

Timber Communities Gain from New Strategy

The timber industries social and community organisation Timber Communities Australia has welcomed the Victorian Government's new Timber Industry Strategy as a win for small rural towns and timber communities.

The Strategy, launched at Heyfield on Friday 19 December by Agriculture Minister Joe Helper, replaces the previous document released in 1986. The document recognises Victoria's timber industries have undergone vast changes in the past couple of decades and provides greater surety for industry over the next two decades.

TCA Regional coordinator Trevor Brown believes the Strategy is largely positive for the industry and will benefit smaller communities. "Treating timber plantations like any other farm crop will remove a lot of frustration and the need for planning permits from local councils, so this will provide opportunities to reduce Australia's \$1.9 billion timber trade deficit" said Mr Brown.

Changed reporting arrangements for VicForests means it will report directly to the Minister for Agriculture for day to day operations and will be allowed to enter Timber Sales Agreements for up to 20 years. "Those two initiatives alone will give the industry more confidence and free-up VicForests operationally" Brown added.

"From a community perspective, TCA sees the allowance of timber residue and off cuts for use as biomass fuel for electricity generation as a major win for the industry and small communities. The Eden biomass power proposal is well advanced and Philp Davis (MLC for Eastern Victoria) recently championed biomass power for timber communities such as Orbost. It adds value to timber production and replaces incinerated waste with clean, renewable energy. It will provide a jobs boost and career options in isolated timber communities".

Mr Brown's main concern with the Strategy surrounds continual Government support for the timber industry. "While the Timber Industry Strategy provides a sound blueprint for the next twenty years, none of the priority actions are funded or legislated. Timber Communities Australia, along with all other industry bodies, will be working hard over coming years to ensure the Victorian Government stands by its commitments and never again uses the timber industry as a political football. The irony of losing a further 45,000 hectares of productive East Gippsland forest to the national parks system, along with much of the river red gum forests in Northern Victoria, in the same month as the new TIS has been released has not been lost on any of our members or the industry in general".

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