

Wednesday, February 18 2009

TIME TO TAKE ACTION ON CATCHMENT PROTECTION

The Victorian Association of Forest Industries (VAFI) said today that a sustainable and well-managed timber industry would provide protection to Victoria's water catchments against the threat from fires, and could reduce the severity of bushfire incidents such as the current tragic events in Victoria.

Joining calls from other scientific groups to further investigate the forest management and bushfire prevention policies of Melbourne's water catchment areas, VAFI said better maintenance of fire tracks, reduction of fuel loads, provision of fire fighting vehicles and skilled local volunteers would help to protect vital water resources against its single greatest threat: fire.

"Our nation is reeling from the worst natural disaster in our history, and nobody wants to see this happen again" said VAFI CEO, Phillip Dalidakis.

"But in the wake of this tragedy, we must start looking at strategies to stop similar incidents from occurring again, and a responsible, sustainable forest industry that protects our water catchments must be a part of those strategies.

"For some time now the VAFI has joined scientists in warning that fire is the single greatest threat to Melbourne's water supply. And while these fires have already done tremendous damage to our water catchments, we must take immediate action to prevent a reoccurrence," Mr Dalidakis said.

"In March 2008, the VAFI released a report that identified bushfire as the greatest threat to Melbourne's water supply and found that the presence of a sustainable timber industry was beneficial in mitigating that threat."

"By annually harvesting and regrowing more than the current 306 hectares of forest out of the 157,000 hectare catchment area, the impact of bushfires on our precious water supply could be drastically reduced.

"The sheer scale of this tragedy should bring an end to a combative, ideological view of forest management. ; we need a common sense approach to a very dangerous and damaging situation, and sustainable forestry must be a part of that."

The Victorian Association of Forest Industries is continuing to provide much needed assistance to those affected by the fires through its Community Support Register at www.vafi.org.au, the register allows people to volunteer assistance and have it matched to those who register in need.

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VAFI

VICTORIAN ASSOCIATION OF FOREST INDUSTRIES

"It's been a very uplifting to see the amount of goodwill offered by the community in these tragic times and we encourage as many people as possible to volunteer to help so that we may begin to provide practical and directed assistance," Mr Dalidakis said.

The Victorian Association of Forest Industries is the peak industry body for the Victorian timber industry.

A copy of the Review of Timber Production in Melbourne's Water Catchments can be found at <http://www.vafi.org.au/documents/WaterCatchmentReview08.pdf>

A special timber industry bushfire bulletin can be subscribed to at www.vafi.org.au

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MEDIA RELEASE

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