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## **INDUSTRY FACING INCREASING UNCERTAINTY**

The peak body for the Victorian timber and forestry industry is concerned at the recent lack of government support for local harvesting contractors.

“Protesters who invaded harvesting operations in a Rubicon Valley timber harvest site last week ignored Public Safety Zone legislation, putting lives at risk,” said Victorian Association of Forest Industries Inc. (VAFI) Chief Executive Officer, Tim Johnston.

“We all have the right to lawful protest. But it appears that the same group of people have been moving from site to site, invading workplaces and endangering lives. The government has laws in place to prevent dangerous protests in forestry operations and these must be strictly enforced,” he said.

“Not only are protesters endangering their own lives by entering the coupes but are also risking the safety of hard-working forest contractors. The situation is dire, and the government must take action.”

Malcom Warnock from Rubicon Cable Co. was the latest target for protesters when they invaded his harvesting coupe last week.

“Myself, and a number of other contractors have been hit hard this season with protesters illegally coming onto our worksites unlawfully and illegally. I have to question our Public Safety Zone Legislation because if it was that secure, then how are these protesters still targeting our coupes on a regular basis,” he said.

Mr Johnston said ongoing protest actions and the fear contractors face that they could be next is adding to high levels of stress in an already uncertain time.

“Imagine attending your place of work only to be confronted with hostile protesters who walk onto your site, make you stop work, and force you to lose financially while you wait for days or even weeks for government intervention,” he said.

“Never before have hard-working contractors and sawmillers in Victoria been under so much financial and mental stress. We are sadly seeing similar struggles to those that many of our farmers are currently facing. We are also a part of the rural landscape and this stress is impacting our workers. Indeed, the crisis is so severe that the state government has assistance programs for those in agriculture to help with mental health.

“I’m calling on the government to act decisively against unlawful protests and also urgently implement assistance programs for affected timber and forestry contractors.”

**ENDS**