

MEDIA RELEASE

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VIC RFAs extensions welcome, but Andrews' plan to close the timber industry still casts shadow over its future

The peak associations representing Victoria's sustainable native timber industries have cautiously welcomed today's announcement of the Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) extension, but considerable uncertainty still surrounds the Andrews Government's plan to close down the industry by 2030.

The Victorian Association of Forest Industries Inc. (VAFI) the Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA), and the Australian Forest Contractors Association (AFCA) said the announcement from the Victorian and Commonwealth governments extending the state's five RFAs until 2030 provided some relief for the native timber industry, which has been hit hard by the recent bushfires and the Andrews Government's decision in November to phase out native forest harvesting from 2024, with a full shut down by 2030.

"The RFA extensions are welcome but they don't change the fact the Andrews Government plans to shut down the industry, despite it being sustainable and critical to so many communities in regional Victoria," VAFI CEO Tim Johnston said.

"These extensions may provide some medium-term security for our industry, but they must be accompanied by guaranteed timber volumes from the Victorian Government over the corresponding period to meet one of the key objectives of the RFAs. We will study the detail of the agreements closely to ensure they deliver on their objectives."

AFCA General Manager Stacey Gardiner said the RFA extensions enable harvesting to continue across the state for those businesses not impacted by other constraints at this time.

"Many forestry contractors who were on the frontline of Victoria's bushfire response this summer, and then worked tirelessly on the clean-up operation to make roads safe again, are working at reduced capacity and are almost out of work. The situation for many has become untenable at a time we should be doing everything to retain businesses who can operate safely," Ms Gardiner said.

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.

"It is disappointing that as a result of the Victorian Government's plan, the Victorian RFAs are now out of sync with the rest of the country, with Tasmania, NSW and Western Australia all signing 20-year extensions with rolling five-year extensions upon successful completion of the statutory five-yearly reviews," Mr Hampton said.

"We will continue to oppose the Andrews Government's plan to end native timber harvesting right up to the next Victorian election to have it overturned." Mr Hampton concluded.

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Background

The Victorian native timber industry is highly regulated and environmentally responsible with only 3,000 hectares per year harvested and replanted, in an overall forest estate of nearly 8 million hectares. To put this in perspective, only 4 trees out of every 10,000 are harvested annually every year, and every tree is replaced as the areas are regenerated by law.

The most recent economic analysis by VicForests showed that the native timber sector generates approximately 2,500 direct jobs. Native timber generated \$770 million in revenue with \$297 million value added in regional communities.

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