

# 'Big impacts': Almost half of areas in East Gippsland approved for logging burnt

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By Sumeyya Ilanbey

Almost half the areas approved for native logging in East Gippsland have been burnt, with Premier Daniel Andrews bracing for what he says will be a “significant” impact on the forestry industry.

The devastation wrought by the recent bushfires came just months after the Labor government announced native logging would be completely banned in 2030, and the cutting of old-growth forest would end immediately.



The fires are a fresh blow to the industry, still reeling from the government's decision to ban native logging by 2030. *Credit: Peter Hannam*

Mr Andrews said 40 per cent of coupes – areas approved for logging – as part of VicForests’ timber release plan in East Gippsland were destroyed by the fires that have so far burnt more than 1.4 million hectares across Victoria.

“So there’s going to be a significant impact ... there’s going to be big impacts on the forestry industry,” Mr Andrews said on Monday morning.

“We’ve said for a while now that the sustainability of this industry could be directly impacted by a significant fire event and that’s exactly what’s happened here.”

Mr Andrews did not say if the 2030 deadline would be extended, or indicate if additional coupes would be approved to make up for the areas that had been burnt.



A bushfire emergency is unfolding south-east of Melbourne.

"Well, let's work through that, I'm not here to make any forestry announcements. I'm just being honest with you, I think there's going to be significant impact."



Industry sources have said VicForests is advising timber mills there will not be ash or mixed species timber delivered from north-east Victoria, Tambo or East Gippsland for the next month, possibly until the end of February.

Some contractors have also been asked to supply harvesting equipment to help clear roads in fire-affected areas.

The decision to ban native forest logging has been welcomed by environmentalists, but has sparked a fierce backlash from the industry, the federal government and the powerful Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union.

In announcing its decision in November, the state government hailed the announcement as a win that would protect 90,000 hectares of native forest, and another 96,000 hectares that would be exempt from logging under a plan to protect the greater glider, an endangered tree-dwelling marsupial.

Mr Andrews at the time said an extra 50,000 hectares of plantation timber would be in the ground before the ban started in 2030.

But the industry's national lobby group, the Australian Forest Products Association, had earlier said large areas of plantation timber had also been burnt in Victoria, NSW and South Australia.

A VicForests spokesman said the organisation was still assessing the impact of the fires on the industry.

"Our current focus is on fully supporting the efforts to manage the bushfires, with our foresters, planners and harvest crews, involved in, and in many cases leading local fire response," the spokesman said.

"The response by VicForests' staff and contractors includes direct firefighting, firebreak works and managing emergency road clearance, which continues to be vital."