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MEDIA RELEASE

IT'S TIME FOR CLARITY, MINISTER

Following last week's State Government announcement of the long-awaited Timber Release Plan (TRP), the Victorian Association of Forest Industries Inc. (VAFI) is calling on the Agriculture Minister, the Hon Jaclyn Symes MP, to be clear on the long-term future of the Victorian native forest sector.

"The Victorian timber and forest industry across the board needs a clear, long-term policy," VAFI CEO, Tim Johnston, said.

On ABC Gippsland Radio last Friday, Minister Symes denied claims the decrease in available harvestable hectares was the beginning of the end for the industry.

"On the contrary," the Minister said. "We want to provide certainty and a sustainable harvesting future for the important timber industry."

However, the Minister then seemed to backflip by admitting the government wants to move away from native harvesting.

When Minister Symes was asked if the messaging from the government was to move away from the native timber industry she said **"of course it is.... of course I want to reduce our reliance on native forest and move into plantations as much as possible."**

Mr Johnston said the industry seeks immediate answers to the State Government's intentions for the industry given that Minister Symes supports the native timber industry in one breath and then appears to want to wind it back in the next.

"These mixed messages need to stop. This vital industry cannot thrive if the government does not have a clearly articulated long-term industry plan, not a short-term stop gap for the next couple of months. From harvest and haulage contractors, to sawmillers and plantation managers, these important players in Victoria's timber and forest industry need certainty, security and clarity," he said.

"If the government doesn't provide the industry with a long-term policy then businesses across Victoria will remain incredibly anxious. Businesses will be unable to plan for their futures and investment decisions will continue to be delayed," he said.

"For months now, small businesses across Victoria have had to endure financial and personal hardship on the back of state government indecision and despite the delayed release of the TRP, these hard-working Victorians are still in the dark about when the coupes will be available for harvesting."

Mr Johnston said the State Government owes the Victorian timber and forest industry, which provides thousands of jobs across the state and generates billions for the economy, a viable long-term industry plan.