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MEDIA RELEASE

Last fire salvage wood to mill no cause for celebration for forest contracting businesses.

A few weeks ago, the forest industry celebrated the last load of fire salvaged wood hauled to a mill in the South West Slopes. For forest contracting businesses and their workers, this symbolised a bleak future, one with no work, job losses and debt in the millions.

Australian Forest Contractors Association (AFCA), General Manager Ms Stacey Gardiner said, "Forest contracting businesses and their employees have been working tirelessly to harvest and haul salvage fire impacted wood for over 12 months, under challenging conditions and long hours. Many of them were also directly affected by the bushfires and were part of the firefighting efforts".

"AFCA is calling on governments to act now. These businesses need urgent support and assistance to service their business debts, with equipment that no longer has a use or can be sold and support for their workers," she added.

The forest industry and governments have known this resource cliff has been coming since the bushfires. While there has been support and grants made available to the forest industry to support bushfire recovery, very little to none of this has reached forest contracting businesses.

Forest contracting businesses face a significant reduction in contract quotas in plantation resource in the South West Slopes region. The Forestry Corporation of New South Wales has cancelled contracts with forest contracting businesses. New contracts were recently awarded based on reduced volumes which have left many businesses with reduced or no future work and significant exposure with large debts unable to be paid.

Ms Gardiner said, "The resource reduction is expected to result in over 50 direct forest contracting workers being laid off by year-end. This includes those that worked tirelessly to harvest and haul the salvaged wood to the mills. The indirect impact on the region, businesses and jobs will be significant," she concluded.

AFCA calls on governments who have historically supported regional areas and businesses with assistance packages* to support these hard-working small businesses and their workers who have dedicated over a year to bushfires and resource recovery and now risk losing their businesses, homes, and personal assets.

*eg. Blue Ridge Hardwoods Retrenched Workers scheme (\$10 million employee support package)

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