

Media Release

The Hon Gayle Tierney MP

Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council
Minister for Training and Skills
Minister for Higher Education
Minister for Agriculture



Saturday, 4 March 2023

SUPPORT FOR MARYVALE MILL WORKERS

Supporting workers in the Latrobe Valley is a top priority for the Andrews Labor Government, and so we welcome Opal's recent public confirmation of the importance of the Maryvale mill and its workers to the company's future.

We are and will continue discussions with Opal to determine any further investment needs to support its transition to plantation supply and recycled products.

While these are robust negotiations, as any commercial negotiation should be, we are firm in our commitment to supporting workers and their families who are being directly impacted during this challenging time and to those who will continue to be employed at the mill.

A redeployment and redundancy process is currently underway, subject to relevant law and the company's enterprise agreement.

The company is yet to confirm final outcomes of this process.

We expect Opal to do the right thing at every step of this process – continuing to consult with workers and unions, continuing to pay stood-down workers, offering voluntary redundancies, and keeping job losses as minimal as possible.

The Labor Government continues to provide funds for Opal to support wage payments to stood-down workers. Unlike earlier Government support, provided when Opal had not yet announced its exit from white paper, this money must be fully repaid by Opal to taxpayers.

The Government has activated a dedicated Opal Worker Support Service, available via ForestWorks, to all affected workers by calling 1800 177 001. This service is being expanded through the Latrobe Valley Authority and Gippsland Trades and Labour Council.

The Latrobe Valley Authority and Regional Development Victoria are working as a part of the whole-of-government response to the situation. The Latrobe Valley Authority maintains an open-door policy to all workers and the community, as it has always done since the Hazelwood closure.

The current native timber supply situation is a result of recent court decisions.

VicForests will have its appeal heard in the Supreme Court later this month. Government continues to seek long-term solutions to the supply challenge.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Agriculture Gayle Tierney

"We know that timber supply is a current challenge – that's why we will continue to invest and ensure workers and businesses are supported during this time."

"We are continuing our discussions with Opal to ensure appropriate support for workers and Opal's transition to plantation supply and recycled products."

Quote attributable to Member for Eastern Victoria Harriet Shing

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“We have made our expectations for workers and their families clear to Opal and we will continue to stand by the community as discussions continue with Opal about their ongoing commitment to workers and its operations in the Latrobe Valley.”

“We’ve activated a dedicated Opal Worker Support Service that is available via ForestWorks to all affected workers, and this support is being expanded to provide additional services.