



Steel Blue

Annual revenue: \$95m | Employees: 80 | Est: 1995

Fittingly for the CEO of a footwear manufacturer, it was a boots-on-the-ground approach that led Garry Johnson to begin the journey of taking Steel Blue carbon-neutral.

“It was really those years visiting our European operations as we set up there six years ago,” Johnson recalls.

“I’d spend the weekends walking around and I’d be looking at retail stores and reading the local papers to see what was going on and I could really see there was a strong movement going on around business learning to lead the way in terms of climate (initiatives).”

Around 2019 the company’s leadership group



Steel Blue’s Garry Johnson

started to think through how it could approach a global issue from a local level.

“Our first step was really a very easy pragmatic one, which was to install a 100-kilowatt solar power system here, which made a difference straightaway,” Johnson says.

What eventually evolved was a sustainability roadmap that identifies five strategic priorities across its supply chain with commitments to human rights, climate, environment, diversity and inclusion, and communities.

As well as solar panels, which generate between 71 and 100 per cent of the business’ operating needs depending on the time of day, Steel Blue also switched to motion-sensor LED lighting; implemented a hybrid car policy to update its fleet by 2025; went paperless; and is exploring innovations to extend product durability of its safety work boots.

“As an organisation, we think it is important to recognise the impact we have on the communities and environments where we operate,” Johnson says.

In November, Steel Blue achieved Scope 3 Climate Active certification — the highest level possible under the Australian Government-backed program — for its Australian operations, meaning it has achieved net zero emissions across its entire value chain.

It reduced those emissions as much as

possible and offset the rest through investments in the Australian Native Reforestation Yarra Yarra Biodiversity Corridor northeast of Perth and the Rimba Raya Biodiversity Reserve Project in Indonesia, where Steel Blue has a second manufacturing facility.

“The first big step for me was really trying to understand what are we actually going to measure — I’d never heard of Scope 1, Scope 2, Scope 3,” Johnson says.

“And the literature is quite daunting. If you want to reduce your emissions, you have to actually understand the impact of the various things you do in your business and how they create emissions.”

However, Johnson says the benefits of taking action have flowed through in both staff satisfaction with the company’s sustainability efforts and appeal to customers, many of whom are big miners with their own net zero targets.

It’s next goal: to achieve net zero status across its global operations in New Zealand, Europe and the US.

“Everybody would prefer to support a brand that’s doing the right thing, sustainability-wise, in addition to being a great product,” Johnson says.

“It’s a bit like a restaurant that’s got a great deal. You’ve still got to have great food, but if you have that sustainability piece as well, I think that makes a difference.” ●