Letter to the Editor – Proposed Great Forest National Park

The article '*Forest plan fires debate (11/10/17)'* confirms what the forest, fibre and wood products industry has known all along – that the plan for the proposed GFNP has one goal: to shut down the native timber industry.

The assertion that establishing the park might mean a unique tenure needs to be developed has left no uncertainty on this matter, and this is something that industry won't stand for.

The Central Highlands is already home to an extensive existing parks and reserve system. For regional towns in Victoria to survive, we need to strike the balance between industry and the environment – it doesn't have to be one or the other, and for the sake of those living in our regional communities, it simply can't be.

The value of our industry cannot be understated. The claims that the proposed park could deliver around $70 million annually and create some 700 full-time jobs is at odds with the loss the state would see from the devastating effect the proposed park would have on the forest, fibre and wood products industry in Victoria. In the Central Highlands alone, there would be some 2,100 jobs, and $573 million revenue, lost if the industry shuts down.

Overall, we are an industry that provides direct jobs for more than 20,000 Victorians, supporting another 50,000 jobs, and contributes $7 billion dollars to the local economy in sales and service income.

The reality is that jobs lost in small regional communities can rarely be replaced. Alternative industries such as tourism might provide some jobs but it should not be a case of either/or – we need forestry and tourism, and any other small industries to ensure resilient and vibrant communities.

The industry is a vital part of the Australian economy and environment, and together we can work towards a strong, sustainable future for the forest, fibre and wood products industry, the tourism industry, and a strong, healthy environment.

Tim Johnston
Victorian Association of Forest Industries