



23 October 2023

To the Hon. Jacinta Allen MP  
Premier of Victoria  
By email: [jacinta.allan@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:jacinta.allan@parliament.vic.gov.au)

To the Hon. Jacinta Allen MP,

**RE: Forestry in Victoria**

We recently noted the letter to you and Treasurer Tim Pallas MP from 60 Environmental NGOs calling for the winding up of VicForests. We were appalled by the unnecessary, vitriolic and factually incorrect content of that letter and felt compelled to write.

Forestry Australia is a professional association with over 1,200 members across Australia and overseas. Our members have both high levels of scientific expertise and extensive operational experience in managing forests. They operate across all aspects of forest, fire and land management and tree growing throughout Australia. While some members manage forest harvesting operations or work for private timber harvesting companies, many others are academics, researchers, and scientists working in government agencies responsible for conservation, forest fire management, and urban forest management. Our members also include forest consultants and private landowners. As scientists, we advocate for good science, practical and effective solutions, and holistic and balanced outcomes for our forests.

Some of our members are current or past employees of VicForests. These forestry professionals and scientists are among the most dedicated, passionate individuals – about managing forests, about conservation and about providing renewable, sustainable and responsibly-sourced timber for the Australian public. We vouch for the professional integrity of these people and condemn calls from organisations who suggest they should be excluded from future land and forest management initiatives. Such calls have been made without genuine engagement with the professional and scientific forestry community and clearly demonstrate a lack of understanding about the depth of skill, passion, knowledge and technical expertise held by these people.

The skillset of these forestry professionals includes intimate and invaluable place-based knowledge about the on-ground status our forests, and operational expertise in active and adaptive management options that are crucial for building climate resilience and mitigating wildfires in our forests. Such skillsets are in short supply and are lacking from within the current DEECA organisational structures.

The future of VicForests is certainly a decision that needs to be publicly announced as soon as possible. While it is uncertain, the misinformation and abuse towards VicForests and its contractors will only continue. The negative impacts of this on the mental health and wellbeing of those involved is being keenly felt and should not be underestimated. The



Government has a duty of care to these staff and contractors who are currently suffering, through no fault of their own.

For too long VicForests has been the scapegoat for Government inaction on proactive leadership for our forests. The current untenable situation of ongoing litigation, misinformation in the public sphere and vitriolic attacks has been brought about by Government policies and decision-making (or lack thereof). It is time to set things right, lead positive dialogue regarding future forest management and recognise the immense positive contributions of those professional foresters and scientists who have worked in the native timber industry, and dedicated their careers to evidence-based care for our forests. This care includes significant, and under-acknowledged, contributions to furthering our understanding of forest ecology and forest fire management.

We would greatly welcome the opportunity to work with the Government on initiatives to ensure our forests are healthy and resilient into the future, for the benefit of all. We invite your Government to meet with us to progress this positive, future-focussed discussion.

For your information, we have attached current Forestry Australia Position Statements that address key topic areas relevant to future forest management.

Please feel free to contact us via Dr. Michelle Freeman (details below).

We look forward to further dialogue on the future of our forests.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michelle Freeman'.

Dr. Michelle Freeman  
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Prof. Rod Keenan  
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cc: The Hon. Ros Spence MP  
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