



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

Wednesday 8 March 2006

Fire Salvage Brings New Life

VicForests and the Tambo Logging Company have worked with local communities in an attempt to minimise negative impacts resulting from timber salvage operations associated with the 2003 Alpine Fire.

"The harvested areas will result in a healthy regenerating Ash forest for future generations to enjoy," said Brad Fisher, Acting Regional Manager for VicForests, East Gippsland.

"Salvage operations to date cover less than 1% of the 440,000 hectares of State Forest burnt in the 2003 Alpine Fire," he explained.

"Locals may have noticed an intensity in the volume of log truck traffic. Industry has worked together cohesively to ensure that the community is not adversely impacted."

One outcome of this joint approach was the development of a Truck Driver Code of Conduct, which has recently been revised. A community flyer has also been distributed, informing locals of the salvage operation and increased truck movements.

"The Ash forests burnt in the Alpine fire represent the highest quality and most demanded timber resource in the State. Consequently, the Government recognised the value in harvesting some of the burnt area before significant deterioration in wood quality occurred," Mr Fisher said.

"So far, a total of 693,000 tonnes of forest produce has come from the Alpine Fire Area. Forty percent of this has been sold for high quality flooring and furniture, to pallet materials. The remaining 60% is being used for high quality paper products. The value of this forest produce to the regional economy is well over \$150 million."

"The areas being salvage harvested include sections of the East Gippsland, North East and Tambo Forest Management Areas. The claim that 1.8 million tonnes of timber has been removed from Tambo alone is incorrect," Mr Fisher said.

"Some areas within the fire boundary that were not completely killed have been harvested in preference to unburnt areas. This is because the wood quality of these areas will deteriorate over the coming years," he said.

A specific set of prescriptions were developed in accordance with the Code of Forest Practice for Timber Production for the salvage operations. Standard harvesting prescriptions were modified to include additional protection to streams, to ensure fire regrowth is protected and to maintain habitat trees on coupes.

The Environmental Protection Authority found a 92% compliance rate with the Code when the salvage operation was audited in 2004. The audit identified no major or severe environmental impacts as a result of non-compliances.

"The salvage operation has scaled back significantly since its commencement in 2003, however locals should expect to see some salvage operations continuing over the next 18 months," Mr Fisher said.

"We're mindful of the impacts of harvesting on local communities and continue to encourage anyone that requires additional information on the salvage operation or any other harvesting in the region to contact us directly."

Contact Brad Fisher at the VicForests Regional Office, Main Street Bairnsdale. Tel. 5152 0495.

ENDS

Media enquiries: Teena Cardillo, Manager, Communications Tel. 9608 9531 or 0400 545 593.