

Media Release



Tuesday 27 March 2018

Victorian RFAs extension welcome but longer-term certainty needed

The peak associations representing Victoria's sustainably managed timber industry have cautiously welcomed today's Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) announcement, but say that much more needs to be done to secure the long-term future for the thousands of Victorian jobs dependent on secure resource supply.

CEO of the Victorian Association of Forest Industries (VAFI), Mr Tim Johnston, and CEO of the Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA), Mr Ross Hampton, said today's announcement by the Victorian and Commonwealth governments to roll over the Central Highlands, East Gippsland and North-East RFAs for a further two years was essential to ensure the ongoing development of Victoria's forest and wood products industry. VAFI and AFPA have called on the Victorian Government to work with industry on the 20-year extension needed to provide certainty and drive investment and innovation in the sector.

"Victoria's highly regulated timber industry strongly supports the RFA framework, which provides 20-year plans for the sustainable management and conservation of Australia's publicly owned forests," Mr Johnston said.

"RFAs are essential to provide certainty for our members as key regional employers, to invest, create jobs and support their local communities. Going forward, the extended RFAs must include guaranteed volume and quality of timber supply to allow for further long-term investment in value adding technology.

"Our state forests provide a sustainable resource that not only supports thousands of jobs directly and in downstream industries, but also generates beautiful appearance grade timbers for furniture manufacturing and structural timber for our vital housing industry.

"We're keen to see the detail and program timelines for the next two years, but these extensions are a positive signal that both governments are committed to the future of Victoria's responsibly managed timber industry.

AFPA CEO Mr Ross Hampton said the RFAs nationally had delivered on all the environmental objectives, striking the right balance between environmental, social and economic considerations in the management of Australia's state forests.

"RFAs are required by law to be independently reviewed every five years, and all reviews conducted have found that they are meeting or exceeding all environmental objectives," Mr Hampton said.

"In fact, as a direct result of the RFAs and public land use decisions since the early 1990s, over 13.6 million hectares have been added to Australia's forest conservation reserve system.

"Today we saw an additional 2,500 hectares of forest locked up, which will inevitably have an impact on wood supply to industry. The Victorian Government must recognise that any reduction in Australia's world class forest industry will likely increase imports of hardwood timber from countries with weaker environmental regulations, including those where tropical rainforests are logged unsustainably and illegally," Mr Hampton concluded.

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

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Background:

- Victoria's sustainable forest industries generate \$7.3 billion of economic activity annually and directly employ around 20,000 people and indirectly support a further 40,000 to 50,000 jobs across regional and metropolitan Victoria.
- Australia currently imports \$5.5 billion of wood products from overseas, much of which comes from the tropical forests of developing nations.
- Currently less than 6% of Victoria's 7.9 million-hectares of native forest is available or suitable for certified timber production. Around 3,000 hectares of forest is harvested and regrown each year which is only 0.04% of Victoria's total area of forest.
- All harvested areas are sustainably regrown allowing biodiversity to be maintained over time.

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