

MEDIA RELEASE

TIMBER AVAILABILITY CHAOS

The Victorian State Government's inaction on securing the future of the Victorian native timber industry has industry workers facing an uncertain future. The Victorian Government is refusing to allow legitimate access by small Victorian businesses dependent on timber supply from state forests for their viability, through bureaucratic and administrative bungling.

Victorian Association of Forest Industries CEO, Tim Johnston, said with confirmation that VicForests is unable to proceed with an amendment to the Timber Release Plan (TRP) in the near future, the results are likely to be devastating for the sector and will have major flow-on effects for regional Victoria.

"VicForests, at the direction of the government, is unable to amend the TRP and has been unable to finalise an amendment to the Allocation Order. This means that, while timber is available, government inaction has put a stop to small family companies in rural communities going about their business of employing people and providing valuable economic contribution," he said.

"Without these amendments the native hardwood timber industry is experiencing uncertainty, unnecessary financial pressure and frustration. At the end of the day, peoples' livelihoods are at stake all because of government inaction." he said.

Graham Walker from Spot Pallet Supplies said his mill will run out of stockpiled timber in July. He has labelled the situation as diabolical.

"We have invested close to a million dollars in the sawmill recently and if there isn't a ten-year guarantee of log supply then we have no future for our business or the town," he said.

"The Government needs to dispose of the Greens' policy and open up the forests where timber is available. VicForests isn't being allowed to log certain areas because the government says so, but they are a government department. The situation is diabolical."

Simon McConachy from SKM Contracting in Gippsland has been hit hard by the timber shortfall and said government inaction is destroying people's livelihoods and mental health.

"At this stage I'm the worst affected. I have not harvested a tree since the Australia Day weekend. I have sub-contractors. Young men with families and I've had to tell them to find any work they can," he said.

"When I questioned officials about the situation, they told me to go off and work on the fires. Working on fires isn't going to help me with the banks."

Mr Johnston is urging the government to meet with him immediately as the peak body representative of the Victorian timber and wood products industry. "The real concern is the immediate livelihoods and mental wellbeing of hard-working Victorians that have invested on the back of guarantees from the government that they have contracts which will be honoured." he said.

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