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VicForests looks to balance the debate

VicForests has hit back at claims made at last week's community meeting in Healesville, saying the native timber industry remains a valuable contributor to regional communities across Victoria.

Lachlan Spencer, VicForests Regional Manager, Central Highlands, was one of a number of VicForests' staff who attended the meeting to hear the community's concerns.

"VicForests is committed to sustainable timber harvesting in Victoria," Mr Spencer said.

"Timber harvesting is a valuable contributor to Central Highlands' communities and can continue to co-exist with other local industries such as tourism.

"Despite figures presented to the contrary, more than 500 full time staff are employed directly by the native timber industry in the Central Highlands region, which incorporates the Shire of Yarra Ranges.

"There are seven timber mills in the region, the biggest concentration of mills anywhere in Victoria, and State Government figures show that thousands of additional businesses also indirectly benefit from the industry.

Mr Spencer addressed claims that plantation timber can replace the need to harvest Victoria's native forest.

"Both native timber harvesting and plantations play a crucial role in the timber industry," he said.

"Victoria's native forests are harvested every 70 to 120 years, giving timber time to develop strength and visual properties.

"Plantations are harvested on a much shorter rotation for economic reasons. This timber has different properties to native hardwood and is generally used for different purposes.

"Timber harvested by VicForests is used to meet community demand for high quality furniture, flooring and other building materials, with by-products such as woodchips going to high quality writing and office paper.

"To put things in context, there are 7.8 million hectares of native forest in Victoria with less than 0.1% of this area is harvested each year.

"And, vitally, all the areas are regenerated following harvesting operations to ensure our forests survive for future generations."

Mr Spencer said no one from VicForests or any other organisation attached to the native timber industry was invited to present their views to the community meeting in Healesville.

"It's important that people are presented with balanced information so they can make up their own mind, rather than hearing only one perspective in relation to this issue," he said.

"VicForests continues to work with representatives from community groups to educate them about the forestry process and address their concerns. We recently appointed a local Community Relationship Manager assist us with this aim."

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