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PREMIER ANDREWS NEEDS TO URGENTLY EXPLAIN APPARENT CHANGES TO TIMBER PLAN

Victoria's hardwood timber industry is demanding Premier Daniel Andrews immediately clarify comments this morning in which he appeared to flag changes to his decision to close the state's hardwood timber industry.

On ABC radio this morning Premier Andrews said that the Victorian Government "may well have to revise" its plan to shut down the industry from 2030 as a result of the recent fires in East Gippsland.

The peak industry bodies representing Victorian forest industries – Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA), Victorian Association of Forest Industries (VAFI), and Australian Forest Contractors Association (AFCA) – said it was disrespectful to forestry workers for the Premier to speculate about fast-tracking his decision to close a vital regional industry while firefighting continues.

AFCA General Manager Stacey Gardiner said, "There has been no information released to industry on the assessment of how much timber slated for mills has burnt, and how much is usable – previous post-fire harvesting operations have resulted in significant volumes of timber for processing which has minimised the resource impact of fires.

"The Premier should not pre-empt these assessments and create more uncertainty for regional communities while forestry workers are still tirelessly fighting fires and removing dangerous, burnt trees in East Gippsland so roads can re-open."

VAFI CEO Tim Johnston said the Premier should engage with industry and ensure that the burnt timber is not wasted.

"Large numbers of trees have been felled along roads and firebreaks to control these fires for access, fuel and safety reasons and it is vital that the government works with industry and local communities in utilising this timber. Now more than ever, the government needs to provide clarity and certainty to the industry."

"If the Premier is serious about supporting timber workers and regional communities, then he should ensure this timber is not wasted."

AFPA CEO Mr Ross Hampton said, "The Victorian native timber industry is highly regulated and environmentally responsible, harvesting the equivalent of just 4 trees out of every 10,000 annually. Every tree is replaced as the areas are regenerated by law. At this rate it could continue forever without diminishing the net forest area.

"The Premier failed to consult with industry, workers and communities before announcing he was closing the industry. He should not make the same mistake again. As the fires have shown, forestry workers play a critical firefighting role – without them, a key firefighting resource in Victoria will be lost forever.

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