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MEDIA RELEASE

FORESTRY CONTRACTORS SUFFER DUE TO GOVERNMENT INACTION

The Victorian Association of Forest Industries Inc. (VAFI) has called for immediate action from the State Government after 11 days of protest action in a timber harvesting coupe in Mount Baw Baw, which has seen the livelihood of a small business owner suffer substantial financial loss in income to date.

VAFI CEO, Tim Johnston, said the Government had the regulatory power to remove protesters from operational harvesting coupes. But 11 days on and the contractor involved, his nine staff and their families suffer at the hands of inaction and a lack of regard for small business owners and their families.

“Here we have hard working small business owners, **self-employed and creating other jobs in the region yet the government has not been able to get a compliance crew to the coupe after 11 days to remove the protesters,**” he said.

The contractor involved and his crew of nine all have to deal with a loss of income despite amendments to the [Sustainable Forests \(Timber\) Act 2004](#) (SFTA) in 2014 which gave the industry hope that new regulations would prevent such protests. Five years on and we have seen little evidence of these new amendments coming into play, highlighted recently when a protester chained himself to equipment needed to fight bushfires.

Mr Johnston said the State Government’s website describes the amendments to the act by stating:

People who choose to disrupt legal timber harvesting operations and put themselves and others at risk, now face a greater range of offences and increased penalties for their *dangerous actions*....*Strong penalties apply to all offences and the courts can hand down appropriate penalties which reflect the seriousness of the offence . . .*

(<http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/forestry/maintaining-public-safety>)

“There are laws in place, and we continue to question why such protests keep **happening, with little** government support or intervention. When people’s livelihoods are at stake, 11 days is 11 days too many,” Mr Johnston said.

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