Dr Rod Anderson's 'Cheap as Chips - A History of Campaigns to Save Victoria's Native Forests' Published by Dr R W Anderson 2006

This brave attempt to tie together the history of Victorian forest campaigning is fundamentally a noble yet flawed undertaking, as the inherent bias of the editor ultimately weakens the overall package. Rod Anderson was Environment Victoria's (EV) forest campaigner from 1997-2000 and therefore his views are heavily influenced by his experiences and networks gained at EV during that time. It appears that a lot passed him by.

As a forest campaigner myself during the 1990's, a host of other people would need to be included if such an ambitious project could ever be called authorative. As a historical document, the book ultimately fails the test, as the selective nature of the contributors makes one question Anderson's real intentions. For instance two of the contributors use the book in a cowardly manner to attack other forest campaigners that they (& the editor?) disagree with. This fundamentally weakens the credibility of entire book as the criticisms are based on misguided political assumptions.

The book totals 337 pages and up until page 167, the book is quite excellent and provides a wealth of information regarding forest campaign history in the 1970's and 1980's. I found the campaign development in East Gippsland through the late 1970's to the late 1980's to be quite fascinating as it was an era I knew little about.

The 1990's is covered fairly well, however a number of key issues are missed, most notably the infamous 1994 DNRE pressure hold action which made global news. There is no real input from GECO and the fezza contingents, the piece on Goolengook (the longest running forest blockade in Australian history) should have been written by actual blockaders and there is almost no input from indigenous people which perhaps is the books greatest failing. No information is presented on either Rainforest Action Group or the Nomadic Action Group and very little is offered from other direct action forest groups.

After page 167, the book's credibility is weakened as it provides uncontested interviews with 'key people', selected of course by the author and selected no doubt because of their political position of no native forest logging. Anyone with a different assessment is of course not invited to comment, although to be fair some of FoE's concerns are broached by selected quotes from FoE newsletters and reprinted extensively through the text. FoE comes out looking pretty good which is odd considering the attacks that have been made at FoE over the years because of our forest policy. A policy which, a decade later, some of those same critical groups are now reluctantly accepting as the way forward.

It should be noted that the Victorian forest movement has effectively been split since the early 1990's by the No Native Forest Logging agenda, which

was driven largely by Environment Victoria, The Wilderness Society, Australian Conservation Foundation and later in decade by the Greens. The rift is of course not mentioned in the book in any detail. It's as if the rift never existed. The first shot in this 'rift' was actually fired in 1996 by Concerned Residents of East Gippsland in their very odd piece published in Potoroo Newsletter "Are you a stop the chopper or a Friend of the Earth rapists". The timing of this attack was pathetic considering that in 1996 FoE had organised over 50 direct actions in support of forest protection. CROEG later evolved into Environment East Gippsland and are now attempting to make alliances with timber workers, something that FoE has always supported, which makes the decade old criticism even harder to stomach.

First person featured in 'Cheap as Chips' is Linda Parlane who was EV's director from 1990-97. Linda had been active on forest issues since 1975 which is quite an amazing effort against overwhelming odds. What is fascinating about Linda's spiel is that she gives a detailed explantation of why the national environmental movement got totally sold on plantations in the early nineties. Linda was the driving force of this change in direction for the movement, which effectively was a top down approach not endorsed by all groups and certainly not by communities impacted by plantations. For instance in 1993/4 FoE groups in Tasmania were already up in arms about atrazine in their drinking water at Lorinna and Derby . How could FoE endorse a 100% plantation position when our members were being poisoned by plantation chemicals? In 1993 the hundreds of kilometres of the Ballarat region was 'accidently' sprayed with Hexazinone by Victorian Plantations Corporation. In 1997/8 Adelaide's drinking water was contaminated with Atrazine and Hexazinone by Forestry South Australia. In 2005 the Federal Regulatory Body the APVMA, placed health bans on pine treated with Copper Chrome Arsenate. The list goes on and on, yet none of these issues are ever raised by promoters of the plantation ideology.

Linda explains that "The fact that we no longer needed to log native forests to meet our wood needs meant that the whole strategic perspective of the forests campaigns had to shift..." EV used this plantation information to start influencing the national agenda."In 1993, Conservation Councils and National Groups ... agreed to ... speed up transition from native forests to plantations. John Faulkner funded the Conservation Councils to undertake a national plantations study..". This study was the infamous Judy Clark report which provided over-optimistic estimates about plantation yields. The Clark report was an economic document rather than an ecological document and it was heavily quoted as the truth by supporters of no native forest logging.

There was no debate about this change of direction in the movement. It effectively meant that at a time when the plantation industry was growing at its fastest rate, green criticism would be muted without offering any social or ecological criticism about one of the largest land grabs Australia has ever seen. Effectively the forest movement had been voluntarily captured. Linda also claims that "...the issue of pesticides in plantations will be dealt with at the right time". Linda then gives no explantation about what the right time is? Plantations by their very nature are reliant on pesticide props for their survival. Without the props the plantations in many

instances will fail. There never will be a right time, so what Linda is actually endorsing is an unsustainable industry based on non-ecological criteria. If you live downwind or downstream from these plantations, bad luck, because you won't get any support from conservation groups who recommend plantations as the only solution.

After 20 years battling for forests, Linda effectively retired from the scene in 1997, leaving others to plod on and deal with the woodchipping fiasco that was increasing both in native forests and plantations. Was EV's support for plantations a desperate attempting for change from a burnt out elite that was fast running out of steam? Rod Anderson came into the scene at this point of time, well after the no native forest logging controversy had been ignited.

The book then includes a detailed 24 page history by Jill Redwood in East Gippsland which is written in a dull manner. In contrast, Simon Birrell from Otways Ranges Environment Network (OREN) is given only 2 pages. Unlike the trench warfare in East Gippsland, the Otways campaign argueably was the most successful Victorian grassroots forest campaign ever, with the Bracks Government eventually handing over 150,000 hectares of forests in 2005. It is odd that this victory is given such short attention in 'Cheap as Chips'. The politically ambitious Greens Forest Spokesperson and failed upper house candidate, Marcus Ward then is given freeboard by Rod Anderson to do a 15 page rant on the plight of the Wombat Forest, including a complete uncontested hatchet job on Wombat Forest Society. (Marcus has long been viewed suspiciously by members of Forest Network after his unprovoked sledging of Friends of the Earth in front of 5000 people at the Victorian forest rally on May 18 2002. Hardly a noble act from a wannabe politician). Why was there no input into Ward's article from Wombat Forest Society whose members, Tim Anderson and Loris Duclos managed to get logging reduced by over 40% throughout Victoria in 2002? Loris was the instigator of determining that logging was occurring way above sustainable yield throughout Victoria and after crunching the figures for a year, managed to convince the Bracks Government that logging had to be reduced significantly across the state. No easy task!

Two respected forest commentators (see below) have acknowledged the brilliant work done by Duclos and Anderson in unravelling these numbers however none of these references were sourced by Anderson in 'Cheap as Chips';
"For the record, the impetus for this new policy can largely be attributed to the modeling work of two community forest activists, Tim Anderson and Loris Duclos rather than existing monitoring and review processes. Though neither has formal expertise in the field of resource modeling, they produced statistical analysis which debunked the sustainable yield estimates of the government's own departmental experts and external consultants, damaging the credibility of the Regional Forest Agreements in the process." Nicastro 2003

"Loris Duclos and Tim Anderson of the Wombat Forest Society were crucial to these events in the 1990s by analysing wood resource estimates for the

Wombat forests and throughout Victoria. Loris Duclos credits TFFTF (The Fight for the Forests) with providing the philosophical and analytical framework they used to unravel the complexities of forest management systems: Considerations such as overly optimist growth rates and standing volumes have been proven in the Wombat. The industrial models described by (TFFTF) in the early 70s have become a reality in the Wombat, both in terms of native forest and plantation logging. With the use of modern computers, WFS developed methods that can analyse forest management figures and demonstrate flawed as-sumptions in the industrial forestry model." Penna 2003

This successful campaign strategy not only shut down logging in key forest areas throughout Victoria, also led to the shutdown of numerous sawmills throughout Victoria, as the mills could not be guaranteed a supply of timber into the future. A massive campaign win, yet Ward and Rod Anderson refuse to acknowledge any positive contribution from Wombat Forest Society at all.

Why?

In 2006 Ward, applauded the closing down of the last small sawmill in the Wombat Forest, yet 500% more timber is still being taken from the Wombat as firewood than sawntimber and the small sawmill (Dwyers) that closed was never a shareholder in the real forest destroyer in the Wombat, Midways Pty Ltd who own the export woodchip mill at Geelong. The remaining large sawmill in the region, based at Woodend (who are still shareholders of Midways) are now being supplied by forests from the Central Highlands. Even Ward acknowledges this in the book, "Sadly, the victory is a hollow one. The solution has come at the cost of shifting the woodchipping and logging to other, and arguably more environmentally significant forests".

Some success Marcus!

It should also be noted that the Greens forest campaign in Victoria was initially set up only to support a no native forest logging agenda. Anyone not agreeing with this hypothesis was effectively not invited into the party, leaving people like Marcus to 'rule the roost' and people like Wombat Forest Society, FoE and many others as perpetual outsiders. Wither democracy and common sense?

After the Wombat saga, the 'Cheap as Chips' includes Doug Phillips giving a decent 12 page view on Cobbobooneee Forests, Box Ironbark gets 5 pages, EV does 3 pages on boycotts, Wendy Radford gets 3 pages on Doctors for Native forests (please don't mention pesticides in drinking water) and Lawyers for Forests get 3 pages. Julie Constable makes for an overdetailed rave (46 pages!!!) on the Strzeleckis, whereas the main movers and shakers in the Strzeleckis, Friends of Gippsland Bush only get a couple of very small mentions, probably due to EV's role in splitting FOGB members in a very torrid 1997.

The book then closes off with chapter 7, a 44 page rant by Gavan McFadzean from the Wilderness Society. Gavan uses the book for all its worth pushing the historical importance of TWS in saving the world. He saves his worst

though to discredit and undermine the work of OREN and WFS. Totally unethical behaviour knowing full well that this may well be the only history of the movement written. WFS is attacked because of their support of limited native forest logging and their influence with the Labor Party. Similarly, OREN's influence with Labor is also criticised, an influence McFadzean could only dream of. McFadzen for years has endorsed the TWS position of no native forest logging, which in 2006 was overturned by TWS backing certification of native forest logging via the Forest Stewardship Council. This means that TWS are now working from a model that WFS has always supported, a position that McFadzean critically slams in 'Cheap as Chips'. McFadzen along with ACF in 2003 was also supportive of corporatisation of VicForests, the entity in charge of managing native forests in Victoria, a position far more extreme than that of WFS. These double standards and contradictions are not unusual in Victorian forest campaigns, some would argue that they have been the movement's greatest weakness, however to publicly attack a group in a supposed historic document, over supposed policy differences, when they are the same policies that are now being used by TWS is a total disgrace. One has to wonder what the real intentions of these attacks are?

What value did Rod Anderson see in publishing contributions critical of groups that have successfully campaigned in their regions? Ward, McFadzean and Rod Anderson have actually done the movement a great disservice by using the book as a means of reinterpreting their narrow blinkered view of history. How will supporters of OREN and WFS view 'Cheap as Chips'. Not highly I would venture to say. Maybe in time someone will write a definitive history of the Victorian forest movement, but 'Cheap as Chips' definitely is not it. 3/10.

Anthony Amis