

Job loss fears at paper factory

200 workers at risk

KIERAN ROONEY

UP TO 200 workers at the Latrobe Valley's biggest employer fear they are about to lose their jobs going into Christmas, amid claims stand downs linked to timber shortages will become permanent.

The Opal Australian Paper mill at Maryvale will suspend white paper production this week as legal hurdles on native logging make it almost impossible to source timber for these products.

The company is the nation's only manufacturer of A4 copy paper but has almost completely exhausted timber stockpiles it has used to keep production running.

Recent court cases have put new restrictions on native harvesting in the region and Vic-Forests, the mill's key supplier of this timber, has been struggling to source enough supply under these regulations.

While the state government said it has received assurances there would be no job losses before Christmas, CFMEU national secretary Michael O'Connor has sounded the alarm and said jobs are about to be lost.

"Opal management are in negotiations with the Vic State government to turn proposed 200 stand downs into 200 permanent redundancies," he wrote on social media.

"That's the so called transition plan. A disaster for the Latrobe Valley which the union warned the government about for the last two years."

The state government has previously announced it will

ban all native logging by the end of the decade, pledging to help the industry transition to use of plantations.

Workers have begun protesting at the Maryvale paper mill in an urgent bid to save their jobs. The union has also warned that Australia will soon become fully reliant on imports for white paper if urgent action is not taken.

A spokeswoman for Opal Australian Paper said they continued to investigate alternative wood supplies. "This is complex and to be viable the alternative supplies must match a range of strict criteria including species, availability, volume, cost, logistics and long-term supply," she said.

"While we pursue substitute wood supply possibilities, this difficult situation means as a consequence, white paper production is expected to be impacted on or around 23 December.

"There are currently no stand downs in place, however it is anticipated there will be temporary stand downs for a number of work groups in coming weeks."

The spokeswoman said Opal was considering a reduction or closure of white paper production at the mill given the supply issues, an outcome that would result in job losses.

"This is a complex and ever-changing situation," she said.

"We appreciate this is a very difficult and unsettling time and we remain committed to keeping our team members and key stakeholders updated on the situation as it develops."

Geelong great Joel Selwood is urging Victorians to be careful at the beach this summer.



REGAN HODGE

THE deadliest year for drowning deaths in Australia's recorded history has prompted a group of sporting greats to band together to send one simple message.

Surf Life Saving Australia is urging Victorians to be extra cautious this summer, following a devastating record number of 141 drowning deaths on Aussie beaches last year.

Former Geelong Cats champion Joel Selwood called on Victorians to take care. "With coastal drowning deaths three to four times more likely on summer public holidays, I implore everyone to stay safe these holidays and swim between the red and yellow flags, at a patrolled beach."

Melbourne Storm star Harry Grant said men need to be especially careful. "In reality ... men are nine times more likely to drown than women," he said.

Man dies after quad bike rolls

A MAN has died after a quad bike accident at a property in Victoria's southwest.

The 74-year-old Simpson man was riding a quad bike when it rolled over and he became stuck under the vehicle on Tuesday.

Emergency services were called to the scene about 10am but could not save him.

Colac Highway Patrol Sergeant Jamie Kahle said it was an incident with "tragic circumstances".

"The sad part of it is that he is going to work and not going home, and it's worse this time of the year being so close to Christmas," he said.

According to Consumer Affairs Victoria, quad bikes remain popular on rural properties but have been dubbed the leading cause of accidental deaths and injuries on Australian farms.

"On average, 15 people are killed each year in Australia while using quad bikes," the authority has stated.

Another 1000 people receive injuries requiring hospital treatment each year from quad bike accidents. It warned they are not all-terrain vehicles and can easily roll and cause fatal injuries.

Charged for 'date speeding'

A MAN caught doing 161km/h in Melbourne's southeast told police on being pulled over he was running late for a date.

Police intercepted the man in Doveton at 9pm on December 20, after he sped to overtake police, breaking the limit by more than 45km/h.

The 22-year-old man, driving a VW Golf, told police he was running late for a first date.

His romantic plans were certainly foiled, as his car was impounded for 30 days, costing him \$1006.

He is expected to be charged on summons with driving at a dangerous speed and exceeding the speed limit.

The impounding was part of Victoria Police's Operation Roadwise, a statewide road policing operation running during the high-risk Christmas period until December 27.

Leaving life stories as a lasting legacy for loved ones

ROBYN RILEY

THE best gift Andrew Thornback can receive on Sunday will be celebrating Christmas Day with his family.

The Pakenham grandfather has bowel cancer and was told earlier this year he wouldn't see Christmas.

"But here I am," Mr Thornback, 64, said.

He credits being home for Christmas to the love and care

of his family and the support from Palliative Care South East (PCSE), a not-for-profit organisation offering home-based palliative care to people in southeast Melbourne.

"It (the diagnosis) devastated me and my family but I have had a tremendous result with chemotherapy," Mr Thornback said.

One of the services PCSE offers is a program called Sharing My Story, which provides a

volunteer to write biographies for those who would like to leave their story for family.

Mr Thornback's biographer is retired school principal Pam Glover, an author of more than 69 books who started volunteering in 2010.

"I have never experienced someone like her who can pick up the little details that I wanted to say, meant to say and should be saying," Mr Thornback said. "Pam is very good."

He said she had helped him prise out details he wanted to gift his family in his biography.

"Things like my daughter's skills drawing. Her grandmother was a very good artist and that skill bypassed me but Erin is amazing and I wanted her to know that history," Mr Thornback said.

Mrs Glover became a volunteer writer because she says everyone has a story to tell.

"It is really important that

the story is left for loved ones," she said. "Often it is grandchildren too young to really to know the person, and it can be a validation of their life."

The duo are putting the finishing touches to Mr Thornback's story in time to gift it to his family for Christmas.

"This allows me to leave behind a legacy of my life to my children, to my grandchildren and those grandchildren to come," Mr Thornback said.



Mrs Glover, Mr Thornback and his grandson Connor.