



## **MEDIA RELEASE – 30 November 2022**

### **Help in a crisis for a flood-affected community at Loongana**

Managing plantation forests safely in a remote area is often a fine balancing act. Forico places the utmost priority on operational safety, while recognising that working with neighbours in the community in the spirit of cooperation is essential, especially during times of crisis.

This balance was put to the test when Forico worked with Central Coast Council and the Tasmania State Emergency Service to respond to the emergency access needs of residents at Loongana. This remote community in the region south of Burnie was cut off when the bridge over the River Leven was swept away by flood waters on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> October, taking with it the public access route.

Forico received multiple calls over the course of Friday 14<sup>th</sup> from residents who were seeking alternative access through Forico's privately managed land to the west. With parts of its own road network flooded and operational issues requiring immediate attention, the company had initially planned to inspect this section of road through the estate on Monday 17<sup>th</sup>.

Over the weekend it became clear that some residents of Loongana would need an access and exit route urgently through the Forico managed estate. 'The Loongana Valley was totally cut off,' said resident Ben Marshall. 'All means of access to food, supplies and fuel was out, and older residents had medical appointments to attend.'

On Saturday afternoon, an emergency meeting occurred online. Present from Forico were Darren Herd, General Manager – Plantation Performance, Mark Pearce, Harvest Operations Manager in the northwest, and Roger Ambrose, Operations Forester, who had accessed the road network on Saturday afternoon to assess damage and suitability for vehicle access. While doing so, he had met one of the residents from Loongana and been able to offer an update that their situation was being addressed.

Also present were Daryl Connelly, Director Community Services with Central Coast Council in his role as Council's Recovery Coordinator, and representatives of Tasmania Police and Tasmania State Emergency Service.

Safety concerns were prevalent for Forico, with active harvesting and haulage of logs taking place in that part of the estate, limited road signage for navigation, limited phone signal, a road surface that was more rugged than a Council road, and the possibility of damage and road blockages due to the adverse weather conditions.

The Council's Loongana Road to the east had landslips due to be cleared in the following week. This meant residents would need to travel via a westerly route, through plantation and native forest managed by Forico, exiting at the Surrey Hills Mill to the west. It was agreed that once the road network had been assessed and cleared of damage, an access route would be arranged.



On Sunday morning, Forico and Council representatives assessed bridges and structures along the route to be in safe operational condition, with overhanging trees and trees across the road cleared. With assistance from residents Ben and Brenda Marshall, a register of residents requiring access was drawn up.

Since Forico's estate and operational plantations are managed to the highest possible safety standards, induction documents were issued to residents informing them of safety and other requirements while using the road network, along with insurance papers and an access map. Residents were also given the contact details of a member of staff in the Land Management team as a central point of contact for enquiries on access. The Central Coast Council agreed to place navigational signs at road junctions.

With these measures in place, access became available to Loongana residents from the afternoon of Monday 17<sup>th</sup> October. Its use continued to be managed by Forico operators at the Surrey Hills Mill gatehouse, as residents used the route and requested access for further family members and friends who were assisting with clear up operations at Loongana.

Community members took the matter of driving through operational forestry roads seriously, said Mr Marshall, driving slowly and carefully, with an awareness of the burden for forestry workers and contractors of having public present on the road network. 'Travelling on working forestry roads was another level of driving for us but we're very grateful indeed that Forico provided us with a critical lifeline when we needed it.'

'We were pleased to be able to offer a solution to residents of Loongana in exceptional circumstances,' said Darren Herd, Forico's General Manager – Plantation Performance. 'Our plantations are subject to rigorous safety controls and not accessible to the public under normal circumstances. Once we had been able to assess our road network and we had an assurance that residents understood our requirements on using the road access safely, it was obviously essential to offer the assistance they needed.'

**ENDS**

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