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AGM

16th oCToBer 2001

Wombat Forest Society 2001 Annual General Meeting

President's Report

The past year has been one of expansion for the Wombat Forest Society's activities and its membership. We have moved into new areas and we have had acknowledgement of our concerns for the forest. We have also been engaged, as consultant's, for forest related activities not only in Victoria but also interstate.

In our continuing campaign for true Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management for the forests of our region, WFS has maintained its research into logging rates and into the management of non-timber values as well as implications from the RFA. This research has been concluded recently and the WFS have made public our predictions that the true sustainable level of sawlog production from the Midlands should be between 15 000- 20 000m3 pa. This is half the level set under the RFA, which was in interim figure. If full intergenerational equity is applied the level should be well under 5 000m3 pa.

The Age ran an article recently stating that woodchipping levels in all areas across the state, except the Midlands and the Otways, have skyrocketed.The Wombat Forest is the major forest in the Midlands region. The Age article points out that it is these two areas that have had campaigns against sawlog levels being much too high. We believe that this vindicated the approach that the WFS have taken in recent years, that of attacking the disease (logging at unsustainable sawlog levels) and not simply attacking one of the symptoms (woodchipping). I thank Claire Miller and The Age for the support we have had getting our story told in the major press.

Among the activities the WFS has engage in during the past year were:

* The Wombat Forest Society was contacted by Joanne Duncan's office (MLA Gisborne) recently and asked if we could **meet with the Premier Mr Bracks and the Minister for Conservation and Forests Mrs Garbutt**, at the Community Cabinet in Gisborne.

* The meeting comprised the Premier and Mrs Garbutt, the head of the Public Service for Victoria, the new Director of Forest Services, NRE chief of Staff, Joanne Duncan and John McQuilten MLC Ballarat Province. After introductions Peter O'Mara gave a potted history and outline of the WFS campaign. We then settled into a full explanation of the revised WFS sustainability figures and the disaster the region faced as a result of over-logging. After this, Loris Duclos moved on to demonstrate how the Wombat Forest Society had audited every other Forest Management Area in the State and how it reflected the same mismanagement as we see in the Midlands.

The Premier and Minister kept up with the presentation and Mrs Garbutt reinforced a lot of the issues we raised. We were asked how the State Government could move forward and have confidence in future sawlog predictions. We asked for open access to all data, which the Premier immediately granted.

The WFS presentation was not time limited, and we certainly got the impression that we no longer need to prove that there is a problem. Loris rounded off our session by presenting our campaign for next year, WATER. (see attached document) We asked for State Government support to have our **National Estate Listing** of the Mineral Springs and their Recharge Areas.

During the reception afterwards for a diverse cross-section of people and organisations of the region, the Premier only mentioned one local issue in his address. He told the large gathering that **they had met with WFS, that there were local forest issues and that they (State Government) would work through these with the Wombat Forest Society**.

A most gratifying day.

* Facilitating the **National Forest Summit** at Continental House Hepburn Springs, This is the peak meeting of Forest Conservation groups in Australia. The Summit had huge attendance. Prior to the Summit a Conference was held from elected State Forest Groups on the appropriate/ if any application for **Timber Certification** from non-native forest sources.

* The WFS are active participants on the **Victorian Plantation Management Statement Steering Committee.** A process that has managed to get forest interest groups from across the State as well as National Groups such as the Australian Conservation Foundation to discuss plantation management. It has been seen as necessary to form a set of environmental standards for plantations, agro-forestry and other private timber sources. For too long, we have had to endure the call from some environment groups for the phase out off native forest logging into industrial style plantations that were environmentally worse than some of the native harvesting operations. We are happy with the outcome and are now engaged in consultation with groups like the Australian Forest Growers Association (which represents 80% of the private forestry industry) in matters concerning the practical application of these standards.

* In November 2000, the Wombat Forest Society held its first **direct action** in local forests, opposing a logging coupe in the **Bullarto Powerful Owl Management Area**. The logging was soon abandoned and a moratorium negotiated after the Wombat Forest Society was able to show that DNRE had actually breached their own management persciptions.

* The WFS has been asked to be participants on the **West RFA Private Forestry Steering Committee.** This process is an outcome of the West Victorian RFA. The aim is to see the establishment of 10 000- 50 000 hectares of plantings to provide 150 000m3pa of sawlog each year to Wombat and Otway Sawmills. This is necessary as there is now open recognition of the fact that the Midlands has been over logged by NRE and that the resource will in the near future. The morally negative side of this is that the culprits of the over-logging within the timber industry are not accountable and suffer no consequence for having driven the forest destruction. In fact we have governments spending even more money to bale out these same people with future sawlogs from private sources.

The WFS sees its role as the 'stick in the muds' that argue 'we do need to put trees back in the landscape but lets do it for remedial environmental reasons that have a future output of sawlogs' and not 'how cheap and close to Black Forest Sawmill can we grow these chemically enhanced mono-cultures'. The Wombat Forest Society have been pushing strongly for a Restoration Forestry approach.

* The **Midlands Regional Forest Reference Group** was convened three months ago. This group has been chosen by the Minister Mrs Garbutt to act as referral panel on contentious issues and/or issues raised by members. The first issue the Reference Group was given was the contentious Hilltops Coupe in Lyonville. After much debate on the issue a vote saw support for logging Hilltops.

The WFS position was, and is, to give full support to the Trentham community and support for a ten year moratorium on any logging within 3.5 kilometers of the town. The basis for this position was due to the current uncertainty of future logging levels coupled with the current expansion of Trentham based on tourism ands the vision of the town to provide forest based tourist activities within walking distance of the town's edge and the intensity of recent logging around the town.

The result of the vote has seen the Actively Conserving Trentham and CAWFAG members resign from the group. The WFS will stay in the group as we intent to make the Reference Group act fully within its brief and properly reflect the failures of NRE to make balanced decisions.

* We have applied our modelling system and concerns about the over-logging in many areas in the State. The **Auditor-General's Department** is interested in looking at NRE's operations at the level that can be audited by a system like the WFS's.

* Every five years NRE is obligated to carry out a **Statewide Sustainable Yield** Review for every FMA. The State Government has hired an independent expert to carry out this process. Jerry Vanclay is from Southern Cross University in Northern NSW.

As a part of this process the Wombat Forest Society has made had number of meetings and phone link-ups with Mr Vanclay. We have presented our local as well as Statewide modeling, which has been well received. He has been quite honest in his view that the management standard in Victoria is below par.

Mr Vancaly has recently emailed asking how he might be able to help guarantee access to data in the future. We have high hopes that his report will open the door for the State Government to have a full inquiry into what has happened in NRE. We suggested to The Premier that the report be used as the reason for calling an Auditor-General's Inquiry.

The results of his review are nearly completed. Our sources inform us that there will be significant reductions in the Midlands. Otways, Tambo, Gippsland, North-East and possibly East Gippsland. This will be full validation of the WFS model.

* Loris Duclos has now carried out an **up to date audit of every FMA in the State** for the past 12 years. This study has shown some definite mismanagement in many areas and shows that, like here, NRE is too ready to comply with the greed of the big end of the timber industry and gut the best areas to maintain an unsustainable supply of big logs to these mills.

These figures gave have been fed into the current Statewide Sustainable Yield Review.

* The success of the **WFS model and approach has now reached wider circles**. In the past year members of the WFS have been engaged to carry out research and report on a number of other areas. Within Victoria these include a 'Sustainable Yield Review for the Portland FMA' for Environment Victoria, a

'Review of Logging Levels' in the North-East RFA region for Friends of the Earth , 'Analysis of the Tambo FMA' for the Tambo Environment Awareness Group.

Not long after the National Summit, we were asked to dinner to meet Dr. Chrissy Sharp, the West Australain Green parliamentarian, who deals with forests. Chrissy had followed the success of the WFS campaign as reported in The Age over the past few years, and sought us out for some work on WA forests. Chris lives in the south-west forests of WA and has an approach similar to the WFS's.

Chris engaged Loris and I to carryout a critique of a paper that Prof. Ian Ferguson of Melbourne University Forestry Department has written into the application of Ecologically Sustainable Forest management. The WA system is already a lot more transparent and accountable to Victoria, but the forests of the west face much the same pressures.

While the WA election has saved the identified old-growth forests, the result has been increased pressure by the timber industry to now get more volume from less area.

* Prior to Xmas last year the Daylesford Sawmill closed with the loss of 50 jobs. The WFS worked with the Barkers for the 3 months prior to the closure as well as after. The WFS was trying to have all the woodchip logs destined for Midways, to be firstly diverted through a sorting yard. The proposal was to maintain some jobs doing some impressive conversion of literally downgrade logs into high grade laminated and finger-jointed beams and table tops.

Unfortunately most of the politicians seemed more interested in maintaining Black Forest Timbers and the woodchippers. The local Hepburn Shire were also notable absentees.

* The WFS ran a **Community Education Camp** at Nolan's Crossing Camping Area earlier this year. The weekend was a huge success with over 80 people attending. Workshops and discussion forums enabled all that attended the opportunity to both give of their knowledge and skills as well as learn others.

The Society will be running many more of these, with one aimed for this coming November at Nolans Creek Picnic Area.

* The Society's charter of public education saw our involvement in many tours and presentations at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. These included weekend bus tours, school tours, tours with fourth year forestry students from ANU as well as some Indian Foresters that could not believe the wastage they saw in the bush.

* The Wombat Forest Society has given lectures at Melbourne University as well as RMIT on our approach to forest campaigning as well as being asked to a weekend workshop for environment clubs and societies from tertiary institutes from all over Victoria in Yarra Junction.

Since the finish of the West Victorian RFA, there have been at least 5 Masters and PhD's that look at the Wombat Forest Society and its campaigning approach.

* We have held our monthly meetings at a variety of **venues between Daylesford and Blackwood.** One recent workshop was specifically on **Wood Utilisation Plan interpretation.** This involved a group session using the computer facilities at the Neighborhood House in Daylesford. The workshop introduced participants to Loris Duclos's auditing system that has been a key element of the WFS's ability to engage NRE over forest issues.

* The **Powerhouse Gallery** has been taken over by Glenn Mack and Allan Wolfe-Tasker of Cockatoo Zoo. They have generously offered the **Wombat Forest Society free office space** in the new Powerhouse complex. We are enormously grateful for their generosity and of local businesses supporting community groups. Thanks Glenn and Allan.

We are hoping to have some dedicated working bees very soon to turn the Wombat offifce space into a functioning resource for the community to carry out forest related activities.

* The WFS has maintained its involvement in broader issues within the forest movement. We have been active at National and State summits and are a member of **'Earthworker'**, which is an entity that is acting as an interface on the common ground between the Union Movement and the Conservation Movement.

* We have been supportive of Tony Lock's **'Shared Vision'** concert and other activities.

* The Wombat Forest Society have managed to produce two substainal **newsletters** in the past year. These are aimed at not being simply a review of WFS activities, but also a way of informing readers on issues, local knowledge and processes to hopefully enable broader community engagement in forest related issues.

* The Wombat Forest Society **email list** has been expanding as members and supporters sign on. The email list is an excellent vehicle for immediate communication to our members. There are currently over 100 names on the list.

* We must **thank Rob Mancini**, a WFS member and **acclaimed wildlife artist, for the magnificent print of a Powerful Owl** for the WFS to **raffle**. John Endacott put in an enormous effort to see that the raffle was well promoted and the proceeds were a welcome boost to our often empty bank account. Thanks Rob and John.

* The Wombat Forest Society has worked with **Blackwood residents** for most of the year. A satisfying outcome for some areas earmarked for logging has been achieved.

John Endacott and Pat Liffman have met with NRE in relation to some coupes and been able to negotiate adjustments to coupe boundaries to maintain visual amenity for Blackwood.

Another member near Dales Creek was able to research a coupe in that region and found that it was in the Pykes Creek catchment that has been over logged and is currently under a logging moratorium. The coupe has subsequently been dropped from the current logging schedule.

In achieving our results, we have not signed off on unsustainable logging (cut out get out) as in the Queensland RFA outcome. Nor have we entertained the scenario that would allow the timber industry to log the Midlands at 40 000m3 pa for 15 years while they transit into industrialized plantations that are appalling examples of industrial monocultures as canvassed as alternative proposal within our community. This approach would see every mature tree in the Midlands available to the logging industry. This unsustainable level of logging would destroy our region and should be rejected.

Those at last years AGM witnessed the sort of carpet-bagging that the Wombat Forest Society has been subjected to over recent years regarding our campaign approach. Disgruntled member Suresh Pathy, a serial joiner and quitter of groups, made allegations against the WFS but has never shown the courage or qualification to actually list or state them despite numerous requests from the Wombat Forest Society committee. Perhaps, his next incarnation could be 'Egos For The Forest." The Wombat Forest Society is **strongly committed to our whole community approach** and should be proud of the many positive outcomes of our work during this last year.

In ending, I must thank the Committee of the Wombat Forest Society for the dedication and time they put into protecting our natural assets. Peter O'Mara, in particular, is a pillar that keeps the WFS operating. Thanks Pete for all the time and effort, especially for making the National Summit on 'our patch' such a roaring success.

I believe we are on the threshold of fulfilling our aims. Finally we are past proving the validity of our concerns and are now sought to work on solutions. We believe that the community should now be taking over running the forests and will be lobbying for such an outcome. Thank you to all our members and supporters, I think we are nearly there.

To John, Loris, Pat, Maryanne, Henk, Rosemary, Bill and others- thanks .

Tim Anderson

Wombat Water Campaign 2001

Over the next year Wombat Forest Society will be focussing their energies on water issues. The decision to focus the WFS campaign on water comes after years of dissatisfaction with how NRE forest managers have managed this resource. Communities around the Wombat raise concerns about how waterways are managed in almost every contentious coupe in the forest. NRE have shown a propensity to minimise water protection measures by redefining prescriptions or selectively using contemporary science to favour industrial logging.

Wombat Forest Society actions

Request NRE adhere to suitable size limits on shelterwood 2 coupes to protect water yield and wildlife habitat. The current delineation by NRE between Shelterwood 1 & 2 coupes appears nowhere in local management plans and prescription nor in the Code of Forest Practices. The removal of the remaining overwood trees in a Shelterwood 2 harvest creates a situation similar to clearfell logging where by there is no protection from excessive evapotranspiration rates and regrowth using substantially more water.

Request NRE provides logging history maps for all water supply catchments. Forest managers are now saying that current log volumes will not be able to be provided in the near future without compromising important water values.

Request NRE provide a clear definition as to exactly what is a waterway especially those in higher catchments. The current definitions used appears to be in conflict with the Water Act. This definition is also stalling debate in the farm dams issue.

Request NRE adopt up to date findings from the Cooperative Research Centre for Catchment Hydrology in relation to soil erosion and sediment yields. Currently NRE only takes account of soil erodibility not the potential for sediment yields leaving a site following disturbance.

Encourage government to provide resources to investigate and map the actual location of recharge areas for all mineral springs.

Re-nominate the Mineral Springs and their recharge areas for listing on the Register of the National Estate. Wombat Forest Society's earlier application for the Mineral Springs listing was stalled because of the RFAs and because NRE would not support the application.

Encourage government to ensure that tree growers are provided with incentives to plant trees where they are most needed in the landscape (ie; saline recharge areas) rather than the current situation where fresh water production areas are targeted.

Encourage government to adopt equitable water pricing reform that ensures that tree growers pay for the water used by their crop. Legislation in South Australia is currently being considered that will make all new plantations subject to the purchase of water rights.