

TIS a Great Christmas Gift for the Timber Industry

Victoria's peak independent forestry body, the Victorian Association of Forest Industries (VAFI) has welcomed the release of the Victorian Government's 2009 Timber Industry Strategy (TIS).

The TIS was officially launched today by the Hon. Joe Helper MP, Minister for Agriculture, capping off a challenging year for the forest industry in the wake of the Black Saturday bushfire disaster and the global economic downturn.

"The Victorian timber industry contributes in excess of \$3 billion to the State economy, employing over 32,000 jobs, and this will provide peace of mind and increased confidence for those rural and regional communities who rely on the timber industry for their continued wellbeing," said the VAFI CEO, Philip Dalidakis.

The development of the TIS has been a long time in the making and the Victorian Government should be applauded for the extensive investment of time and energy that has been put into this strategy. It is also worth acknowledging the efforts of the former Sustainable Timber Industry Council (STIC), chaired by Christian Zahra, former Federal Member for McMillan, which provided a strong framework for the TIS to be based around.

"The release of the TIS, is a clear indication by the Victorian Government that the timber industry has a strong future and Joe Helper, should be applauded for his extensive work and ongoing commitment to the Victorian timber industry," Mr Dalidakis said.

The VAFI strongly supports the following key policy issues arising from the TIS:

- Providing the industry with the ability to secure timber resource for up to 20 years, supplying much needed long term certainty for new and increased capital investment and bringing Victoria into line with other jurisdictions;
- Introducing 40 year Working Forest Plans, underpinned by legislation addressing the uncertainty around the long term commercial operations of VicForests in Working Forest Areas and underpinning the long term sale of timber resource;
- Strengthening industry confidence that changes in State Government policy that affect timber supply are not afforded *Force Majeure* status;

- Acknowledging timber plantations as an 'as of right crop' and that rural landowners are the most appropriate people to determine the best use of their land;
- Streamlining plantation planning regulations, ensuring that timber plantation operations that comply with the '*Code of Practise for Timber Production 2007*' will not be required to apply for planning permits in Farming and Rural Activity Zones as is already the case with other crop types;
- Committing to implement Action 2.20 under the '*Securing Our Water Future Together*' based on sound, reputable evidence and science and ensuring any policy response must be equitable and consistent with other agricultural land uses;
- Encouraging renewable energy investment across the industry by supporting a change in Government policy that native timber wood waste is now eligible for accessing Renewable Energy Certificates;
- Strengthening Victorian Government procurement practises to recognise international third party certification schemes as providing best practice in sustainable forest management and that any agency or organisation that receives funding from the Victorian Government that has an inconsistent policy with this will receive no funding or endorsement from them.

"The Victorian timber industry is one of the most environmentally friendly and responsible industries and it is reassuring to have the Victorian and Federal Government's consistently endorse this view, through the CPRS and now the TIS," Mr Dalidakis said.

"The TIS is a necessary step forward if our industry is to grow and attract investment and this is a clear sign from the Victorian government that our industry will continue to provide a vital role throughout Victoria," Mr Dalidakis added.

Philip Dalidakis is available for comment

Media contacts: James Copsey, 0400 956 741