

Media release | **28/07/23**

Industry calls out government betrayal

FED up with broken promises, the forestry industry has called out the State Government for failing on numerous commitments to industry.

Those commitments include supplying businesses with the timber they have been contracted to receive, as per former Premier Mark McGowan's promise that current contracts would be honoured to the end of 2023.

Forest Industries Federation WA (FIFWA) Chief Executive Officer Adele Farina said an urgent meeting with Forestry Minister Jackie Jarvis had been requested to discuss the matter, however the Minister's office had advised that the request was still being considered and would not provide a timeframe as to when the Minister would provide a response.

"We have been told that the Forest Products Commission (FPC) is prioritising the harvesting of firewood over sawlog for the remainder of 2023, leaving businesses expecting their contracted sawlog high and dry," Ms Farina said.

"This is contrary to the government's commitment to our industry and supply commitments made by the FPC earlier this year. It is extremely disappointing, particularly for those businesses that have made decisions based on continuing operations until the end of 2023."

Ms Farina said it was unfortunately another broken promise from government since the decision to end native forestry from 2024.

She said it was both a breach of trust and contract, reflecting poorly on the FPC and government.

"Businesses accepted the government's modest payments, which fell well short of the pre-decision market value of the businesses, on the understanding that their current contracts would be honoured until the end of 2023, allowing them to transition to the new Forest Management Plan (FMP), if they wished to do so," she said.

"The decision by the FPC to no longer focus on sawlog production will starve our members of resource and make it impossible for sawmills to transition under the new FMP, forcing them to close before the end of 2023.

"This means those sawmills will not be there to facilitate the government's ecological thinning program and process timber from mine site clearing.

"The result will be another broken commitment by government, as they will no longer be able to supply local furniture manufacturers with sawn timber as promised."

Ms Farina denied that the redirection from sawlog to firewood was due to reduced contractor capacity, as contractors wanting to continue operating were willing to employ skilled workers from exiting contracting businesses in order to maintain capacity.

The redirection was an effort by government to stockpile firewood in the hopes of avoiding supply issues and public backlash next winter ahead of the State election, she said.

Ms Farina said this would likely drive the price of firewood up even further due to double handling, at a time when families are already struggling with cost-of-living pressures.

“We call on the government to honour its commitment to meet current contractual commitments through to the end of 2023.”

Media enquiries

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About FIFWA

Forest Industries Federation WA (FIFWA) has been representing the interests of the Western Australian timber industry since 1895. The industry is a key driver of economic activity and jobs in Western Australia, contributing \$1.4 billion to the WA economy and creating about 6000 jobs in WA, with more than 90% of those in regional areas. The industry employs careful and comprehensive management policies to ensure WA’s forests are sustainably managed. Less than 1% of the total forest area is harvested annually, with the area harvested then replanted. In 2001 WA became the first state to abolish harvesting old-growth forests.