

# Timber industry calls for sustainable access

- **Philip Hopkins**
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The timber industry wants long-term access to trees. Photo: *Robert Pearce*

THE Brumby Government's new timber strategy must guarantee access to a secure volume of wood through long-term legislation, according to Victoria's forestry industry.

The benchmark is still the Government's sustainable yield of 576,000 cubic metres of sawlogs per year, set out in its *Our Forest Our Future* policy, says the Victorian Association of Forest Industries.

VAFI executive director Philip Dalidakis said that with the impact of two big fire seasons some resource estimates had been as low as 380,000 cubic metres.

"This would have devastating implications for the industry," he said in VAFI's submission to the State Government's timber industry strategy review. The new timber plan will replace the Government's landmark 1986 timber strategy.

"Reductions in area and yield available from public native forests risk reducing the scale of operations to below the scale needed to maintain economies of scale."

Mr Dalidakis said the area available for timber production was already marginal — 10% or an annual harvest rate of less than 0.2% — so should not be restricted due to events outside the industry's control.

The Victorian Government should reaffirm its commitment to the regional forest agreements (RFAs). After the RFA process ended, "reserves were created in Gippsland and the Otways without adherence to the relevant RFAs", Mr Dalidakis said.

"In the latter case, the Western RFA was cancelled. Political decisions which undermine the RFAs create significant sovereign risk for the industry."

Without the Western RFA, the sustainable yield was reduced to 517,400 cubic metres of sawlog per year.

Mr Dalidakis said the Government should maintain timber harvesting in Victoria's red gum forests. "It is minimal, its environmental impact is negligible and it is economically and socially vital in its regional setting," he said.

Mr Dalidakis emphasised forestry's economic importance, quoting a URS Forestry analysis that shows Victoria's forestry and forest products industry generates output of about \$6 billion annually and employs 25,000 people.

Among VAFI's other recommendations are for:

- The Department of Primary Industries to be the single agency responsible for planning and approving private native forestry, plantations and farm forestry.
- VicForests' charter to be amended to drive investment in long-term business growth and resource management.
- Adequate recognition of the environmental credentials of wood and wood-based products in design and procurement.
- Partnerships to undertake research and development and facilitate greater skills development.