

# 9 September 2016: Forest Industry Taskforce reaches major milestone

The Forest Industry Taskforce is pleased to release its Statement of Intent, which has been provided to the Premier of Victoria, The Hon Daniel Andrews MP.

The Taskforce has made significant progress throughout 2016, reaching common ground about challenges facing the Victorian wood and fibre products industries, secure employment in these industries, and about protection of threatened flora and fauna, including the Leadbeater's Possum.

The Taskforce will continue discussions over coming months to reach recommendations for government that create security and certainty for forest industries, regional jobs, forests and threatened species, and the wider Victorian community.

Independent chair of the Forest Industry Taskforce, Professor Don Henry, acknowledges the complexity of the Taskforce's work due to the many differing, and legitimate, views about the future of Victoria's state forests east of the Hume Highway.

Professor Henry also notes that there are short-term issues of serious concern for all parties involved in the Taskforce, and that the group is making its best endeavours to attend to these immediate challenges, with the assistance of government, while also reaching agreement about long-term durable solutions.

"The Taskforce is together working hard to try to resolve this long-running debate. We think the community is tired of it and wants it ended. The job of the Taskforce is complex and difficult, and we are trying to reach an outcome that's good for jobs, good for Victoria and good for the environment," says Professor Henry.

Tim Johnston, CEO of the Victorian Association of Forest Industries, says, "Through the Taskforce we have an important opportunity to deliver outcomes better than business as usual, including for conservation values, workers, regional communities and the industry. Our Statement of Intent shows important progress to date."

Jane Calvert, National President CFMEU FFPD, says, "Change is now constant in our industries: new technology, shifting world markets, climate change impacts. The Taskforce understands that many Victorians and regional communities rely on and want healthy forests, viable industries and secure jobs."

Amelia Young, Campaigns Manager with The Wilderness Society, says, "Challenges facing the industry, coupled with the vulnerability of wildlife to extinction, highlights the urgency of reaching durable solutions for Victoria's forests and forest-dependent industries, workers and wildlife. The Statement of Intent shows our commitment to reaching common ground on a durable, long-term set of recommendations and proposals to government."

The Statement of Intent identifies agreed opportunities for change relating to parks and reserves, fibre and wood supply security, and jobs and regional employment.

While the scope and scale is yet to be determined, the Taskforce agrees that:

- biodiversity values and threatened species need to be appropriately protected across the forest landscape, including by establishing new parks and reserves
- a secure future wood supply from a mix of sources best supports investment and jobs in the industry, and that the establishment of new plantations and agroforestry are crucial elements to growing future wood supply
- methods for measuring carbon are required for accounting for carbon abatement in native forests and plantations
- forest landscapes and forest products industries support direct and indirect employment and businesses which are vital to local and regional communities, that opportunities exist for growth, and where employment changes arise, an orderly and just transition for workers is required
- the existing regulation requires transformation and is fundamental to ensuring certainty for industry, conservation outcomes and jobs.

As such, the Taskforce is working on a range of processes to inform final recommendations, including:

- A Future Industry Plan
- A Future Conservation and Parks System Plan
- An initial Victorian Environment Assessment Council assessment of forest conservation values
- An initial Victorian Environment Assessment Council investigation into the viability of fibre and wood supply
- Methods for valuing carbon in plantations and in native forests
- A regulatory review and reform process.

The members of the Forest Industry Taskforce are Jane Calvert – CFMEU; Tim Johnston – Victorian Association of Forest Industries (VAFI); Amelia Young – The Wilderness Society; Jess Abrahams – Australian Conservation Foundation; Vince Hurley – Australian Sustainable Hardwoods; Julian Mathers/Peter Williams – Australian Paper; John McConachy – representing harvest and haulage contractors; Alex Millar/Travis Wacey/Anthony Pavey – CFMEU; Sarah Rees – MyEnvironment; Matt Ruchel – Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA).