

DEECA forest and fire management works for harvest and haulage contractors



From the CFO - Welcome

Victoria is one of the most bushfire-prone areas in the world.

I would like to invite you to join our team as we try to minimise bushfire risk across public land and keep communities safe.

Many of you have already worked alongside us throughout fire, flood and storm or helped us with our Business as Usual operations. Thank you.

I know you have been looking for certainty – and we are pleased to offer five-year contracts from 1 July 2024 to help give you this.

This document outlines the process and pathways available to you to transfer to DEECA works or exit the industry. It also details the seasonal works packages that will support contractors to have consistent work until the contracts transfer or expire on 1 July 2024.

You will bring valuable skills, knowledge and equipment to help us manage our forests and prepare for and respond to fires.

I know this is a time of considerable upheaval but please consider joining us.

I look forward to meeting you soon.



Chris Hardman
Chief Fire Officer
Bushfire and Forest Services
DEECA

About you

We need people who can:

- operate in steep and difficult terrain
- handle heavy debris
- be bushfire ready and able to respond

and carry out:

- hazardous tree removal
- mechanical fuel treatments, including construction, renewal and maintenance of fuel breaks
- stabilisation, rehabilitation and recovery operations
- regrowth and seed management activities
- preparation for planned burning activities and,
- transport heavy machinery between job sites.

Forest and fire management works

In the 2023–24 financial year, harvest and haulage contractors who continue to undertake forest and fire management work will do so through a series of 'seasonal works packages' (Spring, Summer and Autumn) or receive stand down payments via their current VicForests contracts.

From 1 July 2024, contracts will be transferred to DEECA with work similar to works to that available through the seasonal works packages. Current contractors are invited to submit Expressions of Interest if they are interested in entering these agreements with DEECA.

A Harvest and Haulage Support Package is available to support contractors to transfer to DEECA agreements.

Transition timeline



What work is available now?

Works until 30 June 2024

DEECA will continue to engage contractors through VicForests until 30 June 2024.

They will work under the direction of Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic).

This will be done through seasonal works packages (Spring, Summer and Autumn) to reduce bushfire risk and will help firefighters respond safely and quickly to any future bushfires in our forests.

Packages of work are additional to that currently offered to wider contractors on DEECA's Statewide External Plant Panel.

Spring works (until 30 November 2023)

The spring works focus on strategic fuel breaks and storm debris removal. The works include:

- Strategic fuel breaks in the east of the state (DEECA Port Phillip, Hume and Gippsland Regions),
- Roadside removal of storm debris in the Wombat State Forest and Dandenong Ranges National Park.

More parcels of work will be available as projects are planned and approved.

The works will begin as soon as the weather conditions are suitable.

Summer works (1 December to 29 February 2024)

Summer package works are still being planned but will include road works and hazardous tree treatment in Gippsland Region.

Contractors will help DEECA:

- Treat hazardous trees along the strategic fire access roads in DEECA's Hume, Gippsland and Port Phillip
- Begin harvest of pine plantation in the Delatite Arm Forest Reserve.

Autumn works (1 March to 30 June 2024)

Autumn package works are still being planned but will be similar to spring and summer package works.

Emergency deployment

DEECA's Statewide External Plant Panel is used to identify and deploy suitable contractors to fire response (suppression) work.

Depending on where fires occur and what resources are required, contractors who have also registered for DEECA's Statewide External Plant Panel may be asked to deploy to a fire event.

Contractors can apply to join the Panel through the External Plant Web Portal <https://epwp.ffm.vic.gov.au/epwp/>

It is important you submit your Statewide External Plant Panel application as soon as possible to allow it to be assessed and a Panel contract issued.

Personnel will need to complete mandatory online training before they can be deployed to a fire event. Plant will also be inspected to ensure it meets mandatory guarding and equipment standards for fire response.

How do I apply for the seasonal work packages?

Until 30 June 2024 inclusive, forest contractors will undertake work for DEECA as subcontractors, with VicForests acting as a head contractor for the planning, allocation and delivery of the works.

This means VicForests will continue to be the primary point of contact for contractors, for the programming and allocation of works to 30 June 2024, payments and other contractual matters. It is business as usual in that respect.

What work is available from July 2024?

Forest and Fire Management Services Agreements – 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2029

Five-year agreements to carry out forest and fire management works are available for VicForests harvest contractors.

The DEECA Forest and Fire Management Services Agreements provide certainty of work and income for harvest contractors, their workers, families and communities from 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2029.

VicForests harvest contractors are being invited to express interest in transferring their existing harvest contracts from VicForests to DEECA by Friday, 15 December, 2023.

Only harvest contracts will be transferred to DEECA – be they harvest-only or combined harvest and haulage businesses.

As part of this change they are also being asked to:

- Extend the term of their harvest contract to five years, and
- Change the harvest contract terms to deliver forest and fire management services for DEECA.

Contractors will enter into an agreement with the Secretary to the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action¹ when transferring their contracts.

The level of work provided through the Forest and Fire Management Services Agreements will make sure businesses are able to maintain their plant.

What parts of the contract will be negotiated to change?

Key parts of the existing contracts that will be negotiated to change include:

- payment structure including mandating a minimum number of machine hours
- mandatory machines
- number of machine operators
- how services will be requested and ordered and the compensation that will be paid
- add-on payments to reflect working outside of the home area.

What works would I be doing?

Works are similar to the 2023-24 spring, summer and autumn packages.

Works under the direction of FFMVic after 1 July 2024 will include:

- construction of 6000km of strategic fuel breaks between now and 2030
- maintenance and upgrading of the strategic road network
- treatment of hazardous trees, especially in heavily-forested areas of Gippsland, Hume and Port Phillip Regions
- other fuel management activities, including supporting planned burns
- tree felling or cutting
- extraction and preparation for transport (logs and other forest residues)
- regeneration activities, including mechanical disturbance and site preparation
- construction, maintenance and improvement of roads and tracks
- contribute to bushfire response and recovery
- other services as requested.

A Planning and Approvals Framework ensures works comply with relevant legislation and regulations.

What equipment will I need?

Contractors will need three pieces of essential and compliant equipment:

- bulldozer capable of extracting log products from steep slopes and constructing roads and fire breaks,
- excavator with attachment for debarking, sorting, stacking and loading, and
- mechanised falling equipment (harvester).

1. This being the body corporate established by Part 2 of the *Conservation, Forests and Land Act 1987* (Vic).

Deployment to emergencies

Contractors who will have a Forest and Fire Management Services Agreement will be expected to join DEECA's Statewide External Plant Panel to contribute to bushfire response and recovery.

Contractors who do not have a Forest and Fire Management Services Agreement and who are registered on DEECA's Statewide External Plant Panel may be asked to deploy to a fire event depending on where fires occur and what resources are required.

Contractors can apply to join the Panel through the External Plant Web Portal <https://epwp.ffm.vic.gov.au/epwp/>

It is important you submit your Statewide External Plant Panel application as soon as possible to allow it to be assessed and a Panel contract issued.

Personnel will need to complete mandatory online training before they can be deployed to a fire event. Plant will also be inspected to ensure it meets mandatory guarding and equipment standards for fire response.

How do I apply?

VicForests harvest and harvest-and-haulage contractors will receive an email with a link to the Buying for Victoria website where contractors can identify their Expression of Interest (EOI) to enter negotiations to transfer their contracts to the DEECA Secretary.

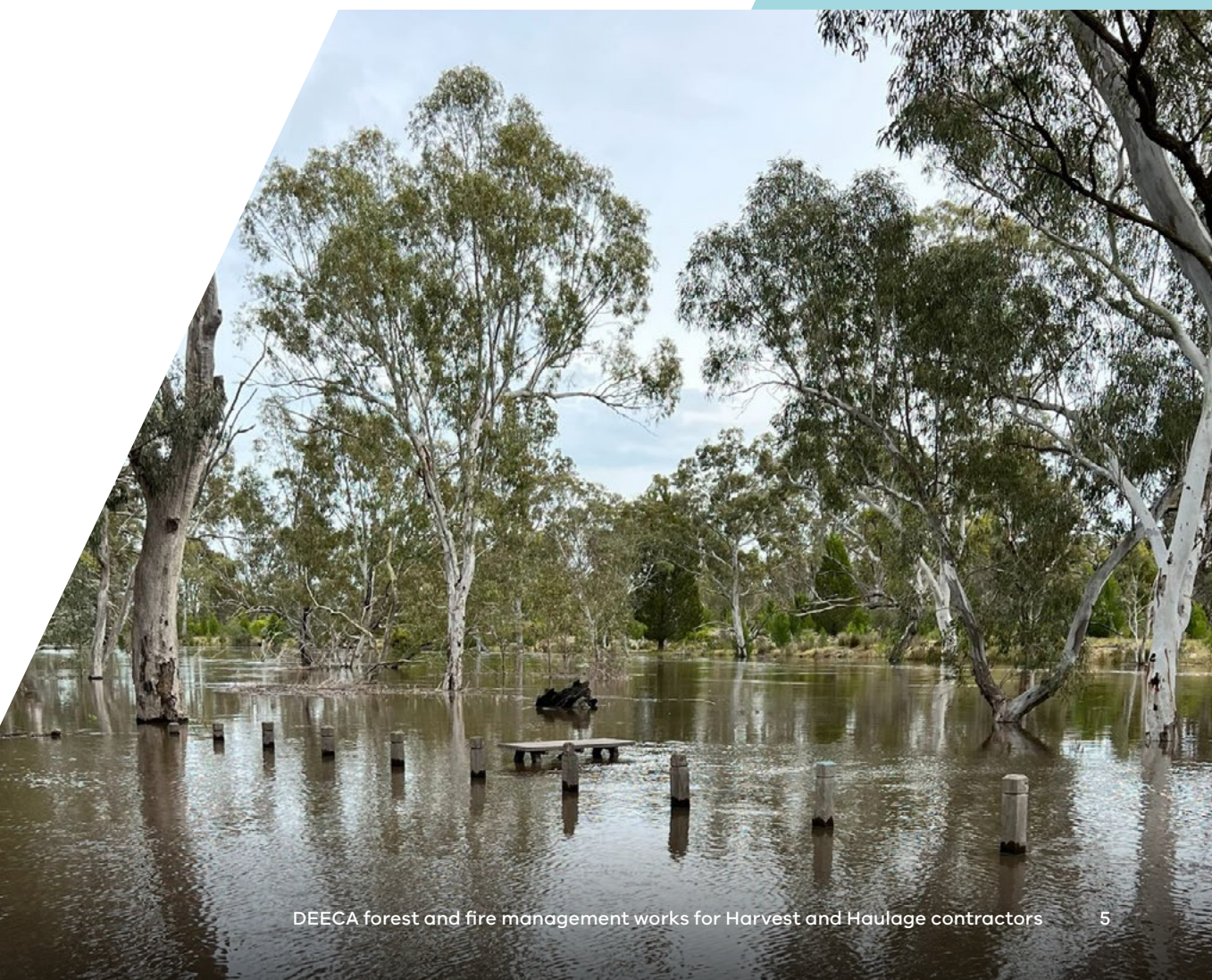
Expressions of Interest close on Friday 15 December 2023. The Expressions of Interest do not lock contractors into any agreements. They will be the starting point of negotiations about transferring contracts.

Expressions of Interest must be submitted through the Buying for Victoria website <https://www.tenders.vic.gov.au/>

More details are available in:

- DEECA Secretary Forest and Fire Management Services Agreement: Negotiation Principles Fact Sheet
- Forest and Fire Management Services Agreement: Expression of Interest Fact Sheet

All fact sheets, a pathway explainer and additional Q&As are also available at: <https://www.deeca.vic.gov.au/forestry/support/harvest-and-haulage-business-support>



What support is available to help me transition?

Harvest and Haulage Support Package

Options are available for VicForests Harvest and Haulage contractors who do not wish to transfer their contract to DEECA.

A Harvest and Haulage Support Package is available to support the transition to new contracts or support businesses exits.

The package includes compensation for loss of income, compensation for plant and equipment that is no longer needed and a payment to reimburse employee statutory redundancy payments.

Contractors can access different components of the package depending on their circumstances.

What are my options and how do I apply?

Harvest and Haulage contractors have three pathways available to them:

Pathway 1 - Transfer harvest contracts to DEECA agreements (harvest contracts only):

1. Keep doing DEECA forest and fire management works through seasonal packages on current VicForests contracts until 30 June 2024 when your harvest contract is transferred to DEECA.
2. Apply for compensation through the Harvest and Haulage Support Package for:
 - loss of income for haulage contracts and any harvest contracts not transferred
 - plant and equipment that is no longer needed
 - reimbursement for any statutory employee redundancy payments
3. From 1 July 2024 transfer to DEECA to provide forest and fire management harvest services with guaranteed hours and machine hourly rate.

Businesses with more than one harvest contract can:

- transfer all harvest contracts to the Forest and Fire Management Services Agreements (providing proof they can service all agreements at the same time. For example, if a contractor currently has two VicForests contracts, they will need at two sets of mandatory machines and six staff in total)
- transfer one contract and receive compensation for the other
- transfer one contract and keep doing DEECA forest and fire management works on current VicForests contracts until the other contract ends.



Pathway 2 - Immediate exit with support (harvest and haulage contracts):

1. Apply for Harvest and Haulage Support Package.
2. Keep doing DEECA forest and fire management works through seasonal works packages on current VicForests contracts until an agreed exit date.

Contractors who take up loss of income compensation do not have to close their business but cannot apply for the DEECA forest and fire management work contracts. They also have to surrender their harvest and/or haulage contract with VicForests. They remain eligible to apply to join the Statewide External Plant Panel.

Pathway 3 - Delayed exit (harvest and haulage contracts):

1. Keep doing DEECA forest and fire management works on current VicForests contracts until the contract ends.
2. Apply for plant and equipment compensation and reimbursement of statutory worker redundancy payments by 31 July 2024.

I have a haulage contract what are my options?

If you have a haulage contract you can:

- Apply for the Harvest and Haulage Support Package and terminate your VicForests contract before 30 June 2024.

OR

- Keep working on your current VicForests contract until it ends 30 June 2024.

You can also tender for works as part of the DEECA Statewide External Plant Panel to provide haulage services after your VicForests contract is terminated/ends.

How to apply

Forest and Fire Management Service Agreements

VicForests harvest and harvest-and-haulage businesses can submit an Expression of Interest through the Buying for Victoria website by Friday 15 December 2023 to have their current VicForests harvest contracts transferred directly to DEECA.

Harvest and Haulage Support Package

- The Department will write to eligible businesses inviting them to submit an application via vic.gov.au/forestry
- Contractors can access different components of the package depending on their circumstances.
- Applications for loss of income must be made by 5:00 pm Sunday 31 March 2024 .
- Applications for plant and equipment compensation and statutory redundancy reimbursement must be made by 5.00 pm Wednesday 31 July 2024.

More details are available in:

- DEECA Forest and Fire Management Services Agreements and Harvest and Haulage Support Package: Pathways explainer

The pathway explainer, fact sheets and additional Q&As are also available at: <https://www.deeca.vic.gov.au/forestry/support/harvest-and-haulage-business-support>

Support for Harvest and Haulage workers who are made redundant

Support for timber workers affected by the transition has been scaled up through the Victorian Forestry Worker Support Program.

Harvest and haulage workers who are made redundant can access the Victorian Forestry Worker Support Program through ForestWorks including:

- Worker Support Payments including redundancy top-up payments up to \$150,000, an over-45s payment and relocation payments.
- Worker Support Services
- 1:1 case management
- Recognition of prior learning
- Funded Training
- Employment support
- Health and wellbeing support
- Referrals to other support agencies.



We acknowledge and respect Victorian Traditional Owners as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, their unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it.

We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices.

DEECA is committed to genuinely partnering with Victorian Traditional Owners and Victoria's Aboriginal community to progress their aspirations.



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