Nov 1999

Pages 2+0

WFS Apolitical

WOMBAT FOREST SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

november, 1999

REVISED WFS MEETING TIMETABLE

Tuesday 9th Nov 7.30 pm @ Powerhouse, Vincent St, Daylesford
Tuesday 23rd Nov 7.30pm @ Powerhouse, Vincent St, Daylesford
Tuesday 14th Dec 7.30pm @ Powerhouse, Vincent St, Daylesford
Tuesday 21st Dec 7.30pm @ Harvest Cafe, Daylesford
Tuesday 11th Jan 7.30pm @ Powerhouse, Vincent St, Daylesford
Tuesady 25th Jan 7.30pm @ Blackwood Community Hall
Tuesday 8th Feb 7.30pm @ Powerhouse Vincent St, Daylesford
.....please ring before as meeting details change.....

ph/fax: 5348-1748

WFS COMMITTEE
President - Tim Anderson [redacted]
Treasurer - Peter O'Mara [redacted]
Secretary - Madeleine Bodenham [redacted]
Commitee Members - Loris Duclos [redacted]
John Endacott [redacted]
Henk Bak [redacted]

Your Membership Status

According to our records the following is our understanding of your membership. If your records indicate ortherwise, or your address label is incorrect, please let us know so that we can update our lists.

LAST PAID / /?
(date)

NOW DUE
PAID UP UNTIL
/ /? (date)

We are continually amazed and gratified by the generosity of members and supporters of WFS. If you have previously donated money in addition your membership fees, please accept our grateful thanks. We continue to rely on your support to maintain our campaign.

Membership renewal forms are located inside the back page of this newsletter.

RFA UPDATE

The Wombat Forest Society is working on overdrive, fuelled by the continued mismangement of our local forests. The long winter months have seen our campaign travel far and wide, holding many community and stakeholder meetings and continually keeping the DNRE and timber interests accountable for the sustainability problems that exist within the Wombat Forest. Probably more importantly, the Wombat Forest Society, through its strong participatory role within the Western Victorian Forest Protection Network has helped to invigorate a collective non-timber voice across the western region of Victoria.The WVFPN has grown into a network of 20 member groups with a combined membership of 10,000 people, ranging from the radical to the conservative. For the first time, the RFA process is being scrutinised by the non-timber community and the State/Federal bureaucracy is struggling. Our most recent meeting, held in Camperdown, overwhemingly endorsed an extension of the RFA timetabling and provision for greater community participation in the process. The independant audit into the sustainablity of the Wombat Forest resource, supported by Wilson Tuckey of all people, is an example of shift in government approach bought about by detailed analysis and lobbying by the Wombat Forest Society and will be included within the RFA process. And About time!! Even still, the RFA process is still fatally flawed and the Wombat Forestr Society is continually re-evaluating its participation within the process. Unless an adequate extension is provided beyong 31st December, 1999, then we would most likely withdraw from the process. The Wombat Forest Society has been campaigning for too long to be fooled by a convieniently rushed process. Whatever decision make in rgard to the Regional Forest Agreement, will be done on what is best for our local forests, now and into the future, but be assured the Wombat Forest Society is working at many levels for the best possible outcome. The Wombat Forest is everything.

STOP PRESS

The West Victorian Regional Forest Agreement process has been extended to 31st March, 2000 after extensive lobbying by Wombat Forest Society and other conservation groups.

THE AGE
THURSDAY 12 AUGUST 1999 $1.00

Row flares over logging audit

A state minister warns her federal counterpart to stay out of Victoria.

By **CLAIRE MILLER**
ENVIRONMENT REPORTER

The State Government has slammed the Federal Forestry and Conservation Minister, Mr Wilson Tuckey, for "interfering" over logging rates in the Wombat State Forest.

The Federal Government has appointed independent auditors to investigate the rates after an analysis indicated timber would be exhausted within 15 years.

The move has infuriated the Conservation Minister, Mrs Marie Tehan, who insists her department's calculations are right and the state does not need "inappropriate interference" from Mr Tuckey.

"Mr Tuckey is barking up the wrong tree," she said. "He should concentrate on problems he has in Western Australia and should allow the formula of due process, which has worked in Victoria for past RFAs (Regional Forests Agreements), to be followed. We do not need inappropriate interference from Mr Tuckey."



Feuding: Marie Tehan is furious with Wilson Tuckey.

But the Victorian Association of Forest Industries welcomed the audit, saying it was in line with a letter from sawmillers and the Wombat Forest Society to Mrs Tehan last year.

The association's executive director, Mr Graeme Gooding, said the industry believed the sustainable yield set by the Department of Natural Resources and Environment should be attainable, "but we are as keen as the (forest) society to ensure the figures are right".

An analysis by the Wombat Forest Society predicted timber in the central Victorian forest would run out within 15 years, putting more than 200 regional jobs at risk.

It said logging rates would need to be halved to restore the balance.

Mr Tuckey said yesterday he agreed to the audit after meeting the society. The audit, which is in addition to routine reviews by the Bureau of Rural Sciences as part of the impending western RFA, will be conducted by two respected forestry academics.

Asked if the audit indicated a lack of confidence in the state's figures, Mr Tuckey said he just wanted to build up as much confidence in the RFA process as possible.

Mr Tuckey also approved an independent audit in Western Australia before its RFA was signed three months ago.

The Wombat audit comes as community tensions mount over the western RFA, which also covers the Otways.

Public consultation periods have been cut short with pressure to complete the agreement by the end of the year to maintain woodchip exports.

Public meetings in Woodend, Trentham and Daylesford over the past month have been packed, with motions passed demanding forests be handed over to community control.

More than 4000 signatures have been collected on petitions.

Much of the Wombat is in the seat of Gisborne, where the Health Minister, Mr Rob Knowles, is attempting to move to the lower house as the anointed deputy premier to replace Alan Stockdale.

WOMBAT RFA MEETINGS

The Wombat Forest Society held three RFA community information nights over the last three months. The three meetings, attended by 500 people, held in Daylesford, Blackwood and Napoleons, are representative of the Wombat Forest Society's ongoing committment to open and balanced forest debate. All RFA meetings were well atttended and reflective of the local community's increasing concern about the state of our local Wombat Forest. The RFA meetings had forum representation from the Wombat Forest Society, Victorian Association of Forest Industries, Department of Resources and Natural Environment, the Construction, Mining, Forrestry and Energy Union, Victorian Apiarists Association and the Macedon Ranges Conservation Society. The Wombat Forest Society, although conservation based, is committed to real and open dialogue with all stakeholders, including timber interests.

Loris Duclos and Tim Anderson, Wombat Forest Society, expressed strong concerns that the rushed RFA process may inhibit the community's ability to contribute to an agreement process that will adequately protect important environmental considerations, including long-term sustainability and water catchment values. Tim Andersons told the meetings that the current overharvesting of the Wombat Forest will see the timber industry within the Midlands region collapse within fifteen years and that sustaimable yeild outcomes need to be reduced to a more realistic level by any Regional Forest Agreement. Obviously, there is no use governments signing off a 20 year forest agreement if the timber supply cannot be sustained for that period of time. As for vital non-timber values, well who knows.

Tim Anderson added that the Wombat Forest Society's detailed analysis of the DNRE's current and future sustainability modelling shows that local timber interests are already cutting into the next genration of sawlog. Tim Anderson also called for the community to take back the running of the Wombat Forest, given DNRE's incompetence and the unique reltaionship between local comnservationists and the timber industry.

Loris Duclos provided the RFA meetings with a compassionate and impressively detailed synopsis on the ongoing problems for our water catchment and mineral springs due to poor management practises and sustainability issues within the Wombat Forest. She told the meetings that the Wombat Forest contains the headwaters of five major rivers, including the Campapse and Werribee and that any management problems will effect the water supply of over one million people, especiall those in Melbourne's fast growing western corridor.

Most notably, at all the RFA meetings, both the timber industry or DNRE were unable to refute any of the Wombat Forest Society's claims, but instead asked us, the community, to have faith in the process. Sound familiar!!
Well Done Loris and Tim!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

John Drohan, representing the Victorian Association of Forest Industries, told the Daylesford and Blackwood meetings that the timber industry believed that the RFA process would provide both employment and investment certainity for local sawmills due to a more secure resource structure. Reading from prepareed sheets and with a rather banal tone, Mr Drohan was unable to answer about sustainability put forward by community members from the floor. Once again, he put all his faith behind DNRE's ability to sustainably manage the forest. Here we go again! One eye closed, the other greedy one open. Meanwhile our local forests are being trashed.

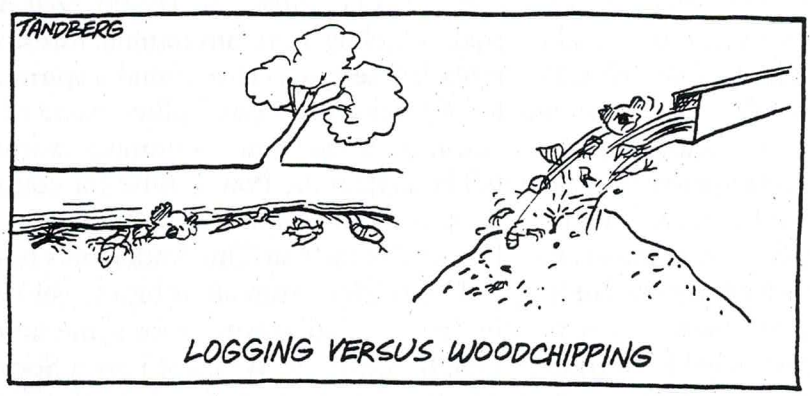
Michael O'Connor and Jane Calvert, Construction, Mining, Forestry and Energy Union, ran an agressively militant but more honest line. Although expressing strong support for the RFA process to provide job security for local timber workers, they did say that they would reconsider their position if the Wombat Forest was found to be unsustainable. At the Daylesford meeting, the CMFEU member s staged a walkout in protest to certain motions regarding woodchipping, but later expressed thanks to the Wombat Forest Society to actively participate in the local forest debate. Most importantly, the Wombat Forest Society and the CMFEU still continue to have an ongoing relationship with regular dialogue.

Marcus Ward, Macedon Ranges Conservation Society, reinforced the Wombat Forest Society's endorsement that a rushed RFA process would have a negative impact on the community's environmental and recreational rights to the local forests. Marcus believed that the management of the Wombat and Cobaw Forests was being structured to allow for possible privatisation in the future. The Macedon Ranges Conservation Society believe that any particpation in the RFA process is faltered and that the community should reject the process altogether.

At the Napoleons meeting, the Enfield Forest Alliance and Victorian Apairists Association also declared their lack of faith in DNRE and major concerns about the RFA process. Julie Donaghy, Enfield Forest Alliance, spoke of their newly formed local forest group's committment to sustainable and balanced non-timber outcomes within the Enfield Forest especially given its importabnt flora and fauna. John Corrigan, Eureka Timbers, spoke of the timber industry's outlook with a bit more vigor but still little punch. Tim and Loris were fantasic once again.!!!!

Unfortunately, but hardly surprising, the DNRE had only one representative (Ian Miles) at one meeting (Blackwood) and then ask why the community don't have faith in the RFA process.

I believe Mr Jeff Kennett is now aking himself the same Question.



Will they ever learn??????

The Howard Government's rewriting of federal environmental protection laws is equivalent to asking Hannibal Letcher to babysit the kids. The recent article by Claire Miller (The Age 22/6) regarding the Environment Protection And Biodiversity Bill highlighted the immediate and long-term dangers that this legislation poses to enviromental protections. Many environmental safeguards, such as Environmental Impact Statements, will no longer be required, leaving our natural world vulnerable to industry outlook and greed. The new legislation, by handing greater responsibilty to State Governments, would diminish much of this and last generations hard fought protection mechanisms. We will enter a new millenium of environmental decay. Already the Federal Government has shown through the current Regional Forest Agreements that our forests are now at unsustainable whim of industry-based management practices without adequate environmental protection strategy. The woodchip is now star player and umpire of our native forests. How can anyone call this responsible legislating? Once again, the Federal Government has shown itself to possess a dollar-sized environmental capacity. The bottom line is that environmental protection has been sacrificed by economically driven policy intent. We truly live in unenlightened times.

A New Home

On August 15th, the Wombat Forest Society moved into an office space in the Powerhouse Art Space in Vincent Street Daylesford at a very suitable rental arrangement. The Powerhouse, founded in 1996, is primarily a contempary art space which is largely self-funded, operating on voluntary labour from resident artists and a wider group of interested people in the community. Wombat Forest Society member, Amanda Rowlands, co-founded the Powerhouse and is delighted for the WFS to be moving in. Over the last three years, the Powerhouse venue has launched many art exhibitions, community-based and individual events and performances. Many of these have had a strong environmental content such as *Recycling, The World That Ate Itself, Landscape to Land* with focus on aboriginal, recycling, uranium mining, forest and sustainability issues. The Wombat Forest Society seems to have found a spiritual and community home. We are hoping that the new centrally located office space will provide for more community input into our increasingly time consuming campaign. The Wombat Forest Society computer will be kept at the Powerhouse for community use as well as a library and facsmilie facility. Also, the Wombat Forest Society will soon be going on-line. For the momnet, the phone wil remain at Tim Anderson's house and probably until the RFA agreement is signed. We might even allow him to get back on with his life then! But then, maybe not. So for now, and hopefully for some time into the future, the Daylesford Powerhouse is the home of the Wombat Forest Society. Please call in and have a chat or just enjoy yourself to look at whatever exhibition is on offer.

Recent Sabotage on Dwyers Mill

The recent sabotage on Dwyers Mill, Daylesford has been strongly condemned by the Wombat Forest Society as both thoughtless and unjustified. The Dwyers Mill has long been supported by the Wombat Forest Society as a timber business of high standing as represented by our continual nomination of the sawmill for the FOE 'Good Wood' Guide. Unfortunately the local timber industry (and their new P.R. company) took upon themselves to blame the Wombat Forest Society for this unwanted vandalism because of our so-called "raising" of the emotive debate. The timber industry's mock environment group, the deceptively named "Forest Protection Society" had the cheek to accuse the Wombat Forest Society of misrepresenting the facts. Yeah right! The following comments by Debbie Mauric (Midland Express 21/9) of the Forest Protection Society that the Wombat Forest Society should take responsibility for the recent sabotage incident at Dwyers Sawmill is both ridiculously niave and defamatory. The Wombat Forest Society and, in particular, our president Mr Tim Anderson, have lobbied that our local forest debate should be conducted with shared, reasonable and intelligent dialogue between all interested stakeholders. Neglectfully, the Midland Express article failed to mention that the man charged over the sawmill incident had no alliance with any local environmental group, so any ascertain of responsibility should rest toatally with the individual involved. It would appear that the local timber industry head honchos are now looking for any opportunity to discredit the Wombat Forest Society's excellent conservation work.. Well bad luck fellas, the Wombat Forest Society has worked too hard within our local communities to have our reputation hoodwinked by such industry propanganda and accusation. Furthermore, contary to Ms Mauric's claims, the Wombat Forest Society, unlike other environment groups, are participating in the RFA process and have had timber industry representation at all their RFA funded meetings. In fact, Ms Mauric actually attended most of these herself, asking questions from the floor and even holding conversation with me afterward. So now, who is telling the porky pies? The only truth that remains is that our much loved Wombat Forest continues to be unsustainably logged.

TREASURERS REPORT

The finances of the Wombat Forest Society remain solvent, but not exactly robust. The last three months has shown unprecedented financial demand due our committed involvement in the West Victorian RFA process, Fortunately, our strong membership base continues to renew memberships and provide additional donations. Recent non-renewal donations have enabled us to re-establish an office space at the Powerhouse Art Gallery at an extremelt affordable rental. Thank-you! The Wombat Forest Society does need to extend its fundraising base though if we are to remain financially bouyant. Unfortunately, the current committee members are heavily involved in the RFA campaign etc... and could do with some extra help. As we all know, money doesn't grow on trees unless you belong to the timber industry. The real truth of the matter is that dedicated WFS committee often give up their own financial position to ensure that our campaign remains financial. You can be well assured that all monies of the Wombat Forest Society are tightly monitored and frugally spent but we definitely need more of the stuff. As always, we thank you for your generous memberships and donations. Please keep them coming.

Timber Industry and its Cast of a Thousand Faces

The recent timber industry incarnation, the deceptively named Regional Forest Agreement and Community Coalition (Midland Express, Oct 12) has one vital missing ingredient, the community. Like their bogus environment group, the Forest Protection Society, the local timber industry has once again attempted to "greenwash" themselves within the RFA process and local community with nothing more than industralised propaganda. If Mr Geoff Proctor, resources manager for Black Forests Timbers, believes that the forest is well managed and sustainable, then can we assured that he will not avail himself to RFA industry compensation if the agreement proves otherwise? The Wombat Forest Society think not! The real truth is that while the timber industry continually reinvents their public front, the Wombat Forest is being logged (not harvested) at an unsustainable rate. Surely, the local community are too intelligent to believe such blatant misrepresentation by a fat bellied timber industry clutching at a diminishing supply of straws. Or is that native trees?

Western Victorian Forest Protection Network Update

The Western Victorian Forest Protection Network, initiated by the Wombat Forest Society to provide a networked community voice for the West Victorian Regional Forest Agreement, now has twenty member groups. The WVFPN have recently lobbied both State and Federal governments and agencies expressing detailed concerns regarding the current management and deadlines of the agreement process. Following a recent meeting (3rd October) held in Camperdown, attended by all member groups from across the West region and interested representation by the Wilderness Society, Friends of the Earth and Environment Victoria, a provision of shared concerns and stuctural demands was collectively drafted and sent to all major political parties (State & Federal) and the appropriate government agencies involved in the RFA process, DNRE and the National Forest Task Force.

The WVFPN member groups believe that the definition of the West region as one entity is preventing proper analysis of the many differing forest values. The Comprehensive Regional Assessment report, part of which was released in July as a status document, has failed to provide non-timber forest interest groups with much confidence due to an unbalanced approach to other relative forest values (ie.tourism, water catchment, beekeeping) and contains severe qualitive shortcomings. Also, the WVFPN believe that the RFA process is being driven by the Forestry Division of the DNRE which appears too closely aligned to timber and woodchipping interests. In fact, the CRA report document included DNRE staff members in the timber industry employment data. Furthermore, the release and public consultation of the CRA report was mostly unprofessional and lacking any strategic guideline. The RFA process has delibrately excluded the City of Geelong, the regions largest population centre, despite its vital interest in forest management issues related to maintaining tourism and water values.

The WVFPN letter has demanded that the RFA process be extended for one year beyond the current December 31st deadline to enable adequate research to be completed and appropriate community consultation to occur. An extension of this deadline has already been supported by the Victorian Association of Forest Industries, the Forestry Divsion of the Construction, Mining, Forestry and Energy Union and now other key stakeholders in the Gippsland RFA, the only other remaining unsigned Regional Forest Agreement on Australia. Any new research within this extension must provide a comprehensive assessment of non-timber values, including water catchment, tourism, biodiversity, plantation and other non-destructive forest activities such as beekeeping and recreational fishing. The extension should contain appropriate provision of applying 'interim protection' to areas indentified in the CRA report as being deficient in Reserve levels in each vegetation class and any new areas of important community forest value. The WVFPN member groups want DNRE to be excluded from the management of the West Victorian RFA and an independant committee, including community stakeholder representatives, to oversee the detailed research.

If these demands are not met, then the member groups of the Western Victorian Forest Protection Network will seriously consider withdrawing from the West Victoria RFA process.

The WVFPN now awaits a reply from all concerned parties.

WVFPN MEMBER GROUPS

Wombat Forest Society	Otways Ranges Environment Network
ANGAIR	Enfield Forest Alliance
Actively Conserving Trentham	Daylesford Walking Group
Portland Field Naturalists	Hamilton Filed Naturalists
South West Environment Action Group	Friends of the Lerdederg
Ballarat Field Naturalists	Dhuart Warrong Elders Coorporation
Victorain Apiarists Association	Enviro West
Apollo Bay Landcare Group	Friends of Bannockburn Bush
Geelong Field Naturalists	Golden Plains Tourism Association
Break'O'Day Forest Environment Group	Barwon Biodiversity Watch

THE WOODMAN Linda Zibell

A glimpse
of his sinewed, stick-insect body
in the forest:
the sapling legs rooted to earth,
his trunk, (the erect torso),
the branched arms,
that stretch.
Twig-fingered hands
grasp the axe...

(just a notion)

With each thud of metal upon wood,
with each chop,
has tree impacted on him in return?

Sap for blood,
to the heartwood.

The Wombat Forest Society & A Labour Government

The recent shock State election result has some positives for the Wombat Forest campaign although it will be some time before we are able to accurately gauge the Labour Government's environmental creditionals. During the State election, the Wombat Forest Society , in keeping with its apolitical approach, availled itself to all major political players, especially those contesting the seat of Gisborne. All three major Gisborne candidates, Joanne Duncan (Labour), Rob Knowles (Liberal) and Deb Dunne (Independant) were taken on tours into the Wombat Forest by WFS committee members and walked away with the same collective disbelief. Both Joanne Duncan and Deb Dunn attended all the Wombat Forest Society's RFA meetings showing an informed and committed approach to local forest issues. Obviously, Rob Knowles didn't bother and know finds himself sitting at home counting his parliamentary payout. The other Wombat Forest electorate, Ballarat East, failed to focus on local forest issues although Geoff Howard (Labour) did keep in touch and is now keen to be briefed on Wombat Forest issues. As history now has it, the Australian Labour Party won both the Gisborne and all Ballarat seats. Joanne Duncan (Gisborne) had a strong emphasis on forest sustainability and an extension of the RFA process within her campaign and was duly awarded the prize scalp of Health Minister and Kennett buddy, Mr Rob Knowles. Post election, Joanne Duncan has renewed her committment to the Wombat Forest, especially an extension to the RFA timetabling. Joanne is extremely keen to maintain a working relationship with the Wombat Forest Society. The Wombat Forest Society has also been contacted by Geoff Howard (Ballarat East) and we will be meeting with all other Ballarat members over the next month. Geoff Howard has recently been appointed Parliamentary Secretary fo the Environment. The new Environment and Conservation Minister, Sherryl Garbutt is well aware of the problems of the Wombat Forest from her time in opposition and will also be attending these meetings. In "The Age" (4/10), Ms Garbutt announced that the Wombat Forest will be used as a pilot program for International Forest Stewardship Council standards for sustainable timber production to be tested. She also promised a more, open consultative approach to negotiating the West RFA and flagged a new transparency withn the DNRE. Obviously, these are all important initiatives and the result of heavy lobbying by the Wombat Forest Society. The Wombat Forest Society will also be pushing for a Parliamentary Inquiry into DNRE and its relationship with timber and woodchipping interests. The Wombat Forest Society says goodbye to the retiring Dick DeFEgely (Ballarat) who showed himself to be a responsive local member on Wombat Forest issues. We hope that our newly elected local members continue to provide a voice for non-timber forest value within the Wombat Forest. As for Marie Tehan, outgoing Environment & Conservation Minister, it's good riddance and thanks for nothing.

WOMBAT APPROACH GOES FURTHER

Our hardworking and inexhaustable committee member Loris Duclos has shifted with her two boys down to Paynesville and is now applying the Wombat Forest Society approach to the Gippsland forest debate. Loris has quickly set up the Tambo Environment Action Group and is using WFS computer modelling and pro-active dialogue approach has managed to give the Gippsland timber industry and playmates, DNRE, a much needed wake-up call. Amazingly, amongst all this, Loris has still managed to maintain a strong working profile within the Wombat Forest Society, especially with her detailed study of local water catchment values. The woman is an accelerator with no brake and thank goodness she is on our side. Like West Victoria, the Gippsland area is in the midst of a Regional Forest Agreement and surprise, surprise, the sustainability figures look decidely dodgy. Sound familiar!! Anyway, Loris has set about developing open dialogue and relationship opportunity amongst all forest stakeholders, including industry, DNRE, conservation groups, timber unions, apiarists and recreational fisherman. Recent meetings at Bairnsdale and Swifts Creek have shown strong support for both Loris and her approach. Wombat Forest Society committee members, Tim Anderson and Peter O'Mara have involved themselves in the Tambo campaign RFA meetings and the WFS are thrilled to see their unique conservation approach adopted elsewhere. And with much success!!!!!!!



Brush-tail Phascogale *Phascogale tapoatafa*

These small greyish marsupials are quickly identified by their long, black bushy tail.

They seldom feed on the ground preferring to nimbly run along or under major branches often leaping from tree to tree. Cockroaches, beetles, nectar and even small rats form the large part of their diet.

Mating occurs around June, and the males die a week after copulating. The females have no pouch, usually 3–6 young are produced in each litter. The newly born are hairless and rapidly lose heat even reaching a torpid state when their mother leaves the nest. The female needs to return to her nest every few hours to nurse her young.

Activities such as timber harvesting, collection of firewood or frequent fuel reduction burns can lead to a reduction in hollow trees. Foxes and cats also hunt this species.

Call for Parliamentary Inquiry into Forests

The Wombat Forest Society is calling upon the new State Government to conduct a full 'Parliamentary Inquiry' into the native forests of Victoria and their management. The Wombat Forest Society believes that there appears to be an agenda to run the forests in a 'plantation style' of management that will compromise other legitimate forest values and be detrimental to some sectors of the timber industry.

Successive State Governments have put the forest debate in the 'too hard basket', in the mean time the timber industry has no security, conservationists are seeing important non-timber values ignored and destroyed and communities are divided as the debate carries on. The WFS believes that it has been convenient for the Department of Natural Resources and Environment to have the timber industry and the conservation movement at each other's throats.

The new Bracks' State Government needs to put an end to this perpetual debate by showing the leadership and strength to hold a full parliamentary inquiry into the State forests of Victoria and their management.

The WFS is also calling for an extension of the Forestry Division of the Construction Forestry Mining & Energy Union (Oct 14 Gippsland News) call for an Independent Inquiry into the letting of tenders in East Gippsland, to be applied across the State.

There appears to be a 'too close relationship' between some sections of the Timber Industry and the Department of Natural Resources and Environment. Future management objectives will be in breach of State and Federal Regulations.

The WFS is also questioning the arrangement of industry-run syndicates, controlling the harvesting and distribution of sawlogs and residual timber. The arrangement has the potential to allow the dominant shareholders of the syndicate (sawmillers) to gain an advantage over fellow sawmillers in the distribution of prime sawlogs. The syndicate could also see the cutting up of sawlogs into various grades that suit sawlog and residual/pulp agendas, not necessarily the best recovery and use of the logs.

These syndicates have also seen significant reductions in pay-rates to timber workers and forced contractors into expensive harvesting equipment despite broad-scale concerns over sustainability. The syndicate has also seen contractors that question practises forced out of the forests.

The future agenda for operations in the forests will be for the coupes, groups of coupes or whole forests to be tendered out to the timber industry to have full harvesting rights and responsibility to regenerate the coupes. Currently we are seeing the regeneration of the forest being manipulated into a monoculture of single species. Will we have to buy our firewood permits from a sawmiller, the

logging syndicate or even Midways, the export woodchipper?

The futures of our forests are in dire peril. The new Bracks Government needs to set up a fully resourced 'Parliamentary Inquiry' that has a terms of reference that includes a review looks at the structure of the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, the relationship and movement between the NRE and parts of the timber industry, the management of our forests for all their values, Forest Victoria (the new commercial corporate arm of NRE) intergenerational sustainability of the forests, resource pricing and arrangements and a review of adoption of the recent KPMG report into the Forest Act with regard to the National Competition Policy and the 1993 Victorian Auditor-General Offices 'Special Report into the Timber Industry Strategy.

The Wombat Forest Society believes that the structures and arrangements between the NRE and the timber industry are possibly in contravention of National Competition Policy, in particular syndicated logging.

The ongoing controversy within our forests will not be settled, unless the State Government intervenes in the 'far from satisfactory' arrangements and hidden agendas that exist in our publicly owned forests. Our forests are our inheritance and it is our duty to pass them on to future generations in a fit and diverse condition, current forest arrangements will not deliver this.

It is up to the New Labor Government to show its commitment to rural Victoria and get our forests back into proper multiple value forest management.

The critical greenie vote

If Rob Knowles (Liberal) had stood up for the Wombat State Forest, which bordered his electorate, he may well have retained his seat. If David Treasure (National) had stuck up for the Snowy River, he might not have lost his seat.

If former Environment Minister Marie Tehan had performed as a champion for the environment, rather than "Minister in Charge of Battling Greenies", her former seat may have remained Liberal.

If Peter Ryan (National) had stood up for the Strzelecki State Forest and Wilsons Promontory, the swing against him may not have been an embarrassing 13 per cent.

In a subtle way, environmental issues throughout regional Victoria may have decided this election. Part of Labor's election successes can be attributed to the fact that it had a slightly better environmental policy than the coalition. Had it been stronger still, Labor may have won outright.

The major parties have compromised their environmental strength by accepting campaign funds from some of the environmental culprits. All major parties must take heed that country people, regardless of their political leanings, are far more concerned for the environment than governments and their advisers would realise.

Politicians for too long have been fearful of appearing slightly "green" lest it damage their public image. I strongly suggest that the opposite is true.

KIM DEVENISH, Stony Creek

Hidden Agendas for Regions Forests

The Wombat Forest Society is calling on the Department of Natural Resources and Environment and leading sawmillers from the Midlands Forest Management Area to come clean with their future agenda for our region's forests. The Wombat Forest Society believes that there is a 'hidden agenda', to log the Wombat, Cobaws and Enfield forests on 25 to 40 year rotations. This would be an abuse of the rights to harvest timber from Victoria's State Forests. The Code of Forest Practices requires minimum rotation of 80 years.

The Department of Natural Resources and Environment and sections of the timber industry have been carrying out 'discreet' tests in the Ash Wednesday regrowth between East Trentham and Macedon, in the Wombat State Forest. These trials have involved poisoning trees, extensive use of fertilisers and even the use of pesticides and other chemical cocktails. This area of the forest is the catchment to the Rossalynne Reservoir that services the western fringe of Melbourne and is immediately above the reservoir.

"The public forests in the region are expected to be managed in a way that preserves the integrity of the forests. What we have at present is a rapid conversion of the Wombat from a forest greater than one hundred years to one that the will be forty years and less by the year 2010. We have all seen the once great Wombat Forest almost entirely taken in just twenty-five years." Said Tim Anderson. Spokesperson WFS.

"This is not native forest management. This is a plantation approach to growing fast rotation trees. This is a violation of the rights to extract timber from our forests. These forest have many equally and in some instances greater value than the timber. A look at any of the regrowth in the forests illustrates the manipulation of the forest species mix towards one species, messmate, the preferred timber species. There is a requirement to regrow the forests to the same mix of species as was originally there." He added.

"If some sections of the timber industry wish to grow trees in this manner then they should consider buying private land and establishing their own plantations. We as Victorians will not allow this greedy conversion of our forests into tree farms." Mr. Anderson went on to say.

The WFS suggests people take a look at the fate our forest awaits yourself by driving along Jubilee Lake Road in Daylesford to the end and just carefully keep driving to the top of the range around 5 kilometers. On your right your will see a coupe that has just been harvested. What you will see is not the shelterwood system that DNRE claims to be applying in the Wombat, instead you will see 'Clearfell", in a forest that has so many other important values.

The people of the east of the Wombat should take a drive into the Cobaws, what you will see is an abuse of a forest. Judge it for yourself.

The region's newspapers are currently running a plethora of timber industry ads explaining how many mouths rely on the timber. Will the sections of the timber industry that are currently driving the unsustainable harvesting of the forests of the Midlands, equally guarantee full compensation and secure futures for these families when the trees run out in fifteen or less years? These same families that are portrayed are also reliant on a sustainable forest resource.

The reality is that the forests of the Midlands Forest Management Area have been over logged for twenty years. The

Department of Natural Resources and Environment has not been able to produce a model to the public that adds up. Two possibilities are that the NRE's forest modeling has a major flaw in it, or there is a cover up of the destruction of the Wombat.

"For the RFAs in the West of Victoria to have any credibility, they must be strong enough to establish an independently produced sawlog sustainability volume that ensures full inter-generational equity for the region and harvesting methods and rates that are sympathetic to other forest values." Said Tim.

If sections of the local timber industry have business plans larger than these forests can produce, then there may be a need to look elsewhere. The State Forests of Victoria belong to all of us, no one user of the forest can be allowed to compromise so many other values. This community is not against a timber industry in the region. We do expect that the operations and rates of harvesting in these forests recognise the other values. This is far from the case in the Wombat and nearby forests. We will not allow them to be turned into plantations.

While the timber industry continues to get its resource from 'native forests', they must accept that the community has the right to comment and question what happens in the forests. The communities in the region have been complaining about the condition of the forests for over ten years. The DNRE's and timber industry's response has been to move to more intensive and destructive logging. Just remember that the industry's access to our forests is by virtue of community acceptance, just look at the West Australian RFA situation to see what can happen when the community has a 'gut full' of seeing our forests abused. Take warning.



Powerful Owl *Ninox Strenua*

The Powerful Owl is Australia's largest owl. They are easily distinguishable by their white breast which is covered with many dark brown v-shaped markings.

Hunting usually occurs at dawn or dusk with possums, gliders and birds dominating their diet. These birds swoop down from their leafy perch and gather up their prey. The prey is torn apart, the head usually being eaten first.

Powerful Owls require tree hollows for nesting and their survival is dependant on the ongoing availability of hollows and prey species.

John Endacott (Wombat Forest Society) Thursday 16-IX-99

Notes for 3BBB Morning Show

FOREST ISSUES

The Wombat Forest Society has been active for some years now, campaigning for more rational and sustainable management of our forest.

W.F.S. reflects deep concern by many hundreds of people about the current management and future prospects of our forest. We are also aware of the broader implications for other forest areas throughout Victoria. It seems that many of the problems we have identified are institutional.

W.F.S. CONCERNS

1. Rapacious over-harvesting of the Wombat Forest
2. Excessive areas harvested
3. Adjacency problems. Too many adjacent Coupes harvested within short times of one-another.
4. Wasteful logging practices.
5. Destructive Regeneration burns.
6. Unreliable regeneration results. Too many coupes failed to regenerate.
7. Harvesting / management system unsympathetic to the needs of wildlife.
8. Harvesting / management system is crazy
9. Too much area harvested in short time. Over 60% of forest harvested in 20 years. This is incompatible with the stated nominal 80 year rotation period.
10. committed to supply the Timber Industry with unsustainable volumes of timber.
11. Secrecy and poor communication of D.N.R.E., confusion of technical language and double talk.
12. Obvious over-estimation of the timber resource available.
13. Failure of D.N.R.E. to adequately factor non-timber values into the forest management equation
14. Optimistic and unrealistic projections of future timber production.
15. Serious anomalies in D.N.R.E. forest planning.
16. Doubtful conclusions from supposed 'best practice' modelling, based on dubious data.
17. = obvious unsustainability of current forest management.
18. The fault is the policy which drives the D.N.R.E. to unsustainable management.

W.F.S. is not after a witch-hunt, we just want the problems fixed, and the future management of our forests to be ecologically, socially and economically sustainable.

W.F.S. has been seeking the start of the Regional Forest Agreement (R. F. A.) for the Wombat Forest for several years now, as our best opportunity to get an independent review of D.N.R.E.'s forest management.

R. F. A.

The R F A is a good concept. In principle its requirements are to balance competing interests in the forest. Its objectives are : to get the Timber Industry to better utilise the forest resource, and so become more competetive; to satisfy conservation requirements, to provide Resource Security for the Timber Industry, **and to resolve the conflicts over forest management.** Because of the seriousness of concerns expressed by W F S, the previous Labour Federal Government agreed to fast-track the process to give the Wombat Forest top priority in Victoria's R F A programme. Since then we have faced delay after delay, and seen R F A's conducted everywhere else with generous timetables; but now we have an abbreviated R F A process imposed on us, with an impossibly short deadline and insufficient time for public consultation and response.

The deadline for completion of the R F A for Western Victoria is the end of 1999; but the process only commenced early this year (1999). Yet elsewhere R F A processes have run for 18 months, with two 6-week public consultation periods. In Western Victoria we will only be allowed two 4-week consultation periods. This crazy timetable has been determined by the political necessity to resume woodchip exports in early 2000 - after completion and signing of the R F A!

The R F A process here is dodgy. Community consultation has been woefully inadequate.

If the R F A is to be successful it must resolve the disputes over the values and uses of our forests. Community consultation must be thorough; the process must be open, transparent and honest; and all relevant sectors of our society must have opportunities to balance the input of the Timber Industry and D.N.R.E.. This has not yet been achieved, and time is running out.

There are several communities in our region which have recently realised that the R F A process is underway here, and that it has serious implications for their communities - and their forests. These communities (Trentham, Kyneton, Woodend, Gisborne, Macedon, Enfield and its satellites, and Blackwood) have risen in horror when they realised the sad state of their forests. So much for D.N.R.E. having community consultation under control.

We have reasons to believe that the R F A process has been manipulated by the Victorian Government and D.N.R.E. to deflect scrutiny and justify unsustainable policies and practices.

ENFIELD CONCERNS

Like other communities, the residents of the Enfield Forest have just discovered the R F A. and the nature of the plans for their forest, and they are unimpressed. They do not like what they see of current management of their forest, and they have expressed alarm about the R F A and its implications.

As a part of the Midlands Forest Management Area, any shortfall in timber production must be met from other forested areas. Unsustainable operations in one forest will put pressure on other forests to make up licence commitments.

The values of the Enfield Forest appreciated by the residents are: the unique wildlife , and the recreational use, both current and potential. The Enfield people are remarkably well informed about these non-timber values, and they recognise that the timber harvesting programme of D.N.R.E. is largely incompatible with these values.

The end result of the long-range plans of D.N.R.E. will be the conversion of a mature regrowth forest to a mosaic of even-aged stands. This will not be in the interests of the wildlife of the forest.

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If undeliverable please return
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Daylesford, 3460



Loris DUCLOS
10 Queen Street
BAYNESVILLE
Victoria
3380

CAN YOU HELP?

THE WOMBAT FOREST SOCIETY COMMITTEE NEEDS HELP. WE ARE FEW IN NUMBERS AND DOING A LOT OF WORK TO PROTECT OUR FOREST. IF WE HAVE MORE PEOPLE READILY AVAILABLE TO SHARE THE WORKLOAD IT MAY MEAN LESS PERSONAL SACRIFICE ALL-ROUND, AND WE MAY ACTUALLY ACHIEVE MORE. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO DO MORE THAN JUST SENDING MONEY, PLEASE LET US KNOW. WE ARE INTERESTED IN PEOPLE WHO ARE PREPARED TO CONTRIBUTE TIME, INTELLECT AND EFFORT. IF YOU HAVE PREVIOUSLY OFFERED HELP, THANK-YOU-BUT PLEASE DO SO AGAIN. THE WOMBAT FOREST NEEDS HELP.

WFS-ph/fax (03) 5348-1748