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RET scheme wouldn't lead to increase in harvest

VicForests has confirmed there would be no area harvested simply for bio-energy production even if native timber wood waste is included under the Federal Renewable Energy Target (RET) scheme.

Nathan Trushell, VicForests' General Manager, Planning, said some of current public discussion has taken an extreme view of this issue.

"While the Federal Government is currently discussing the inclusion of wood in the (RET) scheme, the suggestion that changes would lead to large areas of native forest being cut down for bio-energy or see large scale 'forest furnaces' set up in regions such as East Gippsland is simply nonsense," Mr Trushell said.

"VicForests currently has no contracts in place specifically to supply wood for power generation and even if wood waste is included in RET scheme, no additional harvesting would occur in East Gippsland.

"Using native forest wood for the sole or primary purpose of generating renewable electricity has never been eligible for RET certificates.

"However, there is a significant amount of residual timber produced during harvesting operations to produce high quality sawlog as well as waste wood which comes from the process used by mills to cut timber into shapes and sizes which can be used practically.

"This residual timber and waste wood could be utilised for energy production rather than being burnt in the forest after harvesting or left to rot.

"With or without support from the RET scheme, it is uneconomic to harvest areas only for biomass and, in VicForests' case, sheer distance would make it impractical to transport large amounts of native timber to a single location.

"What the inclusion of native timber residues in the RET scheme would do, is provide support for small, locally-based bio-energy projects.

"This would reduce reliance on non-renewable sources such as brown coal and lead to better environmental outcomes," he said.

Mr Trushell said Australia lags badly behind other parts of the world in terms of utilising wood waste for energy generation.

"While firewood remains a key source of heat for many rural communities, other European countries such as Sweden have embraced bio-energy as a way of increasing their use of renewable energy systems," he said.