

# Media Release

The Hon Daniel Andrews MP  
Premier



Tuesday, 23 May 2023

## DELIVERING CERTAINTY FOR TIMBER WORKERS

The Victorian Government is stepping in to deliver certainty for timber workers, sawmill operators and their communities, with an expanded transition support package as part of the *Victorian Budget 2023/24*.

This package removes the uncertainty that has been caused by ongoing court and litigation process and increasingly severe bushfires, with an additional \$200 million in support for workers and their families to transition away from native timber logging earlier than planned – by 1 January 2024.

This brings the Government's total support for the forestry transition to more than \$875 million, including existing worker support services and investments to support the transition to plantation timber.

In 2019, the Government moved to secure a long-term and sustainable future for Victoria's forestry industry – and for the Victorian workers and communities who rely on it.

We put forward a plan to support the sector as it transitioned, backing long-term, sustainable jobs and giving local workers confidence about their future.

But since then, native forestry has been hit with increasingly severe bushfires, prolonged legal action and court decisions. There are no alternative timber supply sources available domestically or internationally which can offset the current disruptions to supply to Victorian mills and there are no options for regulatory reform which can prevent further legal injunctions continuing to disrupt native timber harvesting operations.

All of that has drastically cut the timber supply we can actually use. And that's left workers in complete limbo.

Hundreds of workers, across Victoria, haven't been able to work a day in recent months. They've got no certainty over their jobs. They don't even know when they'll be able to get back to work.

We have been right there with impacted communities, providing support payments to keep workers in their jobs and paid – but the uncertainty has taken a toll on communities, families and mental health.

It simply cannot continue.

Native timber harvesting in state forests will end in 2024 – with existing supports being brought forward and scaled up – which will mean every single timber worker will be directly supported to find a new job.

Forest contractor workers will be secured with contracts for forest management works, enabling them to continue to work in the forests they know so well and contribute to bushfire risk reduction.

The Government's Free TAFE program will retrain workers, helping them get jobs in growing regional industries like construction, agriculture, transport, and manufacturing through TAFE Gippsland and other key TAFE campuses in timber communities. This will be supported by up to \$8,000 in retraining vouchers for courses inside and outside the TAFE Network.

We'll continue to back workers and their families with financial and mental health support, by connecting them to specialist mental health service providers in their local area and covering out-of-pocket costs. Industry support payments will also continue as needed until the transition is finalised.

We're being upfront with the industry – and continuing to deliver a managed transition to support every worker and every business. Because we'll never leave them to go it alone.

Timber communities have worked with us to identify the jobs and growth sectors that will drive a sustainable future in their local economies. We'll continue to invest in these opportunities to support and create jobs through the Community Development Fund.

We'll continue the discussions we've been having with Opal to support their transition to plantation supply and recycled products. The dedicated Opal Worker Support Service will support every impacted worker at Maryvale.

All other native timber mills will be eligible for a voluntary transition package, whether they choose to stay in timber processing or switch to other industry sectors. Mills that stay will be able to access investment support through the Timber Innovation Fund.

The Government is also providing support to local businesses reliant on Victorian hardwood supply to manage the transition process. The Supply Chain Resilience package will support business continuity and provide assistance to help manufacturing and other businesses make the transition to future opportunities.

As part of the transition, the Government will be required to deliver a program of land management works to manage the 1.8 million hectares of public land currently subject to the timber harvesting allocation order. This will see us deliver the largest expansion to our public forests in our state's history.

The Government will establish an advisory panel to consider and make recommendations to Government on the areas of our forests that qualify for protection as National Parks, the areas of our forests that would be suitable for recreation opportunities - including camping, hunting, hiking, mountain biking and four-wheel driving - and opportunities for management of public land by Traditional Owners.

#### **Quotes attributable to Premier Daniel Andrews**

*"It's not good enough for us to just cross our fingers and hope for the best. We need a plan to support workers, their families and support local jobs."*

*"That's why we're stepping up to give these workers – and their communities, businesses, and partners along the supply chain – the certainty they deserve."*

#### **Quotes attributable to Minister for Agriculture Gayle Tierney**

*"Our focus is on workers and their families. We absolutely do not take this lightly, but the uncertainty cannot continue."*

*"We will back local communities with the financial support, secure jobs and training, and one-on-one case management they need."*

#### **Quote attributable to Minister for Regional Development Harriet Shing**

*"We will support workers, their families and their businesses as we navigate through this earlier exit from the industry and help people and communities to plan for the future."*

#### **Quote attributable to Minister for Environment Ingrid Stitt**

*"Our support package will provide a more secure future for every impacted worker and their families. This transition will see the largest expansion to our public forests in our state's history - further protecting our precious biodiversity and endangered species."*

#### **Quote attributable to Member for Eastern Victoria Tom McIntosh**

*"This support package will make sure forestry workers and their families in Gippsland are supported to establish their future."*