VicForests will back its contractors – CEO

VicForests' CEO Monique Dawson has committed to the continued support of 10 contractors and 90 workers who have been impacted by a force majeure notice because fires have meant timber supply cannot be guaranteed in the foreseeable future from East Gippsland.

Almost all (90% plus) of the affected contractors will remain fully employed, continuing important work on huge road clearing tasks and building firebreaks.

"We are focused on supporting our VicForests family including our contractors," said Ms Dawson. "They are integral to the social and economic well-being of many rural communities."

"We feel their predicament very deeply and are striving to help them in every way possible."

Force majeure is a legal and administrative step that VicForests is obliged to take if it knows that circumstances will prevent it meeting contractual obligations. New South Wales has taken a similar step.

Ms Dawson said the loss of timber resources had not yet been conclusively assessed.

The important task is to confirm not only how much forest was burnt, but the proportionate severity of the burning, and what was recoverable while protecting and promoting biodiversity and regeneration.

"This will take some weeks and possibly months to fully assess, and will involve aerial photography, using laser imaging data, and undertaking boots-on-the-ground assessments," said Ms Dawson.

VicForests is working to minimise the effects of the fires on its businesses and contractors and seeks to recommence normal operations as soon as possible.

"Our task is to complete this work with DEWLP as soon as possible," Ms Dawson said. "We want to provide on-going assurances to our contractors and staff and get anyone affected back to normal work."

"In the short term, this work will include building firebreaks and emergency road clearance.

"Over the mid-term it will include additional haulage through VicForests selling timber out of storage or negotiating opportunities more broadly across the industry."

ENDS