



MEDIA RELEASE

8 FEBRUARY 2005

**LAWYERS FOR FORESTS INC. MEDIA RELEASE COMMENTING ON
THE "VOLUNTARY CODE OF CONDUCT FOR PROTESTS"
ISSUED BY THE VICTORIAN ASSOCIATION OF FORESTS INDUSTRIES ("VAFI")**

"The Victorian Association of Forests Industries ("VAFI") has released a Voluntary Code of Conduct for Protests ("Code").

"VAFI is calling for members of the forest industry, environmental groups and activists to become signatories to the Code and to publicly adopt the Code as policy.

"The Code mostly restates what is already law and that law is already skewed against people wishing to protest the ongoing destruction of Victoria's native forests.

"Two key pieces of legislation were introduced in Victoria in the 2004. They are the Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004 and the Safety on Public Land Act 2004 (erroneously referred to by VAFI in the Code as the Public Safety Act). This legislation hinders protest activity in State forest more than ever before by increasing the criminal offences able to be imposed on individuals involved in direct action, increasing maximum penalties for new and existing criminal offences and prohibiting members of the public from entering vast areas of State forest across Victoria by making access a criminal offence. Unfortunately, the first safety zone declaration took the form of a long list of GPS references, making it difficult for members of the public to determine exactly what areas of public forest are suddenly illegal to enter.

"Where the Code does not repeat the law, it attempts to create obligations for the benefit of the forest industry. For example, it requires members of the public involved in direct action to give their names and allow themselves to be recorded by those subjected to the direct action (I.e. loggers).

"The Code does acknowledge the democratic right to protest, which is something the law does not do. It also states that "dealings with the media will be honest", an improvement over the previous situation which has seen the logging industry members spreading false accusations in the media of "eco-terrorism" by conservationists.

"The Code does acknowledge that the safety of those involved in direct action needs to be preserved. This is timely considering a higher than usual rate of violence against conservationists in Victoria's State forest in January 2005, including alleged police assaults and successful attempts by loggers to shake a conservationist out of a tree-sit.

Comments authorised by and on behalf of Lawyers for Forests Inc., through Vanessa Bleyer, President of Lawyers for Forests Inc.

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