



Andrews Government needs to explain its role in timber industry crisis

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Mark Poynter, a Fellow of the IFA in Victoria said, 'Victorian Premier Andrews' explanation that the delay in releasing this timber is due to the importance of "following the process to get the planning right" is hard to fathom, given that the Timber Release Plan has been ready for signing since before last November's state election.

Furthermore, the Government already has another long-term process underway – the RFA Modernisation Project – which is meant to be assessing the future management of Victoria's native forest timber production.

'Under these circumstances, we would expect timber production to continue while this review was conducted. Stopping an industry dead in its tracks while formulating a strategy for its future is unprecedented and guaranteed to create an employment crisis for regions and rural communities.

'In the absence of any explanation, it can only be assumed that the Andrews Government is happy to effectively cripple the livelihoods of several thousand rural Victorians to appease trendy, ideological opposition to forestry that has been shaped by decades of misinformation. The Andrews' Government's actions are at odds with the Premier's claim that "The Government's position is not to be playing politics with these industries, these jobs and these communities"', said Mark.

If this continues, the forced closure of Victoria's native forest timber industry will have far-reaching consequences beyond the devastating loss of rural jobs. The industry's experienced bush workforce and their equipment have, for generations, been integral to managing the threat to Victorian forests posed by severe bushfires. Only weeks ago, forestry and timber industry workforces combined with government agencies to extinguish a major fire in the Thomson catchment which had potential to seriously damage Melbourne's water supply.

Native forest timber production is clearly a vexed issue for the Andrews Government which appears to be beholden to eco-activist claims that are at best dubious or wrong. In fact, for every dry tonne of timber produced, 1.8 tonnes of carbon dioxide is taken from the atmosphere. This carbon remains 'locked up' for the life of the wood, even when it is used for building products or furniture, helping to offset global greenhouse gas emissions.

Furthermore, timber production is highly regulated and limited to a minor 6% portion of the state's public forests. If this was more widely recognised, the IFA believes that most Victorians would support our native forest timber industry, especially given the continuing strong demand for hardwood products.

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