

FORESTRY TRANSITION PROGRAM

vic.gov.au/forestry

May 2023 Update

Overview

Native timber harvesting in Victoria's state forests will end by 1 January 2024 with existing supports being brought forward and scaled up.

We are continuing to support the transition of the native timber industry while protecting as many jobs as possible.

If you are unsure what support may be on offer to you, please call the Forestry Transition Team on 1800 318 182.

Applications for Sawmill Voluntary Transition Packages will open in July 2023, with the first payments expected in September 2023. This will be modelled on the Opt-out Scheme.

A boosted worker support package will include access to the Free TAFE program to help retrain workers to get jobs in growing regional industries.

Harvest and haulage workers will be offered alternative work in forest and land management, enabling them to continue to work in the forests they know so well and contribute to bushfire risk reduction.

A Supply Chain Resilience Package will support manufacturers of native timber products to make business decisions.

Long-term programs to support local economies to diversify into new and expanding industries are continuing, as is the assistance for timber businesses seeking to transition from reliance on native timber to plantation fibre.

Contacts

Directly impacted native timber workers and families should contact:

Worker Support Service 1800 177 001.

Native timber sawmill employers should contact:

Forestry Transition Team: 1800 318 182.

Native timber downstream impacted supply chain manufacturers should contact:

Business Victoria on 13 22 15 or business.vic.gov.au/timber-supply-chain

Opal Maryvale Mill workers and families should contact:

Opal Worker Support Service 1800 177 001.

Native timber workers, families and communities seeking jobs, skills and training support:

TAFE Gippsland Jobs and Skills Centre 1300 282 317.

Free mental health support is available for any native timber worker, business owner, contractor or family member:

Call 000 for immediate assistance or 1800 318 182 for advice on services in your area.

Frequently Asked Questions

I'm unsure what support is on offer to me?

Please visit vic.gov.au/forestry or call the Forestry Transition Team on 1800 318 182.

What is new?

The boosted package of support includes:

- extended payments to keep workers retained and paid until the transition is finalised
- voluntary transition packages for native timber sawmills (for mills that have not already received an opt-out payment)
- a worker support package including access to the Free TAFE program
- a forest and land management package to engage all forest contractor crews
- a Supply Chain Resilience Package for manufacturers of native timber products.

What is continuing?

Training, employment and mental health support to:

- native timber workers
- supply chain workers and their families.

Worker Support Payments of up to \$120,000 will be made to any eligible worker who is made redundant because of the end of native timber harvesting.

Long-term programs to support local economies to diversify into new and expanding industries are continuing through Local Development Strategies, as is the assistance for timber businesses seeking to transition from native timber to plantation fibre.

Voluntary transition packages for mills – what are they and who's eligible?

Every native timber mill will be eligible for a transition package, whether they choose to stay in the industry or not. These new packages will be similar to the earlier Opt-out Scheme. Mills that have already received an opt-out package are ineligible.

To receive a package, mills must relinquish supply contracts with VicForests. Some mills getting a package may choose to stay in timber processing and source alternative supply.

Will harvest and haulage workers continue to receive stand-down payments?

Anyone currently receiving payments from VicForests will continue to do so. This includes harvest and haulage contractors getting stand-down payments for any period of inactivity within their contracted period.

What sort of work will be available to harvest and haulage workers?

Harvest and haulage contractors will be engaged in the delivery of strategic fuel breaks, ongoing recovery works on public land and the treatment of hazardous trees in the preparation of planned burns and along critical firefighting roads and tracks.

Will contractors who don't secure ongoing fire management work get an exit payment?

All harvest and haulage contractors will continue to be engaged under Government contracts until they expire. If an employee of a contractor business is made redundant as a result of inactivity, they will be eligible for worker support services and payments.

What is available to workers right now?

ForestWorks is already providing services to impacted workers and families, as well as people working in downstream supply chains.

ForestWorks support will be delivered through 1:1 case management including for:

- training support including free training
- recognition of prior learning and current competencies to formalise skills acquired
- employment support including matching workers to jobs in their local area
- health and wellbeing support
- referrals to other support agencies.

When can worker support payments and services be accessed?

Sawmill and forest contractor workers whose job status is impacted by the transition will be offered case management, retraining and apply for Worker Support Payment assessment. Forestry workers in financial stress are encouraged to contact the Forest Transition Team to discuss eligibility.

Will the innovation and community funding continue to be available?

The Local Development Strategy program continues. Early actions to boost local economies identified in the Local Development Strategies will be supported by the Community Development Fund, which is available now.

Timber Innovation Grants are available to mills planning to carry on operations.

The Transition Fund will become available later in 2023. It will support actions to grow businesses and generate economic activity that will create or retain jobs in towns and communities affected by the transition away from native timber harvesting.