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Federal Parliament must support Senator McKenzie legislation to provide certainty for native timber industry

The Federal Parliament should unite to support legislation proposed by Nationals Senator Bridget McKenzie that will provide certainty for Australia's native hardwood timber industries and the thousands of people whose livelihoods depend on them, the Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA) and the Australian Forest Contractors Association (AFCA) said today.

The Senate's *Environment and Communications Legislation Committee* today heard from forest industries representatives about the importance of Senator McKenzie's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Regional Forest Agreements) Bill 2020*, which will clarify legal uncertainty created by a Federal Court ruling last year that threatens Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) around Australia.

"On behalf of the thousands of Australians who rely on our sustainable and renewable native timber industries, I call on the Federal Parliament to unite in supporting Senator McKenzie's legislation. This legal uncertainty pressuring the industry is spurring anti-forestry groups who are threatening to use the precedent to shut the industry down," AFPA Chief Executive Officer Ross Hampton said.

"Senator McKenzie's Bill will affirm and clarify the Commonwealth's intent regarding the relationship between the Commonwealth's Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act and the robust environmental frameworks established under the RFAs.

The Senate committee hearing today heard disturbing examples of the illegal activity from extremist groups protesting native timber harvesting operations, including the dangerous practice called 'black wallabying' in which protestors conceal themselves in dark clothing and covertly enter active harvest sites, often leaping out, ambushing machines, and putting lives in danger.

"Illegal protest activities continue to create serious safety breaches in legal workplaces. These dangerous and illegal activities are occurring within heavy equipment operating areas and are often life threatening and risk serious injury. Alarming, as part of recent illegal activities an individual brought a toddler onto an active operational forestry site," General Manager of the Australian Forest Contractors Association (AFCA), Stacey Gardiner said.

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Mr Hampton said Senator McKenzie's Bill affirms the intended operation of RFAs between the State and Commonwealth Governments, not just in Victoria but in Tasmania, NSW and Western Australia.

"Under the RFAs, the state environmental laws that the Commonwealth accredits are designed to provide equivalent environmental protections as the EPBC Act for threatened species, and the Commonwealth can review at any time whether they are being complied with," Mr Hampton said.

Mr Hampton said all the statutory reviews of the RFAs have found that they meet or exceed all the environmental protection and biodiversity conservation requirements.

Australians can have confidence that our native timber industry is the most sustainably managed of anywhere in the world, using the equivalent of just six trees out of every 10,000 to make a range of renewable and sustainable products, and those trees are then replaced through regeneration, by law.

"This support of this Bill through the Parliament will allow the industry to continue doing its great work, providing thousands of jobs and helping the environment," Mr Hampton concluded.

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