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### Native forests part of industry's future

Victoria's peak representative body for the timber industry, the Victorian Association of Forest Industries (VAFI), has stated it supports the continued sustainable harvesting of native forest in Victoria as part of a mixed supply of timber, along with plantation estate.

VAFI President and Managing Director of Hallmark Oakes, Mr Bob Humphreys, said without harvesting native forests, timber industries would not be able to meet community demands for wood products.

"People want to buy timber floorboards, wooden dining tables and other forest products, and without access to native Australian forests, timber from less sustainable industries in other countries will be imported to meet this demand," he said.

The Victorian forest industry employs about 25,000 people and Victorian-sourced timber directly contributes \$3 billion to the local economy. The industry's sales and services income is double that, at \$6 billion.

Mr Humphreys said the Victorian native forest industry operated according to high environmental standards and played an important role in bushfire management.

"No one cares more about the state of our native forests more than those in the industry; these people rely upon the health of our forests for their livelihoods," he said.

"The forest industry manages public lands under its care and protects it from pests and fire damage; saving the taxpayer money and helping to maintain forest health.

"It is also the only greenhouse gas positive sector in Victoria, offsetting 2.3 percent of Victoria's greenhouse gas emissions."

Mr Humphreys was also critical of those interest groups that created the impression the industry slashed and burned its way across the Victorian landscape.

"The forest industries harvest less than 0.2 percent of Victoria's public forest each year, replanting as they go," he said.

"What people forget is the greatest threat to our native forests is not the timber industry, but fire.

“Between them, the 2002, 2006 and 2009 fires burnt nearly three million hectares; at current rates it would take the industry nearly 300 hundred years to harvest this much forest.”

Mr Humphreys agreed plantations have a role to play in the future of the forestry industry. However, he disputed the need to pick a single solution.

“Sustainable and responsible forestry management must always seek a balance between native forestry and plantation development; diversity in the resource base needs to be the way forward,” he said.

“And what makes sense for a single company will not necessarily work for an entire industry, and without access to Australian native forest products, Victorian consumers will just be buying more goods made using timber sourced from fragile rainforests overseas.”