President's Report

# Wombat Forest Society inc.

**Wild & Wonderful Wood & Water Work & Wildlife**

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*AGM 2000*

The Wombat Forest Society started in 1994 and was another manifestation of shared concerns in the region over the rate and extent of harvesting in the Wombat State Forest and the Midlands Forest Management Area.

In the mid 1980's conservationists and sawmillers joined forces to fight against the cutting down of native forest to establish pine plantations. In the late 1980's the region saw small traditional sawmillers publicly and privately questioning the intensification of harvesting techniques and the push to woodchip small diameter and low-grade logs.

In 1991 the then Conservation and Environment Department set up a Community Liaison Committee in Daylesford, in response to a barrage of public criticism at forest management in the Wombat. This committee was made up of a diverse number of interest groups and again saw conservationists and parts of the timber industry united in their criticisms of operations and management in the Wombat State Forest.

The Wombat Forest was completely cut down by the late 1890's. Most of the 'Old-Growth' Wombat is purported to be beneath Ballarat and Bendigo, in the form of mine props. A Royal Commission delivered in 1899, described the Wombat as the 'ruined forest' and a read of the Royal Commission shows that 100 years ago the relative values that we attach to the Wombat where identified. The Commission recommended the formation of a new management body to be called the 'Forest Commission". This is the reason that that Creswick has the Victorian School of Forestry.

The Wombat Forest Society was formed with the aim of ending export woodchipping and forcing sustainable logging. The WFS gained immediate community support and memberships came from most of the old timber families in the area and the broader public. The Society held a number of public meetings in halls in townships and hamlets that revolved around timber. These meetings saw virtually unanimous condemnation for the industrial style harvesting and the extent of harvesting that had taken place in the previous decade.

The WFS embarked on a systematic analysis of the 'numbers' that the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources touted to justify its rate of logging. It became quickly evident that the area cut each year was excessive. The DCNR was quick to run the typical public line that 'forestry was a complex issue and that the WFS was taking a simplistic approach'.

The working with parts of the timber community allowed the WFS to tighten its arguments. A timber operator then offered to take into Midway's yard a 60 minutes cameraman, and grade a load of logs from the Wombat. This was accomplished. It showed that around 1/3 of the load where sawlogs, it also showed that it takes just 15 minutes from the truck entering the yard to the whole load turned to chip.

The WFS then took this along with its statistical analysis to Canberra in November 1994. It was shown to many Keating Government Ministers, Members and Advisors. It split Cabinet and the Government was left with a dilemma. The result was David Bedall calling for an EIS to be carried out on the Wombat, but disappointingly Midway's could still take logs in the interim.

It was of great surprise to many in the WFS when the resulting media attributed the videotape to the Wilderness Society. The logger was banned from the bush.

The following year saw the WFS undertake a massive round of lobbying what we called "middle management/bureaucracy". This entailed taking our argument to every public servant, council, authorities, community and service groups etc that had any remote connection with the Wombat or a related value or interest. The aim was to minimise the number of people that dismissed our claims as just unfounded tripe, it also was aimed at getting at least some to speak in our favor when consulted over the issue.

During 1995, the Commonwealth EPA commenced the assessment into the need for the EIS. Environment Victoria had become involved in this process. The EIS never happened because the depth and range of argument that was presented to the EPA was only a proportion of the argument presented in Canberra, and the recommendation was that it did not need to proceed as the upcoming RFA would deal with the issues.

The video tape and the loss of our EIS due to peak group involvement set up a resentment and suspicion of being involved with the big end of the forest movement.

The technical argument was further honed that year and the WFS prepared to return to Canberra for the next round of woodchip licenses.

1995

- Further work on proving unsustainability.
- Lobby extensively 'middle level officialdom'.
- Loose EIS. EV involvement seen as contributing.
- Submission to Canberra prepared.
- WFS apply to AHC for listing of Mineral Springs and recharge area on National Estate.
- DFA Federal Briefing. WFS representative breaks committee instructions and with Alec Marr (TWS) bring Anne Marie Delahunt (AHC) to tears, destroys meeting. Severely compromises chance of removing Midway's.
- WFS learn that EIS would have been possible if all WFS research was presented earlier.
- WFS splits internally. Breakaway group lobby's Canberra. 19 meetings 1 ½ days.
- Splinter group involved in negotiations. Fed. Government wants to only cancel ½ of Midway's license. Direct phone conversations from caucus ensures full cancellation.
- Midways kicked out of Wombat. Pending completion of RFA.

1996.

- Former Director resigns. WFS regroups.
- Liberals win Federal Election.
- Midways allowed back in due to CFMEU rallying.

- Midlands Forest Management Area Draft Management Plan released. Sustainable yield reduced from 70 000m3 p.a. to 58 000m3 p.a. indicated.
- WFS holds public meetings on Plan.
- WFS submission to FMA Plan. Showing unsustainable.

1997

- Midlands Forest Management Area Plan finalised.
- Yield reduction formalised. Timber Industry told by NRE that they can bank on the number as it was the result of the best modeling NRE had ever done.
- WFS analyses NRE modeling work . Find it highly flawed.
- Take analysis to timber industry. Decided that a joint letter of concern be produced.

1998

By the end of 1997, The Wombat Forest Society had finalised its analysis of the sustainable yield model released by the Department of Natural Resources and Environment in 1997. NRE had informed the WFS and timber industry sectors that the revised reduction in sustainable yield was world's best modeling, and that they could invest on it.

- Letter takes 10 months to prepare. Signed in front of Robert Hill during 1998 Federal Election. Union goes off.
- Tehan dismisses letter. Pisses off industry, WFS and local Liberal Members.
- WFS convenes the Western Victorian Forest Protection Network
- Helps a number of landholders in Newbury, Bullarto and Leonard's Hill areas to question logging etc
- Extensive lobbying with Federal Government and Opposition, State Government and Opposition. Start of a good working relationship with Sherryl Garbutt.
- EV attempts to undermine Network
- WFS seek to talk to EV board. Board refuses.
- WFS take letter to Canberra and put sustainability on agenda for upcoming RFA.

1999

- WFS release definitive critique of Midland's sustainability modeling. Proves 58 000m3 is laughable. Shows that the resource will be cut out in 15 years.
- RFA start.
- Tuckey announces independent audit of NRE Vs WFS critique.
- WFS very active in RFA.
- Trips to Canberra
- Many public meetings
- Help CAWFAG to get off the ground.

2000

- RFA finalised.
- Sustainable Yield reduced to 40 000m3 p.a. and acknowledgment of WFS modeling as being indicative and more reductions necessary.
- Strongly lobbied for community forest management level in forest management.
- WFS and Tambo Environment Awareness Group announce intention to challenge RFA and WUPs.
- Still pursuing a number of avenues both political and legal.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank past and present committee members and other individuals who have been involved at time to time.

Special thanks to Peter O'Mara that has put a tremendous amount of his time, talent and far too much of his own money into the WFS.
Loris for still battling for the Wombat while now also doing tremendous work in the Gippsland and East Gippsland area.
To John Endacott for his vast natural and historical knowledge, the work he has done with forests tour and the work in helping the Enfield Forest Alliance as they formed.

The WFS has had to endure two years of undermining, and accusations from some elements of the forest movement. These have included members of the Wilderness Society, EV and CAWFGAG. The WFS has requested the National Forest Summit to call for mediation between the WFS and the above parties.



The RFAs' have been better than most. The Western Victorian Forest Protection Network believes that we have collectively got the most workable RFA in Australia. The State Government announced a number of independent studies that it would carry out into a number of aspects of forests and forest management in Victoria.

Reference Groups have been announced, Midlands the first.

The workload of the WFS has been overwhelming for the past six years. One of the consequences of this has been our failure to hold two AGMs. We apologise to the membership, and are here tonight to make amends. In the past two years or so the actions of the committee have been to work towards the goals of the WFS. I believe we are much closer to sanity returning to the Midlands. We will still pursue the culprits in the destruction of the Wombat as we know it.

Thank You.
Tim Anderson.

Wombat Forest Society

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# MINUTES

## of Annual General Meeting

held at Powerhouse, Daylesford

on Tuesday 15 August 2000

**Apologies**: Madeleine Bodenham, Mark Cowie, Wendy Bone, Joanne Duncan, Deb Dunn, Rosemary Ward, Michael Fox.

**Welcome**: from President, Tim Anderson.

**President's Report** : Tim Anderson presented a comprehensive report outlining a range of important issues -

- the forest campaign has been a chore for those involved, but results so far seem worthwhile
- The RFA process is now complete
- Because of the Western Victorian Forest Protection Network (formed by WFS) and the campaigning of its 24 member groups, the West Vic RFA is the best RFA of all.
- The Wombat Forest is a basket case, as are other State Forest regions.
- Because of the Sustainable Sawlog Yield (SSY) reduction in 1996 from 70,000 to 58,000 cubic metres annually; and DNRE's claims that their figures were untouchable and their modelling was the best available, and that the industry could have confidence in continued supply, many in the industry have invested heavily in upgraded facilities.
- WFS's analysis and modelling are better than DNRE's
- Over 6 years WFS's analysis and modelling has proven Wombat Forest management to be unsustainable
- WFS took its analysis and modelling to Federal Environment minister Wilson Tuckey, with the claim that the SSY was still too high and should be less than 30,000 cu. m. /year. As a result Mr Tuckey over-rode then Minister Marie Tehan and NRE, authorising the Turner / Ferguson Report.
- A good interim outcome of the RFA is that the SSY has been reduced to 40,000 cu. m. / year
- Tim predicted that the SSY review in 2003 will see a further SSY reduction to 25,000 cu. m. / year
- WFS has threatened to take DNRE to VCAT, over unsustainable proposed harvesting as detailed in the current Wood Utilisation Plan ( WUP )
- Regarding allocation of logs from the Wombat Forest, Black Forest Timbers' claims have not been substantiated by contract documents [50-60% of quota in B-grade sawlogs] .../ .2.

**President's Report** : ( continued )

- Our request for further investigation of management systems' efficiencies was received positively by the Auditor General.
- There are still many unacceptable practices in timber harvesting, such as 'long-butting'
- Forest management is running on maximun output, and the logical conclusion is that the agenda is to "cut-out and get-out"
- WFS believes that although community consultation was inadequate in the RFA, the proposed reference group may provide better outcomes if more stakeholder groups are represented.
- The Timber Industry is aware of all of these issues, and is reconciled to more cuts in timber supply
- Loris Duclos took her computer analysis and modelling to the Tambo and Gippsland RFA processes where they were well received and very helpful.

Having presented his report, Tim Anderson vacated the President's chair.

*John Endacott proposed a vote of thanks to both Tim and Loris for their untiring efforts on our behalf, for the excellent and professional analysis and lobbying, and dedication to better management of our forests. This was endorsed by the meeting.*

**Treasurer's Report** : Treasurer Peter O'Mara presented his report and outlined some past, present and future activities.

Peter spoke first about some procedural matters. This is our first AGM since 1997, and the committee apologises for the omission and delay in not calling an AGM.

The Office of Fair Trading and Business Affairs has investigated the Wombat Forest Society and found the books and affairs of the Society to be in compliance with all other requirements.

The Financial Statements are all available for inspection on the table.

The current account balance of the Society is $263:66

Peter expressed thanks to Tim Anderson for all of his work, and his family for their support; to the committee; and to Loris Duclos for her hard work, and to her family for their support.

Peter expressed willingness to stand again as Treasurer.

The future directions of the Society were then mentioned. The proposed Wombat Forest Field Guide has been commenced. There is a process now under way to integrate many different sources of information, knowledge, history and social relevance of the Wombat Forest into a comprehensive resource that will be a great asset for our communities. It is hoped that it will help to preserve a local continuity of knowledge of and interest in our forest. DNRE has expressed its support.

**Discussion**: Peter O'Mara then opened the meeting to questions and comments from the floor.

Helen Morningstar expressed concern that a lot is heard about logging and woodchips, but little about wildlife.

Recommendation: That the WFS should have a Flora & Fauna Sub-Committee

Ian Esmore spoke about the Mineral Springs Advisory Committee and its funding.

Judith Gray spoke of the need for a full Flora & Fauna Survey of the Wombat Forest; and that funding for this had been promised by the Federal Government with its refusal of the export woodchip licence.

| Position | **Member** | Nominator | Seconder |
|---|---|---|---|
| President | **Tim Anderson** | Loris Duclos | Pat Liffman |
| Vice-President | **Peter O'Mara** | Tim Anderson | Hugh Burnham |
| Treasurer | **Peter O'mara** | Di Oram | Trish Sweeney |
| Secretary | **Hugh Burnham** | Peter O'Mara | Loris Duclos |
| Committee | **Loris Duclos** | Tim Anderson | Peter O'Mara |
| " | **John Endacott** | Peter O'Mara | Loris Duclos |
| " | **Emma Koch** | Pat Liffman | Donna Zabinskas |
| " | **Maryanne Faulks** | Loris Duclos | Tim Anderson |

As there were no further nominations, Anthony Amis declared the above committee duly elected.

Peter O'Mara recommended that the first meeting of the new committee deal with a review of the Wombat Forest Society Charter. *Agreed*

Peter O'Mara stated that he intended to continue to press for mediation between WFS and CaWFAG.

Peter O'Mara then introduced the Guest Speaker, Anthony Amis from Friends of the Earth.

## Guest Speaker : Anthony Amis

Anthony has been a forest campaigner with FoE for 15 years, and has increasingly been involved with the Plantations problem. He believes that the existing hardwood industry in State Forests and the existing plantation industry are both unsustainable.

Plantations which were in the past established by Government authorities are now in the hands of a private company, John Hancock, which is foreign owned. The monitoring of these plantations is now the responsibility of Local Councils.

There are problems with the privatisation of forests and plantations. Anthony examined some of these problems in relation to John Hancock, Amcor with its destructive practices in the Strzelecki Ranges, and Weyerhauser. Monoculture plantations require heavy applications of chemical support. Without the use of herbicides plantation growth rates are reduced by 30%. There are problems with the genetic engineering of seedlings for plantation growth, in terms of their performance and herbicide tolerance. There are serious implications for water catchments, particularly for water yield and quality. He mentioned the need for a system of certification of plantations, which involves all stakeholders, including Kooris and Local Government.

Anthony referred to the Hancock Watch website as a useful source of information; and mentioned the need to get Hancock to protect native forest components, such as riparian remnants, which occur within plantations. His ultimate objective would be to see all plantations in Victoria converted back to native forests.

Finally, Anthony suggested that we need to think more like indigenous peoples, who consider the impact of their management on the next seven generations.

Peter O'Mara proposed a vote of thanks for Anthony Amis for his informative address. *Endorsed.*

In response, Anthony Amis endorsed the work of the Wombat Forest Society, claiming that it is leading the debate at a national level.

Ken Mansell then spoke briefly about the forthcoming S-11 demonstration against the WEF meeting in Melbourne on 11 September 2000. The organisers are an alliance of 70 different organisations who have been consulting with the police in the plans to surround Crown Casino, and conduct a peaceful blockade of the forum.

The meeting was then closed and discussions continued over supper.