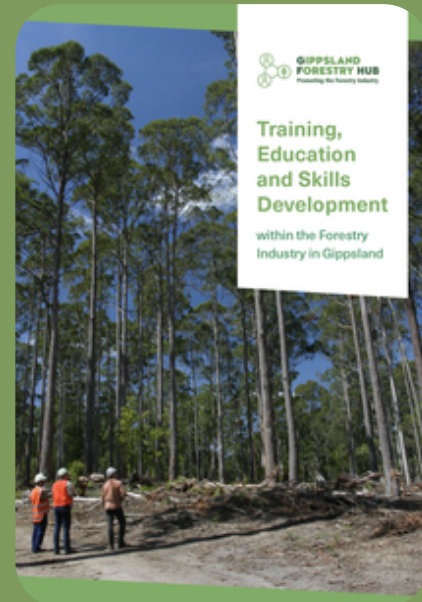


GIPPSLAND FORESTRY HUB: TRAINING, EDUCATION & SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN THE GIPPSLAND FORESTRY INDUSTRY



Purpose

This report, prepared by Agilus for the Gippsland Forestry Hub (GFHub), examines barriers to effective training, education and skills development in the Gippsland forestry and pulp and paper industries. It assesses the feasibility of a dedicated training facility and recommends practical, industry-led solutions to support workforce development during the transition to plantation forestry.

Industry Context

- Forestry, pulp and paper are major employers in Gippsland, now largely centred in the Latrobe Valley.
- The Victorian Government's move away from native forestry by 2030 is reshaping workforce and training needs.
- Access to accredited training is limited, geographically dispersed and costly, with workers often travelling 150–290 km to attend courses.
- As a result, many employers rely on internal, non-accredited training, increasing compliance, safety and workforce risks.

Key Issues Identified

- Limited availability of local, accredited forestry and pulp and paper training.
- Shortages of qualified trainers and assessors.
- Training offerings poorly aligned with current industry needs, particularly plantation forestry.
- Low enrolments leading to reduced government prioritisation and funding of forestry and pulp and paper-training packages.
- High training costs for employers, with estimates of up to \$50,000–\$100,000 per new employee.
- A clear disconnect between industry perceptions of training availability and training provider views.

INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT OUTCOMES

- Strong consensus that current training access is not timely, cost-effective or fit for purpose.
- Industry preference for flexible, on-site training rather than off-site delivery.
- Demand for entry-level and transition programs (e.g. a short “Forestry 101” course), compliance training, leadership and management development.
- Very low uptake of forestry traineeships, despite ongoing skills demand.
- Broad agreement that coordination and communication are the primary gaps, rather than physical infrastructure.

TRAINING FACILITY ASSESSMENT

- Stakeholders expressed mixed support for a dedicated forestry training centre.
- The majority view was that a standalone facility would be high cost and difficult to sustain given low and dispersed enrolments.
- Industry favoured better use of existing facilities (e.g. TAFE Gippsland), mobile delivery models, and on-the-job training supported by accredited assessment.

PREFERRED SOLUTION

- Establish an industry-led, coordinated training model rather than a new bricks-and-mortar facility.
- Create a Gippsland Forestry Training Calendar to consolidate demand and improve visibility of available training.
- Appoint a dedicated Training Coordinator within GFHub to act as the conduit between industry and training providers.

Key Recommendations

1. Develop and maintain a Gippsland Forestry Training Calendar aligned to industry demand.
2. Fund and implement a Training Coordinator role within GFHub to manage training coordination and partnerships.
3. Improve alignment between industry needs and training provider delivery, particularly for plantation forestry.
4. Support third-party and on-site training and assessment arrangements using industry subject-matter experts.
5. Strengthen collaboration between GFHub, TAFE Gippsland and other Registered Training Organisations.

Conclusion

The report concludes that improved coordination—not new infrastructure—is the most effective way to address training and skills gaps in Gippsland’s forestry sector. Implementing a coordinated, industry-driven training model will improve access, reduce costs, support workforce readiness and help secure the long-term sustainability of the industry.