

MEDIA RELEASE



INDUSTRY DISAPPOINTED OVER PLANS TO LIMIT NATIVE HARVESTING

The Victorian native timber industry will be extremely disappointed if the State Government accepts the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council's (VEAC) recommendations to create an extensive suite of new national parks in Victoria's west.

The Victorian Association of Forest Industries Inc. (VAFI) CEO, Tim Johnston said that the proposals to create new conservation reserves in the Wombat, Wellsford, Mount Cole and Pyrenees Ranges State forests would have negative impacts on local businesses and communities.

"If accepted by the Government, these proposals will severely impact the local harvesters and processors that rely on the high-quality timber," Mr Johnston said.

"These forests are extensively used by local communities for a wide range of activities, including sustainable timber harvesting and firewood collecting. Currently in the Mount Cole State forest, approximately eight hectares is sustainably harvested and regrown annually. It is unclear what impact this proposal will have on local businesses and the wider industry," he said.

Pyrenees Timber owner, Ian Crick, said he was disappointed with the recommendation to further reduce the area of the Mt Cole State Forest, which supplies most of his timber, by 44%.

"VEAC has recommended retaining 3099 hectares of Pyrenees Ranges as State Forest to offset the area lost from Mount Cole. The problem is that the sawlog quality in the Pyrenees Ranges is of a lower quality and diameter than compared to Mt Cole," he said.

"Sawlog quality is more important than volume. If the recommendations are accepted, then this will have a devastating effect on the viability of my business and the businesses supported through Pyrenees Timber down the supply chain."

Mr Johnston said VAFI reiterates the need for a long-term industry plan so businesses can make investments and make decisions for their own futures. He said this is having a detrimental effect on the mental health of many.

"VEAC has not made an adequate socio-economic assessment of the impacts these proposals, which VAFI strongly recommended during the investigation. This timber is harvested and processed by community businesses. Removing this supply will severely impact livelihoods.

"This is putting an enormous amount of pressure on small businesses owners, their families and their local communities."

"Our industry demands a long-term State Government industry plan so the industry can adapt and make plans for their futures. These recommendations have disappointed local timber businesses given their futures lie in the resource."

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