



For Immediate Release

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## MEDIA RELEASE

### **Victorian sawmillers announce bold plan to secure the future of besieged timber industry**

- Group of six sawmillers announce plan to transition industry
- Seeks to remove Victoria's reliance on native forests and more
- And immediately abolish clear-fell logging of native forest coups larger than 20ha

A group of Victorian sawmillers have released a bold plan to remove Victoria's reliance on native forests by transitioning to plantation supply by 2040.

Frustrated by State Government stalling and inaction, a group of six sawmillers, known as the 'G6', today released an Eight Point Plan to assist the \$7.3 billion industry's transition to a more secure and sustainable future.

The Plan, outlined in an Open Letter to the Premier of Victoria, also seeks to immediately abolish clear-fell logging of native forest coups larger than 20 hectares.

A spokesperson for the group said the Government must seriously consider an industry-bridging plan or risk condemning regional sawmills to extinction.

"We are not going to stand by while the Government sleepwalks into the destruction of sustainable timber industry jobs, viable regional businesses and the hollowing-out of the communities that depend on it," the spokesperson said.

"To do this we need a willing and committed government that fully supports a sound forest policy that 'bridges the gap' between where we are today and where we need to be.

"We are calling on the Andrews Government to implement this Plan for the sake of jobs, communities and families.

"This Plan comes from people who live in, work in and care about our forests.

"The G6's plan is to remove Victoria's reliance on native forests by transitioning to plantation supply by 2040, and immediately abolish clear-fell logging of native forest coups larger than 20 hectares.

"The uncertainty needs to stop. Without the Timber Release Plan (TRP), harvesting and haulage contractors won't be able to start work. This will not only impact contractors and their families but the flow-on effect will mean our mills won't be adequately resourced and we won't be able to keep our businesses operating," the spokesperson said.

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## **Victorian sawmillers announce bold plan (cont.)**

The G6's plan calls on the Andrews Government to immediately:

- 1. Invest in the modernisation of mills to enable the better use of available resources and minimise waste**
- 2. Invest in State-owned plantations**
- 3. Revegetate unproductive land in public and private hands**
- 4. Legislate Timber Supply Agreements (TSAs) to ensure immediate and long-term investment, certainty and sustainability in the sector**
- 5. Provide assistance packages for worker re-skilling and relocation**
- 6. Provide exit packages for businesses handing back TSAs and contractors**
- 7. Adopt Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) standards to improve the industry's social license to operate, including putting a ban on the export of unprocessed saw-logs**
- 8. Safeguard communities from bushfires by maintaining, not weakening, the capacity and capability of timber industry people, equipment and programs in high-risk areas**

"As a principle we need to be doing 'more with less' as timber supply continues to contract in this State.

"We need urgent action to make Victoria the 'Plantation State' of Australia," the spokesperson added.

"This means getting 'fair dinkum' about plantation policies and establishing and expanding plantations as the primary source of timber supply. This means urgently getting on with 'on-the-ground' action by getting seedlings into the ground.

"It also means reducing the industry's dependence on native supplies. We need surety from the government that funds will be available to the industry so that we can invest in new equipment to accommodate for both native and plantation supplies.

"We are asking the Andrews Government to offer exit packages for businesses that choose to hand back their TSAs and provide assistance for contractors that may be impacted by business exits.

"And, we implore the government to move away from a future looking more and more like the 'Heyfield model', where jobs, resources and the milling of timber are concentrated in one area.

"The timber industry must be 'decentralised' to support and attract jobs across this great State," the spokesperson concluded.

The Plan to transition Victoria's timber industry to a sustainable future comes after a petition of more than 2,000 signatures was tabled in Parliament on Tuesday 7 August.

Signatories to the petition called on the Andrews Government to safeguard jobs in more than 20 regional communities. The Andrews Government is yet to respond.

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### **Victorian sawmillers announce bold plan (cont.)**

The Victorian timber industry employs around 20,000 people in Victoria in both regional and metropolitan businesses.

Approximately 40,000-50,000 additional jobs are supported by the industry through flow-on economic activity, including almost 10,000 people who make timber furniture, cabinetry and who are employed in joinery manufacture.

Townships which have an economic interest in the long-term viability of Victoria's timber industry include: Benalla, Murrindindi, Yea, Yarra Glen, Healesville, Noojee, Neerim, Moe, Pakenham, Drouin, Narbethong, Mt Evelyn, Wesburn, Warburton, Bruthen, Lakes Entrance, Bairnsdale, Alexandra, Sarsfield and Shepparton.

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**For more information please contact:**

Richard Amos, M: 0418 344 978

Nicolette Baxter, M: 0438 143 342