



Media Release

Our Foresters No Future (081205)

The National President of the Institute of Foresters of Australia, Dr Peter Volker, has proclaimed the Victorian Government's glossy "Our Forests Our Future" policy is in tatters after revelations that the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) will cut 22% of the Land Stewardship and Biodiversity Branch.

"The 'Our Forests Our Future' policy was released three years ago with much fanfare and plenty of glossy booklets. However in less time than it takes for a mighty Mountain Ash to grow from a seed to a small sapling the Victorian Government has decided get rid of the professional staff responsible for implementation of such a policy," he said.

He also added, "Why is the Victoria State of the Forests Report three years overdue? The data in the report dates back even further, so even if the report was released tomorrow it would be at least five years out of date." Dr Volker believes that this is because the professional forestry staff in DSE are already overworked and lack adequate resources to complete the report. "How can further reductions in the size of the workforce be justified," he said.

In addition Dr Volker says that professional foresters in Victoria hold grave concerns for fire management capabilities in Victoria's peak forest management agency. "IFA members in Victoria tell me that staff in the Department have been told to look for other jobs if the opportunity arises as the structure of the Land Stewardship and Biodiversity Branch will be changed. This has resulted in many staff with specialist fire fighting expertise leaving the Branch."

The Institute of Foresters is concerned with the constant attacks by politicians on forestry as a legitimate land management option and the lack of regard for the expertise of professionally trained foresters, many of whom have as much training as our most highly qualified medical professionals. Dr Volker likens the cuts to the LSB soon after the release of the 'Our Forests Our Future' policy as similar to completely refurbishing a hospital and then sacking all the medical staff.

"It's about time that Governments around Australia woke up to the fact that if they continue on the path of restricting access to native forests for timber supply and consequently reducing opportunities for professional forest management, demand for forest products will not diminish. Consumers will continue to purchase forest products, however much more of these will be sourced from overseas, putting pressure on forests in countries that can ill afford it. This is the ultimate in exploitation of vulnerable communities in poor countries by a first world country such as Australia, which should know better," he said.

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The Institute of Foresters of Australia Inc. is a professional body with 1240 members engaged in all branches of forest management and conservation in Australia. The Institute is strongly committed to the principles of sustainable forest management and the processes and practices which translate these principles into outcomes.

The membership represents all segments of the forestry profession, including public and private practitioners engaged in many aspects of forestry, nature conservation, resource and land management, research, administration and education.

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