

# Media Release

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## **Federal Court RFA decision: A win for balanced approach to forestry and the environment**

Today's Federal Court decision to uphold the validity of Regional Forest Agreements sends a strong signal that the RFAs strike the right balance between environmental, social and economic management of our forests, CEO of the Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA), Mr Ross Hampton said.

"The Australian forest industries welcome today's vindication of our sustainable, renewable industry which relies on the latest available science to ensure our precious native forest resource is sustainably managed to ensure it is available to all Australians in perpetuity," Mr Hampton said.

"The facts are that Australia's RFA framework rightly demands the highest environmental standards and is complemented by rigorous state-level environmental laws, on par with the the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act. Today's decision by the Federal Court has confirmed that."

Victoria's forestry industries generate \$7.3 billion of economic activity annually and directly employ around 20,000 people across Victoria and indirectly support another 40,000 to 50,000 jobs. Many of these jobs are located in rural and regional Victoria.

"Victoria has almost 8 million hectares of native forest, of which 94 per cent is unavailable or unsuitable for native forestry operations. Annually, only 0.04 per cent of total area of the native forest area in Victoria is harvested for timber, and all forest harvested is sustainably regrown," Mr Hampton said.

The 20-year RFA agreements around Australia have been independently assessed time and time again as exceeding the environmental requirements of the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, while providing a level of resource security for industry.

While the judge hearing the case deferred a decision on some operational aspects separate to the substantive point of whether RFAs were invalid because of delays in the five-yearly reviews – which would have national implications – Mr Hampton said he hoped the matter would be promptly resolved to provide certainty to industry and allow Vicforests to get on with caring for our forests.

"Looking forward, it's vital that the Federal and Victorian Governments prioritise the 20-year extension of the Victorian RFAs, particularly the Central Highlands and East Gippsland RFAs," Mr Hampton concluded.

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AFPA represents forest growers, harvesters, and manufacturers of timber and paper products.

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