

# ***MEDIA RELEASE***



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14 September 2010

## **Victorian Government, Wilderness Society Must Come Clean on Timber Industry Intentions**

National rural community organisation Timber Communities Australia believes the State Government needs to immediately quash fears in rural communities by ruling out changes to current timber harvesting arrangements in Victoria's native forests.

TCA's spokesperson Trevor Brown believes the agenda of The Wilderness Society has been exposed in recent days since Gunns Limited chief executive, Greg L'Strange, addressed an industry conference in Melbourne detailing his company's plans to source timber from plantations in the future.

"Mr L'Strange was talking about the situation his company faces in Tasmania and the emotional toll the years of conflict with anti-timber activists has taken on his employees and contractors. While he indicated the company would transition to plantations as its source of timber it was clear he was talking only of his own company's situation, not that of the entire industry or the rest of Australia" Mr Brown said.

"Now, The Wilderness Society (TWS) is pushing to get the rest of the industry to follow suit, which is just rubbish as Victoria does not have plantation hardwood suitable for sawlogs. TWS is now campaigning for changes in the plantation sector that it originally claimed to support. Its website is quite upfront about this fact.

"For an organisation with a budget in excess of \$15 million a year, The Wilderness Society either does not use its funds well or deliberately hides the facts. If its preference is for development of single species plantations in preference to the biodiversity of a working forest then it should say so. If not, it should state what changes it wants with the plantation industry. If it suggests that we should have multiple species plantations, then we already have them – they are the native forests that have been environmentally managed and harvested for more than a century" he added.

TCA recently commissioned a report highlighting how the most radical changes to Victoria's timber industry had been made under Labor-led state governments in the past three decades and how those changes mostly affected blue-collar workers and communities reliant on a prosperous timber industry.

"Labor's history in managing our native timber milling industry since John Cain became Premier in 1982 suggests that more than 73 mills have closed resulting in the loss of at least 2,400 jobs, mainly from rural communities.

"We all know that there are back-room preference discussions taking place right now between the Government and so-called environmental groups. It is all in the name of gaining preferences from the Greens for the Victorian elections" Brown stated.

"I've received phone calls this week from a bushfire-affected community in fear of its saw mill, its largest employer, closing. The State Government must publicly rule out any further reductions to our native hardwood industry and stand by its own Timber Industry Strategy that it released last December in order to allay fears of our blue-collar communities".

**ENDS**

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