

Media Release

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Bob Brown legal action a callous attack on Tas timber workers

The Bob Brown Foundation's legal action against Tasmania's sustainable forest industries is just the latest callous attack on forestry workers from the extremist activist group and threatens vital regional jobs in an essential industry at a time when Australia can least afford it, AFPA CEO Mr Ross Hampton said today.

“Vexatious litigation is just one of the tactics used by the BBF and other activist groups to disrupt lawful, sustainably managed timber harvesting operations around Australia, alongside illegal protests, site invasions and intimidation of workers,” Mr Hampton said.

“BBF’s timing could not be more insensitive and irresponsible. Sustainable Timber Tasmania’s sustainably managed timber harvesting operations underpin thousands of Tasmanian jobs and the manufacturing of many essential products which are in high demand during the pandemic. Bob Brown should realise that Australians are fed up with his anti-job agenda and propagation of falsehoods about Tasmania’s forest industries.”

Mr Hampton urged the Federal and State Governments to urgently address the uncertainty around Regional Forest Agreements created by a Federal Court decision earlier this year, which has emboldened activist groups to launch more legal claims against state government-managed timber harvesting operations. VicForests has already confirmed it will appeal the judgment, but the BBF legal action is proof that governments must act sooner.

“Clearly, the activist groups are trying to exploit the situation by ramping up their lawfare tactic, which, regardless of merit, hamper harvesting operations. We urge the governments to urgently explore legislative reform to put a stop to the flood of litigation that activist groups are threatening to unleash nationally.”

“This lawfare puts tens of thousands of jobs across Australia that rely on the native timber industry are at risk at a time when the country can least afford such a disastrous collapse of a major industry. Also let’s not forget the indirect employment created by the forest products industries, and the families and communities which rely on those incomes to survive.”

The Chair of the Tasmanian Forest Products Association (TFPA) Bryan Hayes said, “Tasmania’s native forestry operates to the highest standard, and the industry is appalled the BBF has launched this action, which can only be aimed at putting people out of work.”

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Mr Hampton said, “What’s worse is that these attacks on workers are all predicated on the untruth that Australia’s native timber industry is not sustainable. The facts are that native forestry operations occur on only a tiny fraction of Australia’s native forest estate, using the equivalent of just 6 trees out of every 10,000 annually, and every tree is replaced as the areas are regenerated and regrown by law.”

“RFAs have been in place for over 20 years and are independently reviewed every five years, and those reviews have found they are meeting or exceeding all environmental objectives. If Bob Brown and his ilk succeed in closing native timber harvesting in Australia we will still use appearance grade timber in our homes and offices – it will just be imported from overseas countries which may well not operate to the strict environmental standards that we do.”

“Now, more than ever, Australia needs to support local manufacturing jobs. Our native timber industries are the backbone of many regional communities. With Australia facing years of record high unemployment, it beggars belief that Bob Brown is trying to put thousands of people out of work,” Mr Hampton concluded.

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