

MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday 5 August 2020

IN THE MIDST OF A PANDEMIC THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY SHOWS A CALLOUS DISREGARD FOR VICTORIAN WORKERS IN AN ESSENTIAL INDUSTRY

On the same day the Victorian Government announced that, due to CoVid-19 lockdowns, the state economy will likely be in a deep recession with the loss of potentially tens of thousands of jobs, The Wilderness Society has taken its extremist campaign against the state's sustainably-managed native forest industries to an international audience, and trivialised the global scourge of illegal logging, Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA) CEO Ross Hampton said today.

"It seems to be lost on The Wilderness Society that amid the unprecedented lockdown in Victoria and the devastating impact on the state's economy, Victoria's native forest industries continue to operate to produce essential products like packaging, timber products for the building industry, pallets for supermarket deliveries, and firewood," Mr Hampton said.

"These are vital jobs producing essential products in a lawful, sustainable industry that a vocal minority of extremists want to close down – most Victorians would be rightly horrified by The Wilderness Society's conduct."

The Chief Executive of the Victorian Association of Forest Industries Inc Tim Johnston said, "Actions like this from the Wilderness Society just embolden protestors who choose to disrupt legal timber harvesting operations and put themselves and others at risk. These are the same forest contractors that are asked by the State Government to risk their lives and fight bushfires."

Mr Hampton said it was also wrong of the Wilderness Society to be equating VicForests' tightly regulated harvesting operations with the global illegal logging trade.

"The Wilderness Society effectively trivialises the global criminal trade in illegally logged forest products that leads to deforestation, poor working conditions and environmental vandalism, and it undermines the huge efforts of global agencies like Interpol in combating this scourge."

"Australia's illegal logging laws are designed to prevent the importation and domestic harvesting of timber outside of legitimate regulatory frameworks. Australia is part of a global effort to stamp out the theft, laundering and trade of illegal timber, often by organised crime syndicates, particularly in developing countries. The Wilderness Society should not undermine these efforts for the sake of a cheap headline."

Mr Hampton said it should also be noted that VicForests has flagged it will appeal the Federal Court decision in question, and that the judgment only related to a handful of forest coupes that were harvested between 2016 and 2018.

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“VicForests uses the equivalent of just 4 trees out of 10,000 every year, and old growth trees are protected. It is certified to the world’s largest global certification scheme called PEFC (known as Responsible Wood in Australia). Every tree that is used is regenerated. It is completely sustainable environmentally and a vital driver of jobs in many regional Victorian towns. The Wilderness Society should not have to be told that now is not the time to be trying to close down an essential industry in Victoria,” Mr Hampton concluded.

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