination?**

Europe – catch up with family and I love seeing the old and new come together of some of these amazing cities.



# UPCOMING EVENTS



South Australian  
Careers Expo  
SA

9-10 MAY 2025

Melbourne  
Workshop  
VIC

MAY 2025

Victorian  
Careers Expo  
VIC

3-4 JUNE 2025

Females In Flooring  
High Tea  
WA

13 JUNE 2025

FCIA  
GOLF DAY  
NSW

12 SEP 2025

FloorTec  
2026  
VIC

27 FEB 2026

FCIA Gala  
2026  
VIC

28 FEB 2026

**IF YOU WOULD LIKE INFORMATION ABOUT THESE  
OR ANY OF OUR OTHER EVENTS THEN PLEASE  
CONTACT [INFO@FCIA.ORG.AU](mailto:INFO@FCIA.ORG.AU)**