

## Questions taken on notice and further information agreed to be supplied at the hearings.

Portfolio:	Agriculture
Witness:	Nathan Lambert
Committee Member:	Danny O'Brien
Page/s of transcript:	p.8

### Relevant text:

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Thank you, Chair. Good morning, Minister and officials. You will be not surprised I have a similar question but from a very different angle. With respect to the salvage logging, page 14 outlines the funding for timber salvage operations, but there is no indication of the timing. When will coupes be available for that salvaged timber?

**Ms SYMES:** We are salvage harvesting now.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Have the coupes all been released, identified?

**Ms SYMES:** It is the existing coupes from the timber release plan.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** How many coupes have been identified?

**Mr LAMBERT:** We would have to take on notice the exact number, but certainly there have been, as you would be aware, a second timber release plan that was released in the middle of the year and then one that has just come out or is currently up on the VicForests website.

### Answer:

In the period since the 2019-20 bushfires, VicForests has updated its Timber Release Plan (TRP) twice. On 27 July 2020, VicForests added 59 coupes to undertake salvage harvesting of some burnt areas of ash forest. On 14 December 2020, VicForests further amended its TRP by adding 261 coupes. Of these, 20 coupes were identified for salvage harvesting operations. The process of assessing fire severity and timber suitability is ongoing.

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Portfolio:	Agriculture
Witness:	Minister Symes
Committee Member:	Danny O'Brien
Page/s of transcript:	p.9-10

### Relevant text:

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** So how much of the \$110 million will go to VicForests?

**Ms SYMES:** We have got separate buckets, so the \$110 million investment is for the variety of programs. I do not have the breakdown for you, because we do not—

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Okay. Well, are you able to provide that on notice? Presumably VicForests needs to know how much money it is going to have.

**Ms SYMES:** Yes. It is subject to the market engagement, so once that process is completed, I will have a more accurate reflection of the—

### Answer:

As announced on 2 October 2020, the Victorian Government has committed \$2 million of the \$110 million Gippsland Plantations Investment Program to VicForests for the development of the Nowa Nowa nursery.

A further \$4.9 million has been allocated for VicForests' establishment and maintenance of Crown land plantings and for the development and delivery of farm forestry.

## Questions taken on notice and further information agreed to be supplied at the hearings.

Portfolio:	Agriculture
Witness:	Minister Symes
Committee Member:	Danny O'Brien
Page/s of transcript:	p.16

### Relevant text:

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Well, Minister, you are responsible for VicForests. VicForests reports to you; you are one of its two major shareholders. Does it not concern you that there is a \$1.2 million outstanding debt and you have done nothing about it?

**Ms SYMES:** I stand by my answer, Mr O'Brien.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Are there any other court cases currently underway by MyEnvironment against VicForests?

**Ms SYMES:** There is lots of court action underway, but I am not aware of anything further from MyEnvironment Inc.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** That is a good segue. I was going to ask if you could advise how much the legal costs initiated by green groups have impacted on the profitability of VicForests.

**Ms SYMES:** Not at hand, Mr O'Brien.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Could I get on notice then the legal costs paid by VicForests for the past two years?

**Ms SYMES:** We will provide what is in the annual report, Mr O'Brien.

### Answer:

VicForests' legal costs are reported in its annual report.

## Questions taken on notice and further information agreed to be supplied at the hearings.

Portfolio:	Agriculture
Witness:	Nathan Lambert
Committee Member:	Sam Hibbins
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### Relevant text:

**Mr HIBBINS:** The \$11.2 million—now, VicRoads, sorry, VicForests—

**Ms SYMES:** I do that all the time too, don't worry.

**Mr HIBBINS:** We had Minister Carroll in here last night, so I am still in that zone. VicForests is already on a pretty good wicket. They are a loss-making entity. Why do they actually need the \$11.2 million? What is that actually going towards?

**Ms SYMES:** In relation to the payments for VicForests, Mr Hibbins, they do receive income from government grants for specific purposes. They also provide a lot of services to DELWP. You may be familiar with their practices post the fires in ensuring that roads were safe and that unsafe trees were dealt with and cleared, for example. Their grant income has remained relatively stable from last year. As I said, some of that money was received for undertaking bushfire salvage activities, management of community forestry activities and undertaking activities relating to the new farm forestry initiative. It is appropriate for government to ensure that VicForests is adequately supported to deliver their important work.

**Mr HIBBINS:** But the \$11.2 million?

**Mr LAMBERT:** Just to clarify, Mr Hibbins, I know there is a \$12 million payment to VicForests in its financial report.

**Mr HIBBINS:** The salvage logging initiative?

**Ms SYMES:** That is the \$11.2 million.

**Mr LAMBERT:** Yes, as we discussed earlier, \$4.2 million of that is going to VicForests. We took on notice to give you a more exact number of what has been spent so far.

### Answer:

A payment of \$4.2 million has been made to VicForests, to offset the additional costs associated with the salvage of burnt timber. VicForests will acquit the expenditure through a report to the department in 2021.

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Portfolio:	Agriculture
Witness:	Minister Symes
Committee Member:	Sam Hibbins
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### Relevant text:

**Mr HIBBINS:** You have indicated that there are a range of views. Are you able to provide the committee with any scientific evidence that refutes the much-canvassed public evidence that salvage logging is actually incredibly damaging to the environment?

**Ms SYMES:** It would be in conjunction with the OCR. So, I can certainly furnish more information on why salvage harvest logging is a policy that the government supports.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Okay; thank you.

### Answer:

I am advised that research supporting fire salvage programs undertaken by state and territory governments has been presented in peer reviewed papers published in the Australian Forestry Journal in 2006, 2013 and 2018.

A summary of the issues related to recovery of fire-killed timber was undertaken and published by the Institute of Foresters of Australia in their 2020 paper, "Bushfire Recovery Harvesting Operations".

Any salvage logging is done within sustainable harvest levels and only in forest already available for timber harvesting.