

● **LETTER OF THE WEEK**

MAKING IT IN AUSTRALIA

In response to your article on the plight of manufacturing in Australia "For want of a nail", (*BRW*, March 15-21), I believe not enough attention is paid to the "dumbing down" of the high-tech work being undertaken in manufacturing (and engineering in general).

Although I freely admit bias, due to the fact I operate a company providing numerical analysis software tools to engineers, in my more than 20 years in industry I have seen the focus shift from innovation with a long-term view, to much more attention given to cost reduction and short-term results.

This type of thinking leads to investment decisions in technology and skills development being considered with such short payback periods that these initiatives are usually never undertaken.

We now also see big mechanical or manufacturing projects (for example rail and heavy equipment) being undertaken in China and south-east Asia.

Once, undertaking such manufacturing in Australia provided an excellent

training ground for junior engineers and trade apprentices. These opportunities are evaporating.

Research and development has diminished to a point where the main role for engineers in manufacturing is project managing supplier outsourcing.

This is currently possible as the local engineers, having been trained with the more holistic focus of the past, still hold the necessary skills. But what of the future? Without engineers to engage outsourcing companies and ensure quality content, we will be at the mercy of our suppliers.

As a father of three, I lament the future for our nation's children as we rapidly sell out our natural resources and deskill our manufacturing workforce. I hope it is not too late for a bipartisan approach to reinvigorate industry and move Australia back up the supply chain.

Warwick Marx
Gordon, NSW

DUMBED DOWN

Unfortunately your 10 tips to revitalise manufacturing ("For want of a nail", *BRW*, March 15-21) fall short.

Education in science and engineering have been dumbed down by the "fees for degrees" syndrome. Engineering now means building a bridge or a mine to most Australians, while scientists spend most of their time on fruitless grant applications. Brendan Dow, of Ceramic Fuel Cells, hits the nail on the head when he says Germany, the location chosen over Australia for a fuel cell manufacturing plant, "has an engineering culture".

Countries with such a culture typically are short on natural resources (think Japan, US west coast, Finland). While we are focused on digging up iron ore rather than making smartphones or aircraft, we should at least resuscitate education in science and engineering and provide an environment where technology start-ups can prosper.

Paul van de Loo
Adelaide, SA

CORRECTION

BRW's Fast Franchises issue (February 23-April 4) stated revenue per outlet for King of Knives/Chef King was \$153,570. In fact it is \$661,538.

[illegible]