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press clip

Native forestry worth \$150 million

The Victorian Association of Forest Industries (VAFI) has welcomed the release of a new study commissioned by the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) into the economic importance of East Gippsland native forestry.

VAFI public affairs manager, Shaun Ratcliff said the study by Coakes Consulting, 'Victoria's Forestry Communities: Adapting to Change in the Forestry Industries', showed that the native forestry in East Gippsland generated \$150 million of economic activity and directly supported the livelihoods of 2000 people in the region.

"This report confirms that the forest and wood products industries are major drivers of economic growth, particularly in rural and regional areas," Mr Ratcliff said.

According to the study, native forest and wood products businesses with links to the East Gippsland Forest Management Area create over \$150 million of economic activity each

year.

This included local business expenditures in East Gippsland of:

- * \$22.16 million in Bairnsdale.
- * \$21.08 million in Orbost.
- * \$14.33 million in Cann River.
- * \$7.79 million in Heyfield.

It was also found these businesses supported around 2022 people (778 industry workers, plus their families) within East Gippsland. This only includes those directly employed in the industry and not those indirectly supported by it, such as employees of non-forestry firms that rely on it for trade.

According to research conducted by Australian National University academic Dr Jacki Schirmer, this figure may be even higher. In this study, also commissioned by the DPI, 1289 people (2.3 per cent of the workforce) in East Gippsland were found to be directly employed in the forestry industry. A

further 2145 people were found to be directly employed in forestry in Gippsland.

The Coakes study found forestry jobs to be general-

ly better paying than the Victorian labour force average, with incomes also growing faster than average between 2001 and 2006.

Forestry jobs were also found to be more secure, with workers on average being employed in the industry for 19.7 years; and 10.2 years with the same business.

There was also a higher than average indigenous participation in the industry, with 2.8 per cent of the industry workforce in East Gippsland being Aboriginal.

The study also found forestry workers to be highly active in their communities, with 65.4 per cent reporting involvement in community groups and organisations.

However, a very high proportion (40.5 per cent)

stated when asked that they would leave the area to find work if no longer employed by the timber industry.

Mr Ratcliff said the report made it clear forest and wood products industries were major economic contributors to the local economy.

"These industries provide good, stable jobs for East Gippsland communities that create income for other businesses, such as the local supermarket, bakery and pub," he said.

"Forest and wood product businesses also help keep local CFA members and other community minded volunteers employed and in the region.

"This needs to be a wake-up call to policy makers and advocates for East Gippsland; we need to make sure there is a sustainable forest and wood products industry into the future to ensure we retain viable communities in East Gippsland."

Further information on the study can be found on the DPI website.



Wayne Alberni, of Kanga Farm Equipment, with Ian Broome, of Cann River, at the 25th Annual East Gippsland Field Days at the Bairnsdale Aerodrome last Friday afternoon. A huge crowd of over 8200 flocked to the event over Friday and Saturday to view a range of agriculture, motoring, food, craft and outdoor items. K300-71

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Jill Crouch, of Marlo, with Karen Detering, of Stiches 'n' Things, at the Craft Show as part of the East Gippsland Field Days in Bairnsdale last Friday. K400-13