Wombat Forest Guardian

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Woodchip Decision Imminent

Dear Members and supporters,

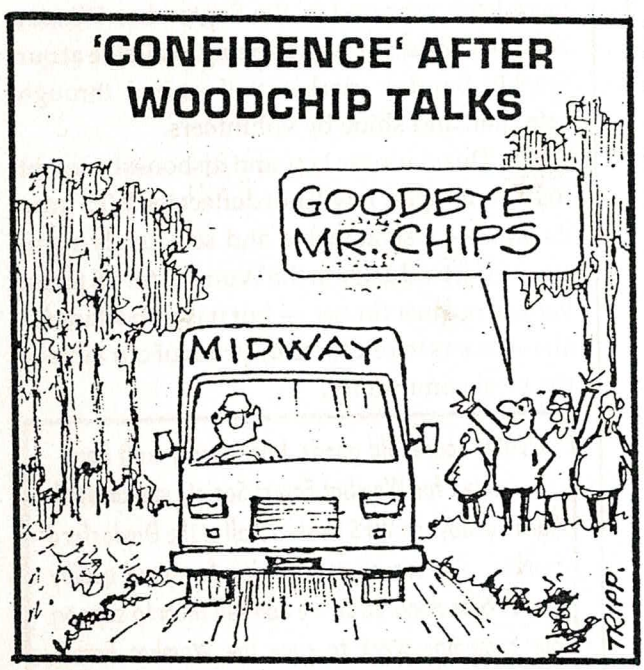
Since we posted you the September edition of the *Wombat Forest Guardian*, a lot of the hard work by the WFS committee seems to be bearing fruit. As I write this, we await the final decision of the Federal Government about whether or not to renew the export woodchip licence for Midway Wood Products, who, as you know, source their woodchips for export from whole trees in the Wombat forest.

We have heard from sources in the Federal Government that the decision is likely to be handed down in the next seven days, and as you read this, the result may be known.

If the licence is cancelled the decision will be based on irrefutable video, photographic and (Statutory Declaration) written evidence of massive breaches of the licence conditions by Midway, gathered and presented to the Government by the Wombat Forest Society.

On 17 November a delegation of four WFS committee members flew to Canberra to present this evidence to a range of the key Labor MPs, ministerial advisers and bureaucrats who will be making the licence renewal decision. Showing our evidence had a dramatic effect on many of the people in Parliament House who saw it. Some MPs instantly altered their views on export woodchipping, and the whole day was packed from start to finish with meetings, viewings of our video evidence, and high pressure lobbying.

I am delighted that the hard won funds of the Society were put to such efficient use, and I'm certain that every member has had their money's worth! We now feel like VCE students who've done their exams, and can't do much more till the results come through. Your committee of up to 15 local people from all parts of the forest continues to meet every single week to maintain, extend and adjust the campaign as necessary.



Cartoon reproduced courtesy of Gordon Tripp, *Midland Express*.

If the decision of Federal Resources Minister, Mr David Beddall, is not to renew this licence, it will constitute one of the most significant forest victories in Victorian history.

This would be the first time in the 30 year history of export woodchipping that a licence has been cancelled outright.

Our Society is an unusual community group because it is made up of ex-sawmillers, timber workers and local residents who have banded together to end export woodchipping from their forest, and to preserve local sawmill jobs by getting timber harvesting back onto low-intensity selective falling, instead of the current methods of pseudo-clearfelling which simply feed the woodchippers.

Change To Selective Falling

Regardless of the decision, the second objective of the WFS will remain for us to achieve: low-intensity, selective falling instead of the high-destruction, regeneration burning, and degradation of the forest under the current system.

If we can return timber harvesting to sustainable levels, and treat our forest more sensitively, perhaps we can preserve the non-timber values which are currently being ignored. These include:

- flora and fauna
- water catchment
- tourism; and
- forest-related businesses and other community values.

These issues are discussed in more depth in the enclosed fact sheets, and I hope you will take the time to read them, and pass them on to family and friends.

If the decision is to cancel the woodchip licence, the WFS will have achieved a spectacular forest victory purely from the volunteer efforts of local forest residents and their supporters who began their campaign a mere 7 months ago.

Thank you,

Alan T Gray

Alan T Gray
Director,
Wombat Forest Society Inc.

FRIDAY 9 DECEMBER 1994 **THE AGE**

Poll boosts campaign to end export of woodchips

By GARETH BOREHAM, Canberra

The push for the Federal Government to end export woodchipping has received a fillip with a poll showing eight out of 10 Australians are opposed to the logging of native forests for overseas markets.

The Newspoll survey, conducted last weekend, was commissioned by leading conservation groups in the lead-up to this month's decision on export woodchip licence renewals.

The Wilderness Society's national campaign coordinator, Mr Kevin Parker, said the poll gave the Prime Minister, Mr Keating, a clear mandate to intervene in the licence rulings. "He has been given an imprimatur to take very strong action," he said.

The Resources Minister, Mr Beddall, is due to decide on the licences shortly with advice from the Environment Minister, Senator Faulkner. He presented his recommendations to Mr Beddall on Tasmanian, Western Australian and south-east New South Wales forests this week.

The 10 companies seeking renewals of their licences include the timber giant Harris Daishowa, which has applied to raise its woodchip exports from Victorian forests by almost 50 per cent.

If Senator Faulkner, who is committed to the phasing out of export woodchips and the protection of sensitive forests, is unhappy with Mr Beddall's ruling he may take the issue to Cabinet.

Yesterday Senator Faulkner said that he was not surprised by the poll result because Australians took the logging issue very seriously and had strong views about the protection of native forests.

But the National Association of Forest Industries dismissed the poll as "completely loaded".

The association's executive director, Dr Robert Bain, said the poll question — "Do you personaly approve or disapprove of trees from Australia's native forests being felled and exported as woodchips to Japan?' — was factually wrong.

"What we are exporting is residual wood. If we did not export it, the wood would be left on the ground or gathered up and burnt," he said.

Environment Victoria's campagin coordinator, Ms Linda Parlane said Australians from every walk of life were "unequivocally opposed" to export woodchipping.

Surprisingly, the poll found that more blue collar workers (83.2 per cent) disapproved of export woodchipping than white collar workers (76.3 per cent).

According to conservationists, the poll showed that Mr Keating could ban export woodchipping altogether and still receive strong community support.

"JOBS NOT WOODCHIPS FOR THE WOMBAT FOREST"

SPREAD THE WORD. Durable, weatherproof WFS stickers. Only $1.50 each, posted, from PO Box 51 Trentham, 3458, or $1.00 each from the WFS stall at the Daylesford Sunday market.

False Accusations Against WFS

In recent weeks the State Government and certain timber industry representatives who profit from the woodchipped destruction of the Wombat Forest, have concentrated on misrepresenting the aims and objectives of the Wombat Forest Society.

We've since learnt that this is a standard tactic against any community group which is concerned for its forest environment, but the attacks boil down to one rather shallow claim: that the real motives of the WFS are to close down the timber industry in the Wombat entirely, and that the WFS wants a total end to the jobs in our local communities.

This was claimed in print as recently as two weeks ago in an internal State Government newsletter to staff of the logging department (DCNR), by South-West Forest Manager, Mr Gary Morgan, who is based in the department's Ballarat office. He claims that our true, and hidden motive, is to completely close down the industry.

Wrong, wrong, wrong. The aims and objectives of the WFS were listed in the very first mail-out to local residents in May, and have been repeated in the September *Wombat Forest Guardian*, as well as being available at our weekly Sunday market stall staffed through rain, hail and shine by volunteers.

This claim is a lazy and dishonest attempt to scaremonger. It will not deflect the WFS from its aims — a sustainable and sensitively-managed forest industry in the Wombat for all forest values, not just timber — but it is important for all members to reinforce the truth of our aims in the local community.

Quality household goods, bric-a-brac, craft items etc wanted for Wombat Forest Society market stall. *Each Sunday the WFS holds a stall at the Daylesford market. We are always looking for good quality items to be donated so we can sell them to support our campaign work to save the Wombat Forest.* ***Please bring any donations to the stall on any Sunday.***