
OPINION

Logging protesters break laws while government looks other way

The National Cabinet recognises forest industries are essential, so why don't green activists, asks Ross Hampton

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Threatened: Forest industries have been identified as an essential service.

WE'VE all had to make sacrifices during COVID-19.

Hundreds of thousands of Australians are out of work, a vast number of businesses' doors are shut and more are expected to do the same before anything improves.

The hibernation of the economy is costing \$4 billion every week, a sad but necessary price to pay to contain the pandemic.

But it seems some environmental activists in Victoria are ignoring the law and invading forestry worksites, chaining themselves to trucks, and threatening to undo the efforts of millions of Victorians.

One group is boasting about one member chaining herself to a harvesting tractor in Warburton, and in the process, stopping a lawful business from doing its job.

Most Victorians would be rightly outraged by this selfish conduct.

They've been unable to attend funerals of loved ones, grandparents haven't been able to meet their new grandchild, weddings have been postponed.

It is the latest in a relentless campaign being waged by some activists hellbent on closing down a major sustainable industry in regional Victoria, and one which the Andrews Government is complicit with, bowing to their demands and committing to shut down the industry within a decade.

The Andrews Government is also failing to apply the COVID-19 laws with those protesters, not to mention the workplace safety laws.

The inaction is particularly disappointing given the recent recognition by the National Cabinet that forest industries are an essential service because of the vital services and products they provide.

It's also disappointing because of the enormous contribution forest industry workers played during last summer's bushfires, particularly in East Gippsland.

In an almost breathtaking display of ingratitude, the activists are now using the black summer of bushfires to double down on their campaign.

It was the men and women who work in our industries who were mostly operating the graders and dozers that worked on the fire frontlines with little sleep for months over summer.

They were absolutely vital for creating the firebreaks and pushing the trees off the roads so the tens of thousands of holiday-makers trapped in resort towns could flee.

Activists also like to overstate the scale of harvesting operations, while downplaying the economic and social contribution of forest industries.

Each year in Victoria, the equivalent of just four trees are harvested out of every 10,000, and every area harvested is reseeded and regenerated by law.

Barely a day goes by without another attack on forestry, either by trespassing in the areas where the harvesting crews are trying to do their work, misinformation campaigns, or — as *The Weekly Times* has exposed — using dubious tactics to find Leadbeater's possums in planned harvesting coupes for the sole purpose of halting operations.

It is a shortsighted and selfish campaign, that as a society, we shouldn't tolerate.

Ross Hampton is Australian Forest Products Association chief executive