JOBS...

not woodchips for the Wombat Forest

By Alan T Gray, Director, Wombat Forest Society.

From Chile to Siberia and Canada, local residents are finding that woodchipping destroys their forests and communities. But how many people in the Daylesford region realise that the same thing's happening on their doorstep in the Wombat Forest?

Each year the Wombat regrows at around 98,000 cubic metres, yet it's being woodchipped, logged and burnt at around 285,000 cubic metres per year. And the amount of timber 'waste' burnt on the forest floor each year after woodchipping could heat the homes of every household in the Wombat region for a whole year. During this year alone some 2,000 hectares of forest will be logged — that's 1/20th of the entire forest in one year.

The Wombat Forest Society is a new group of concerned residents aiming to get the facts and figures out to residents and tourists to show them that it's not sawmilling and firewood collection that's killing our forest. Woodchipping — turning good trees into paper bags by chipping them in Geelong, and exporting them to Japan — is what's destroying jobs, wildlife habitats, and the forest.

The campaign to save the Wombat Forest from woodchipping is a local initiative which adds our voices to the global tide of opinion turning against large scale forest destruction.

Slicing up the Wombat pie

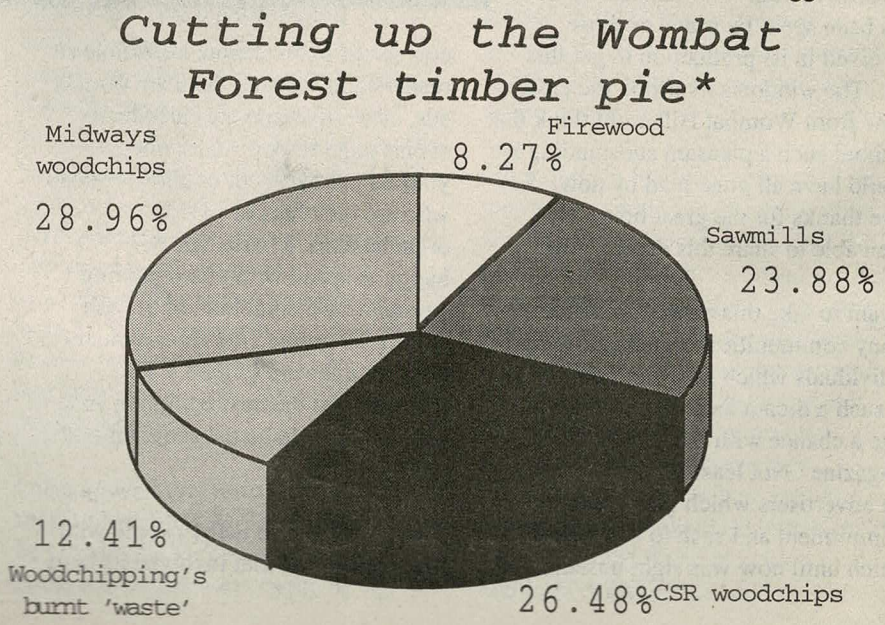
The chart shows how the Wombat Forest timber pie is sliced up and devoured each year. Woodchipping and its burnt 'waste' is responsible for 67 percent of the forest destruction each year. And each year woodchippers around Australia ship over five million cubic metres of woodchips to Japan to make hamburger packets and other disposables (1). But the old myth that they're providing secure long-term jobs for people in our communities just doesn't hold up to close scrutiny. From 1965 to 1985, while wood production from Australian forests increased 40 percent, jobs in the industry were cut by 40 percent(2). And woodchipping is an increasingly capital — not labour — intensive operation. Only two percent of the industry jobs are provided by woodchipping, yet this sector is responsible for 60 percent of the forest destruction!

"And each year woodchippers around Australia ship over five million cubic metres of woodchips to Japan to make hamburger packets and other disposables"

Daylesford region

In the Wombat Forest there are nine sawmills providing jobs for local people. Yet one export woodchip company, providing a fraction of the sawmill employment, takes out more timber each year than all the sawmills combined. Around Daylesford, the woodchipped destruction of the forest is not always visible. The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources have a policy they call 'visual corridors'.

They leave the roadsides unlogged and



pretty, but a short drive down many of the side roads leading into the forest reveals massive destruction, and piles of small-diameter trees ready to be taken for woodchipping. The Wombat Forest Society is compiling a list of such cutting areas, and at our weekly market stall at the Daylesford Sunday market, you can pick up the directions "for how to see for yourself what's happening in your forest backyard'.

If we continue to allow our forest to be woodchipped, we will eventually lose all long-term employment options from forestry operations. Of the 440 timber-related jobs around the Wombat Forest, approximately 30 are for Department staff, but only 10 are provided by woodchipping operations — even though woodchipping takes the lion's share of the forest pie.

Unless we reduce logging to sustainable levels, there simply won't be any jobs for our children. If we're going to go on logging the Wombat Forest we should at least make sure that the timber goes to local sawmills for local jobs.

If we consider the other businesses which indirectly rely on the natural beauty of our region (and isn't that most of them?) then it becomes plain that woodchipping is jeopardising the economic wellbeing of our communities. So even if we ignore the environmental imperatives for saving the Wombat Forest, there are compelling employment and economic reasons to tell the woodchippers to "grow your own".

Other primary industries around Daylesford must buy their own land, plant their own 'resource', and regrow the 'crop' once it's been harvested. The woodchippers do none of these things, and have shown by their massive appetites for woodchips that they have no long-term concern for the wellbeing of our region.

Next time you see a laden log truck moving through town — have a good look at the size of the logs on the back. If they don't have little silver tags on the ends, chances are they're on their way to the woodchip mill in Geelong. Most of them are small diameter logs of trees which one day could have made a good sawlog, or provided a habitat for some of the rare animal species which depend on the forest for survival. What you're seeing as you look at these small logs, is future jobs for our communities disappearing down the highway to help line the pockets of executives who don't live here and don't care about the future of "the lungs of Melbourne".

The Wombat Forest was completely logged out over 100 years ago to provide timber for the various mining operations around central Victoria. Even way back then a rule was introduced to protect the future sawlogs of the forest from being cut out as saplings. The "two foot rule" meant that no tree could be fallen unless it was greater than this diameter. Over a century later, even this crude conservation measure is totally ignored by woodchippers who want even sized, even aged trees which make whiter woodchips than genuine sawmill waste and forest thinnings.

The figures make it plain

If you had the choice between a business which *made* $4 million a year, and one which *lost* $13 million a year, which would you back? Dumb question? Not if you listen to the government department which runs logging operations here in the Womb Forest. In the 1991-92 financial yea the government (read: taxpayers) los $13.2 million — mostly because of t hopelessly low royalties charged to woodchippers for gutting our forests. At the same time, State softwood plantations made a profit of $4 million(3). So, Australians are payin millions of dollars each year, subsidising the woodchipped destruction of forests like the Womb at bargain-basement prices, even as experts tell the Federal Government stop. Every State forestry departmer except South Australia's, makes a lo on its operations. Why not South Australia? Because that State's operations are plantation-based. An according to the Resource Assessme Commission (RAC), the Federal Government's independent inquirers into the timber industry, no forests ir Australia are logged on a sustainable basis.

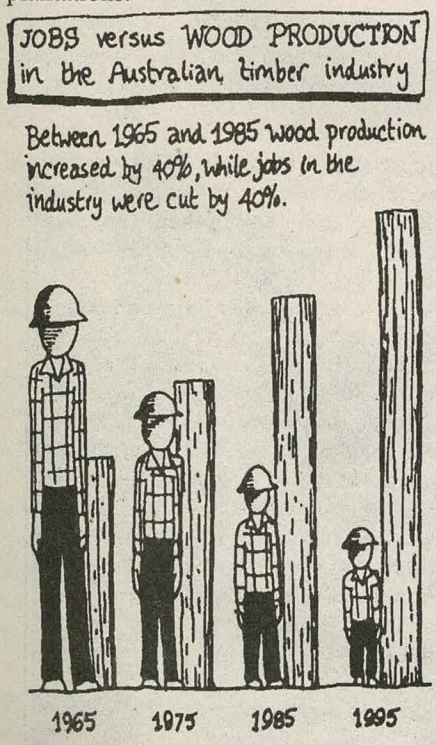
Plantation alternative

Already the area of eucalypt plantati throughout the world is equal to the





size of Tasmania. However, the woodchipping industry wants to go on using 'cheap' native forests (instead of plantations) until they're all used up. But Australia could become self sufficient in pulp and paper manufacturing by the year 2000, if we started using: eucalypt plantations;
• existing softwood plantations; and
• recycled fibres.
In fact, one company in Australia, Sapfor, already exports 400,000 tonnes of woodchips a year — from plantations.



**Taken from page 121 of the Forest & Timber Inquiry Draft Report of the Resources Assessment Commission, AGPS, Canberra, Volume 1, July 1991.*

Green economist, Judy Clark, has calculated that Victoria could build its own clean and Green pulp mill, fed by plantation stock, by 1996, and create 1,280 jobs in the process. This could be repeated around the country: throughout Australia there are almost 100,000 hectares of eucalypt plantations in the ground right now. All export woodchipping from native forests should cease immediately so that we can concentrate on building a sustainable plantation-based industry with secure jobs. There are 220,000 hectares of plantations ready to go right now in Victoria, the woodchippers could buy their stock from these supplies instead of destroying our forest. The Federal Government could end this destruction by not renewing the annual export woodchip licences at the end of this year.

The department should also come clean and admit that its operations aren't sustainable, and reduce all cutting to the rate at which the forest regrows.

What you can do

Join The Wombat Forest Society. You will be informed of progress on the campaign to save the Wombat Forest from woodchipping, through regular updates and the quarterly *Wombat Forest Guardian.* As a volunteer you could help with the following activities:
• letter-writing campaigns to governments (they *do* work, and they always will, simply because politicians need *voters* to keep them in power);
• 'Forest Watch' recording of logging code breaches;
• community displays and the WFS stall at the Daylesford Sunday market.

You can contact the WFS by writing to our office at :

PO Box 51 Trentham, 3458.

Annual membership is:
$16 per individual,
$18 per household, and
$12 concession.

References

1. Department of Conservation and Environment Report, 21 July, 1992, Melbourne.
2. Forest & Timber Inquiry Draft Report, Resource Assessment Commission, AGPS, Canberra, Volume 1, July, 1991, pp 95-113.
3. Forest & Timber Inquiry Draft Report, Resource Assessment Commission, AGPS, Canberra, Volume 1, July, 1991, page 121.



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