

Community urged to join fight against illegal firewood theft

Community members are being urged to join the fight against native firewood theft by ensuring the wood they purchase is sustainably and legally sourced.

Firewood theft has plagued the Green Triangle forest industry for many years, but more recently, forest owners have reported a sharp increase in illegal activity.

A group of Green Triangle forest owners fed-up with widespread environmental destruction and theft of native timber, have joined forces with law enforcement and government agencies to address the issue.

The new Intra-Agency and Forestry Management Liaison Group spans both sides of the South Australian-Victorian border, with representatives from ForestrySA, SFM Asset Management, Green Triangle Forest Products, OneFortyOne, HVP, Australian Blue Gum Plantations, PF Olsen, Timberlands Pacific, Birdlife SA, SA's Department for Environment and Water, Department of Environment, Water, Land and Planning Victoria, SA Police and Victoria Police.

Group chair and SFM Asset Management Portfolio Manager Joel Turner said it was important for community members to ensure they purchased only legally and sustainably sourced firewood.

He said plantation grown blue gum was an excellent sustainable choice which burns at the same temperature as redgum, is easier to split and ignite and readily available from local merchants.

“What the public doesn't realise is that the wood they are purchasing from private sellers has often been cut down illegally from native reserves or private land across the region. Illegal firewood theft damages the native environment that is protected for conservation and native animal habitat,” Mr Turner said.

“Many of the trees being cut down are 150 to 200 years old and they can't be replaced. It takes more than 100 years for a redgum to provide a suitable habitat for native species such as the endangered Red-tailed black cockatoo.”

Fellow group member ForestrySA Forest Ranger Kieran Gosden said camera surveillance and patrols had been increased in and around plantation and native forests to help catch thieves operating across the region.

“The forest industry is working collaboratively with regulatory authorities and police. We're all ramping up our efforts to catch those responsible,” she said.

For more information contact:

Laura Thomas | Corporate Communications, ForestrySA

Phone: (08) 8724 2867 | Mobile: 0400 285 674 Email: thomas.laura@forestrysa.com.au

“If you are in local forests cutting down trees and taking firewood you are breaking the law and there will be consequences.”

Green Triangle Forest Products Harvesting Manager and group member Mark Wells said the community had a collective responsibility to look after the environment for the benefit of future generations.

“This is a pretty unique environment and if we’re not careful, we’ll destroy it and lose more than just trees,” he said.

“I think a lot of the people who are buying redgum are probably unaware of the impact of what they’re doing. For them it’s just a heating resource and they’re keeping warm in winter, but the real environmental impact – they just don’t see it.

“We really need to convey to the community that ‘we understand that you’re looking for heating, but there are alternative resources that you can use to do that and cutting down our redgum is going to have a huge impact on our natural resources going forward.’”

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Photograph: *Members of the Intra-Agency and Forestry Management Liaison Group have joined forces to target illegal firewood theft in the Green Triangle. Group members, ForestrySA’s Kieran Gosden, SFM Asset Management’s Mike Lawson and Department of Environment and Water’s Aiden Laslett are pictured in native forest near Mount Gambier.*

AN INTRA-AGENCY AND FORESTRY MANAGEMENT LIAISON GROUP INITIATIVE



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