

The Age Business
25 January 2007

'No plan' to export timber

By Philip Hopkins

THE Victorian Government has denied it will export timber logs salvaged from the state's bushfires.

Rumours have been swirling in the Victorian timber industry that export sales of salvaged logs were being considered.

But a spokesman for Environment Minister John Thwaites said that in the first instance, timber salvaged would be offered to Victorian customers.

"If they are all not sold in Victoria, we can look at other options," he said.

VicForests' director of strategy and planning, Pat Groenhout, confirmed that VicForests' first focus would be to sell salvaged timber to meet existing commitments.

"If there is excess produced, we will also make first offers to domestic customers," he said. "If there is excess beyond that, we would look at all opportunities."

About 1.1 million hectares of native forest have been burnt in Victoria this summer — the same extent of forest that was burnt in 2002-03. Some fires are still burning, and the bushfire season is only half over.

Mr Groenhout said VicForests estimated that about 2 million cubic metres of standing sawlog had been burnt in this year's bushfires.

"We don't know how much of that is burnt beyond repair or burnt at all," he said. "That's the first assessment — they're rough figures because we're doing it on the run."

Mr Groenhout said the first step would be to check the condition of the fire

area. This would determine how much timber was still alive and how much would continue to grow.

"That gives us two things — what we can focus on for the salvage program, and the area that will contribute to future sustainable yield," he said.

"There is clearly an impact on long-term sustainable yield, but we don't yet know what that will be."

Victorian Association of Forest Industries chief executive Trish Caswell said it was crucial for the Government to consider the Victorian industry's long-term needs, and not just immediate cash income.