Wombat Forest Society inc.

Wild & Wonderful Wood & Water Work & Wildlife

ASN: A0029445N

PO Box 428, Daylesford. 3460.
Ph/Fax: 0353 481748.

From: Tim Anderson
1 June, 2000

Dear Andrew,

I would like to take this opportunity to put in writing the Wombat Forest Society's concerns in relation to the current harvesting operations along Osbornes Road, between Curry's Hill and Bullarto. I would appreciate a written reply to the issues raised.

In relation to the question of whether there is sufficient forest of 30 years+ age of origin in the SMZ around the Bullarto/Musk Powerful Owl site. I suggest that instead of working on interpreting GIS data to determine age class left, it would be much more efficient to simply refer back to the logging history maps for the area in question. The WFS would request being given copies of these logging histories.

Any coupe that has had either a shelterwood 1 or shelterwood 2 harvest would be dis-qualified from the area counted as having age class 30+. The SW1 cuts would be classed as the age since the harvest took place and similarly, sw2 would also be counted in the same way (as per the Midlands FMA plan pg.120 and the phone conversation I had with you today.)

My analysis and knowledge of the area around Osbornes Rd/Bullarto and the area around Wombat Reservoir, most of the areas that are in the SMZ have had at least a SW1 harvest.

The WFS also has concerns that the intensity of harvesting along Osbornes Rd in the owl breeding season is too much. As discussed in our meeting yesterday, I believe that NRE's interpretation that the SW2 is not covered by the Code of Forest Practice in relation to adjacency, biodiversity and catchment protection is wrong. With respect to this I have suggested that a special meeting be convened to deal with this. This is being arranged via Hon. Joanne Duncan, Member for Gisborne.

The WFS is concerned that when Gary Mackintosh raised the 10ha reserve near Bullarto with local staff, he was told that unless he (Gary) could produce the letter that David Bedall had sent granting reserve status on this area, it would be logged. Was this arrogance on NRE's part or do you not keep records.

Secondly, when Wendy Bone, who lives near the Powerful Owl nesting site phoned you (yesterday) to inform you that the pair was not nesting at the site near her, but in the other nesting site near Bullarto Reservoir, that you apparently informed Wendy that it was up to her to prove that this was the case and not NRE. Does this mean that we the community are expected to be NRE's record keepers and police. If so then we are in for an interesting future.

In response to community requests, the WFS are organising a public meeting at the Bullarto Hall on the evening of Thursday June 8, 7:30pm (tentative) in response to community concerns. The aim of this meeting would be to discuss the current harvesting in the area and allow NRE, community, timber industry and the union to put forward their various perspectives. This is a formal request for you or an appropriate NRE representative to be a speaker.

We would also request a moratorium on all harvesting in the prescribed Powerful Owl protection area until after this meeting. We believe that to attempt to harvest in the mean time would be provocative.

If NRE decides to allow the contractors to continue harvesting in this area until this issue is fully resolved, then the WFS will be ensuring that full accountability and penalties be applied to NRE staff responsible.

There is a lot of feeling around the community that this issue is the 'straw that has broken the camel's back'. Given the extent of harvesting in the Wombat, tolerance is very low, we are being asked to join in protest and possibly direct action over this issue. The WFS hopes that a path of reason can be found.

The WFS is not being pedantic on this issue, we are simply sick of seeing the Management Plans, Code and now the RFA interpreted always to suit the extraction of timber over other values, especially when these interpretations are made not on science and consultation but whim.

Yours truly,
Tim Anderson

Cc: Minister Garbutt
Hon. Geoff Howard
Hon. Joanne Duncan
Hon John McQuilten

19th Oct 2000

Wombat Forest Society inc.

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PO Box 428, Daylesford. 3460.
Ph/Fax: 0353 481748.

Media Release

19 October, 2000

Contacts: Tim Anderson. 5348 1748
Peter O'Mara 5348 1154

After three days of tense stand-offs between NRE, logging contractors, the Wombat Forest Society and members of the community, a resolution to the controversial Bullarto Powerful Owl Zone logging has been reached.

The decision to send in the loggers to the coupe on Osbourne's Road Leitches Creek before outstanding concerns of over logging in the coupe has put the WFS and supporters on the brink of directly intervening to halt logging. A number of people had raised concerns earlier this year that the required 500 hectares of greater than 30 year old forest was not left within the Special Management Zone in Bullarto. NRE analysis pre-winter had shown that they could log another 290 hectares and still meet their requirements under the RFA and the Midlands Forest Area Management Plan for the protection of the owl.

The WFS along with other residents of the area have carried out extensive on ground surveys and logging history reviews over winter and could not find the implied areas. It was unacceptable that the loggers were put into the coupe before concerns where allayed. This placed the loggers and excess of fifty WFS and community members in the position of imminent confrontation on Tuesday. Whilst tensions rose in the bush NRE and community members reviewed maps and logging histories in the NRE Daylesford office.

By the time the re-analysis was complete the 290-hectare buffer NRE had was reduced to 57 hectares, with some questions still unanswered. During a conference at the coupe over the new figures later that afternoon the loggers explained that they would see civil charges laid on anyone that disrupted logging. The protesters explained that they would welcome the opportunity to argue the issue of area as their defense in court with the accompanying media, represented by the top legal representation that was offered to the group.

NRE supplied alternative analysis on Wednesday that confirmed that the area available was still very marginal, around 50 hectares. Extensive consolation with around twenty five protester delegates and NRE in the Community Forest Embassy, the infamous teepee, which was set up outside NRE Daylesford's office on Wednesday. This resulted in an agreed outcome.

After general discussion that the figures where too close to be able to clearly stop the logging under legal means an agreement from NRE was given that there would be no logging within the Powerful Owl Management Zone for the next ten years. This

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Ref:

2 July 2000

Mr Tim Anderson
Wombat Forest Society Inc.
PO Box 428
Daylesford 3460

Dear Mr Anderson

Timber Harvesting at Bullarto

Thank you for your letter of 1 June 2000 raising a number of issues regarding the level of timber harvesting in the vicinity of Bullarto. Your letter raises a number of issues which I will address in turn.

Implementation of the Powerful Owl Strategy

The Midlands Forest Management Plan establishes a requirement to protect sufficient habitat for a minimum of 25 owls towards a statewide target of 500. For each owl, the plan specifies the maintenance of at least 500 hectares of reserved protected owl habitat plus a further 500 hectares which is greater than 30 years old to be maintained within 3.5 km. These areas combined, totalling 1000 hectares, are considered sufficient to support enough prey to sustain a breeding pair of owls. The zoning is based mostly on records of Powerful Owls. This is to ensure good quality habitat is maintained but no assumption is made as to *which* particular owl uses the protected area.

Each year, as the Wood Utilisation Plan is developed, an analysis is conducted of available forest resource data and of logging history data recorded since completion of the resource assessment. In the Wombat State forest the forest resource data used is the assessment completed in the early 1990s which maps forest by crown class and year of origin. Coupes are scheduled in SMZ only where there the analysis shows that sufficient 30 year old and greater habitat has been retained in addition to 500 hectares of SPZ.

Following your expression of concern over the adequacy of retained habitat in the vicinity of the owl record at Leitches Creek (close to Wendy Bones' property), NRE suspended logging operations while a review of the initial analysis was conducted. This review examined:

- the basis of the original estimate of habitat areas, including any assumptions;
- the calculations used in the original estimate of habitat areas;
- recent aerial photography to conduct a 'reality check' on the estimate.

State Government Offices, 402 – 406 Mair Street, Ballarat 3350
Telephone (03) 5333 6544
Fax (03) 5333 6733

Following this, I am satisfied that in addition to 500 ha of SPZ, there is at least a further 500 ha of suitable mature forest. This assumes that 1970s first-cut shelterwood coupes are considered to be greater than 30 years old. In view of the relatively high level of retention of mature canopy in these early shelterwood cuts, I believe that this is warranted. More recent shelterwood cuts are not considered to be suitable habitat and are excluded from the analysis.

As you will be aware, the analysis depends on the reliability of the initial assessment and on subsequent logging history records. New SFRI data due for completion over the next year or so will assist in improving the precision of estimates and, I hope, will provide you with greater confidence in the outcomes.

Harvesting During the Owl Breeding Season

Measures in the Midlands Forest Management Plan aim to avoid disturbance of breeding owls by ensuring total exclusion of harvesting with 100 metres of an otherwise unprotected site and within 300 metres of sites during the breeding season. The Leitches Creek site falls entirely within a large (approx. 250 ha) SPZ and no logging has occurred within 650 metres of the Leitches Creek site this season.

Discussion with Ms Wendy Bone

My recollection of my telephone discussion with Ms Wendy Bone is that she advised that believed that the Powerful Owl previously resident at Leitches Creek may have moved to the vicinity of the Wombat Reservoir. My response to this was that such a relocation is consistent with observed behaviour of other Powerful Owls and does not have any influence on the implementation of owl habitat protection measures in the vicinity of Bullarto. Nevertheless I advised Ms Bone that I would welcome any information she may be able to provide on a new roosting or nesting location of the owl. I do not *expect* her to do this and I regret any misunderstanding that may have occurred.

General Level of Harvesting along Osborne Road

The two stage shelterwood harvesting system means that larger areas of forest are harvested each year. This reduces flexibility in coupe scheduling, making aggregation of coupes harder to avoid. In most cases, aggregations are of shelterwood 2 coupes. Two significant measures are being taken by NRE which will reduce the extent of this issue. These are the planned reduction of harvest levels from 58,000 m^3/year to 40,000 m^3/year with a further review to follow, and the implementation of improved habitat retention measures to apply to the general management zone from 2000/2001.

Proposed Walking Track at Bullarto

Subsequent to the commencement of harvesting near Bullarto in May, Gary McIntosh drew to the Department's attention that an agreement had been reached with him to protect an area in the vicinity of Quartz Track for a prospective recreation development. This informal agreement was reached prior to development of the Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) for West Victoria. During development of the RFA, draft zoning maps were published which did not include the proposed reserve and despite receipt of submissions from WFS and Mr McIntosh in relation to the RFA, no reference was made to the proposed recreation development or the earlier agreement relating to protection of the site. Further, the WUP for the area in question was made available for public comment some time ago and no issues were raised. In view of this, NRE had no reason to assume any continuing interest on the part of the community groups or individuals in the area.

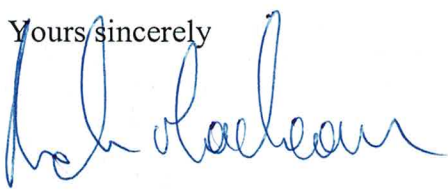
Forestry operations staff are entitled to schedule coupes in accordance with the RFA. In view of the sequence of events outlined above, they are entitled to ask for evidence of any commitment made by either a State or Commonwealth Minister. I would not expect the Daylesford office to hold copies of such correspondence and, in any event, the Commonwealth Minister has no power to specify reservation of an area of State forest except through an RFA.

Now that Mr McIntosh has again raised the issue of a walking track linked to the tourist railway, NRE has agreed to extend the earlier agreement to protect parts of the area which may have some future use for a walking track and associated facilities. NRE will confirm these arrangements in writing with Mr McIntosh and request submission of a detailed proposal so that a final decision on the use of the area can be made.

While I appreciate that it is not always possible, early advice of concern over harvesting proposals, preferably as the WUP is developed will greatly assist NRE to deal with issues in a more orderly way. In this case, the ultimately unnecessary disruption to logging contractors has caused them considerable expense.

Thank you for raising these matters. While I expect there may be continuing differences of opinion over forest management practices, I look forward to establishing and maintaining a constructive relationship with the Wombat Forest Society within the framework of the West Victoria RFA.

Yours sincerely



Andrew Maclean
Regional Forests Manager, Western Victoria