



# Media release

**The Hon Peter Walsh MP**

Minister for Agriculture and Food Security  
Minister for Water

Friday 1 November 2013

## Public safety focus of new unlawful protest rules

Minister for Agriculture and Food Security Peter Walsh has introduced amendments to laws that deal with protests at working forestry coupes and wetlands where duck hunting occurs.

The Victorian Coalition Government's amendments have been introduced in the interests of increasing public safety, and deterring disruptions to lawful timber harvesting and duck hunting activities.

The proposed amendments would alter provisions in the *Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004* and the *Wildlife Act 1975*.

"Significant public safety risks are created when people unlawfully protest at operational forestry coupes and wetlands where duck hunting occurs." Mr Walsh said.

"We do not want accidents at logging coupes, or on wetlands during duck hunting season.

"New offences and increased penalties on existing offences are being introduced in the interests of public safety for all, including protestors, authorised officers, forestry workers and duck hunters.

"The Coalition Government supports peoples' right to protest lawfully. These amendments will preserve that right, so long as the protest activities do not put anyone's safety at risk or break the law.

"People will still be able to protest in forests and at wetlands, but they must ensure they are outside exclusion zones during prohibited periods to avoid fines.

"It is imperative that only people who are authorised are inside timber harvesting zones and hunting firing zones.

"Compliance officers must be able to focus on their core role of ensuring game and timber harvesting laws are adhered to, rather than managing safety issues caused by unlawful protests."

Mr Walsh said further to these measures, the proposed amendments also introduce new measures to enforce compliance by licenced operators who harvest timber on public land.

"DEPI will now be able to direct non-compliant operators to improve practices. Previously, options were limited to warnings only or prosecution in court," Mr Walsh said.

.../2

“Prosecution in court can be costly and lengthy, and could potentially delay best practice methods being enforced as soon as possible.

“There will now also be an increase in the time limit for prosecutions for unauthorised timber harvesting activity from one year to two years.

“This provides alignment with the two-year cycle of the Forest Audit Program and will give DEPI more time to collect evidence and prepare prosecution briefs when court action is required.”

**Proposed amendments to the Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act include:**

**New offences:**

- possessing prohibited objects or substances in a timber harvesting safety zone (maximum penalty \$2,877).
- breaching an exclusion order (maximum penalty \$8,661).

**Increased penalties for existing unlawful protest activity offences:**

- Removing or destroying notice of a Timber Harvesting Safety Zone (Previously ranged from \$577 up to maximum \$7,218. Now proposed from \$866 up to \$8,661).
- Offence to remove or destroy a fence or barrier to a Timber Harvesting Safety Zone (Previously ranged from \$577 up to maximum \$7,218. Now proposed from \$866 up to \$8,661).

**Proposed amendments to Changes to the Wildlife Act include:**

**Increasing the penalty for the following offences to 60 penalty units or \$8,661**

- Unauthorised person entering or remaining in one of 227 specified hunting areas during restricted times during duck season. (Current penalty is 10 penalty units - \$1,450).
- Interfering with, harassing, hindering or obstructing a person engaged in lawful hunting. (Current penalty is 20 penalty units - \$2,890).
- Repeat offences can be issued with banning notices (by Authorised Officers and Victoria Police) or exclusion orders (at the discretion of Courts).

**Exclusion zone definitions (unchanged):**

- Timber Harvesting Safety Zones – provisions prevent unauthorised people from entering a logging coupe, any road closed for timber harvesting purposes within that coupe, plus any area of state forest that is within 150m from that coupe’s boundary.
- Specified Hunting Areas - provisions prevent unauthorised people from entering within 25 metres of the water’s edge from two hours prior to sunset until 10am the following morning during duck hunting season. Duck hunting can take place on 277 of Victoria’s approximate 4,000 wetlands.

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