Will Community Forest Management help the Plantation Sector's Environmental and Social Credibility?

The public is split over the issue of plantations as an alternative or supplement to native forest timber. Some environmental groups are calling for a quick transition into plantation sourced wood and fibre, while other groups see much deeper environmental and social negatives with plantations and are questioning whether this is an acceptable alternative.

The introduction of Community Forest Management into the public native forests sector in Victoria has resulted in members of the community asking to incorporate private timber production to the CFM model.

With Community Forest Management moving the debate over forests and timber production from the emotive level to a more informed and holistic base, the issue of private tree production with a greater social and environmental basis is already happening.

The paper will examine the perspective's that Community Forest Management is bringing to 'local as well as the big-picture issues' surrounding forest, catchments and supplying our current and future timber needs, fibre and firewood. To this end the paper will move from the public forest context and into the private domain and look at the CFM opportunities within the farm forestry context. These moves can help the plantation sector meet its Triple Bottom Line requirements.

Tim Anderson has been engaged in issues surrounding forests and tree production as a community activist for 15 years. His original focus was were the native forests of his region in Central Victoria. In that time he has served on many committees. He is a founding member of the Wombat Forest Society and was President from 1996-2002.

Mr Anderson developed sustainablilty modelling review systems that bought about the Vanclay Review that heralded the 'Our Forest Our Future' restructure of the Victorian Forest Agency. He is a member of the West Victorian Farm Sawlog Project Steering Committee, acted as a Consultant for ACF, Environment Victoria and is currently working for the Department of Sustainability and Environment implementing the 1st Community Forest Management project in the Wombat Forest.

Will Community Forest Management help the Plantation Sector's Environmental and Social Credibility?

Tim Anderson
Wombat Community Development Officer

February 2004

Introduction

Modern day Community Forest Management has two distinct origins. The first follows the traditional relationship that many communities have with the forests in their region. In some parts of the world this could be seen as traditional practices that date back hundreds if not thousand of years. The second influence is as a result of looking for alternatives to entrenched and growing opposition to the intensive forest management practices of the past 50 years.

Michael Pilarski in his book Restoration Forestry states: 'The history of forests throughout the "civilised world" has been largely one of destruction and degradation. Present-day, industrial forest management practices are largely contributing to this destruction of life on earth. The world's forests are on a downward spiral. It is time to reverse this trend and begin to build up forest resources.'[1] (Pilarski 1994)

In the case of the Wombat State Forest in Victoria, 20-years of community concern over logging methods and sustainability, ultimately convinced the Bracks Government to engage an independent analysis of State-wide harvesting volumes in 2000. The outcome of this study resulted in an average State-wide reduction in volume of 30% and in the case of the Midlands Forest Management Area, which includes the Wombat Forest, the reduction was 79%.

The government decided to trial Community Forest Management in the Wombat Forest. The trial has been in the implementation phase since April 2003. Since that time a series of meetings and workshops has seen the process gain increased and broader involvement from the community, near and far. An interim structure is currently in place with an aim of moving into the formal commencement of CFM on 1 July 2004. The first section of this paper will explain the process to date as well as some issues and developments.

The second part of the paper will explore some of the current concerns surrounding plantations on a social and environmental level. These revolve around the apparent or actual economically' driven broad scale industrial plantations.

In a society that is currently looking at 'level playing fields' for economically based activities, plantations based primarily on economic return will be forced to be accountable for its impacts in relation to water and other socio-environmental values. It is inevitable that a farmer that has to pay for water consumption via 'water rights' will challenge plantation growers in the upper catchments who use similar volumes of water free of charge.

Impacts at a social level have also seen plantation companies become subject of widespread criticism and opposition. The buying up of farms and conversion to plantations has bought about the collapse of some communities.

On an environmental level, trees are an important tool in the fight against the serious land degradation that 150 years of European based farming practices have wrought on the land. Community Forest Management has the potential to act as a vehicle for the convergence of the economic return from growing trees and the need to put trees into the landscape within a context that targets appropriate ecological outcomes.

The third part of this paper will look at the increased awareness about land management issues in the community as a result of participating within CFM. This, coupled with the improved capacity of the community to work effectively on these issues, can lead to bigger picture regional strategies for land management and catchment restoration strategies. Plantations and farm forestry will be vital components of these strategies.

[1] Pilarski.M.(1994) Restoration Forestry. Kivaki Press Colorado. US.

Part 1

Introduction to CFM in the Wombat State Forest

The communities in and around Wombat State Forest have been given the opportunity of implementing the pilot for Community Forest Management. This will be a first on public land in Victoria and possibly nationally.

Community Forest Management is a well-established and fast growing reality in many other parts of the world. Canada has the widespread Model Forestry movement, parts of the United States have moved in to CFM, in Mexico over 1500 groups and communities run their forests form tendering, harvesting, processing and finally producing products from their timber. Nepal has over 11 000 forest community groups and in India there are 63 000 communities managing the forest and re-afforestation programs. CFM is being implemented across the African continent as well as very good examples in England and Europe.

After decades of heated conflict over forest management and utilisation in Australia, it is exciting that the Wombat Forest, itself the scene of long-term community concern and recent direct action, has the opportunity to forge new and constructive alternatives.

If all participants within the forest issues are really concerned about achieving the best possible future for our forests, then it is time for everyone to sit together and work on strategies that will ensure the best environmental, social and economic outcomes. The Wombat campaign has been quite unique in the way that the many different interest groups had been able to work cooperatively in its attempts to get previous governments to admit that there were major issues over sustainability. The failure of the previous State Government to face up to the reality inevitably opened the door to the more radical right-wing of the forest movement to enter the local issue. An outcome of this change was the creation of deep divisions within the local community.

The Bracks Government engaged Prof. Jerry Vanclay form Southern Cross University to review the Statewide sustainable sawlog yields in 2001. The findings of this Review produced and average reduction across the State of 31% and a massive 79% in the Midlands Forest Management Area, which includes the Wombat Forest.

As part of the reforms announced under the Our Forests Our Future model, the Government announced that the Wombat Forest would be given the opportunity for the Community Forest Management pilot and determination over the future of the forest.

This was far from the ideal scenario with which to commence the CFM process. The Start-up Process has been has been progressing for the past 6 months. This has seen the community embrace the opportunity and look at alternatives from many other parts of the globe.

It has been a credit to the people of this region and the other participants from the over 100 user and interest groups and authorities that have put the past behind, buried many past animosities and worked in a mature way to lay the foundations of what appears to be a successful lead in to Community Forest Management.

Background

The Wombat State Forest is located about 50 km west of Melbourne. The forest is approximately 70 000 ha in gross area and stretches primarily between Woodend and Daylesford.

The Wombat forest was effectively cut down during the gold-rush times of the mid to late 1800. The Royal Commission set up to look into the destruction of the Forest in the late 1890, described it as the 'ruined forest'. This resulted in the forest being closed and for 50 years; the only activities were aimed at rebuilding the structure of the forest. The forest was re-opened during and after the 2nd World War. Logging at that time was aimed also at Stand Improvement, with 'Silvicultural Selection' carried out.

In the three decades that followed, the local industry was only allowed to thin the forest for the primary products of lamp-posts and small sized logs for milling. There was great attachment and pride within the local timber families for the forest. Their work was pivotal in the restoration of the Wombat Forest that today's forest campaigners have fought for.

By the late 1960s, discussions had started between the Forest Commission and forest scientists about the lack of regeneration in the forest from logging. As a result a new form of silviculture known as 'shelterwood' was introduced in the mid-1970s. This involved the removal of approximately 60% of all trees in the first phase, a regeneration burn was then carried out and the final removal scheduled for 20 years later.

During the Land Conservation Council assessment processes of the 1970s and 80s, large areas of the Wombat Forest were considered for conversion to 'pine plantations'. This saw organised campaigns against this conversion, from residents of the region. There were large sections of the western end of the Wombat Forest bulldozed and converted to pines. It is ironic that some of the region's newer forest activists are calling for plantations to be used as a replacement for native timber, in effect condoning the destruction of native forest.

The mid 1980s saw the introduction of the Timber Industry Strategy and the setting of regional sustainable yields. Forest Management Areas were formed and the Midlands FMA comprising the Wombat, Enfield, Mt Cole and Cobaw Forests was created. The sustainable yield was based on historical sawlog license levels of around 70 000m3 per annum, with a further 63 000 tonnes of waste going as woodchip to the CSR Bacchus Marsh hardboard plant.

By the mid to late 1980s sections of the local timber industry were raising concerns over sustainability. They believed that the area cut annually was too high. Despite lobbying at many levels, the local industry was told that 'they did not know what they were talking about' and to be silent.

The start of the 1990s saw more local discontent over the forest. A 'Community Liaison Group' formed and the same issues of sustainability were raised. At the same time the then Department of Conservation & Environment decided to move to a more intense form of shelterwood, that saw closer to 80% of all trees removed and the second and final harvest planned for 10 years later. A major shortcoming of the system at that time was the failure to adjust sawlog volumes based on the alterations to the silvicultural prescriptions. You cannot take more trees out in the short term, halve the growth advantage that retained trees were meant to have, and not have a significant impact of the 'Sustainable Sawlog Volume'. This time also saw the introduction of a second woodchipping operation, which doubled the licensed volumes out of the Wombat and the Midlands.

In 1994 an alliance between some of the traditional timber families and conservationist within the area saw the creation of the Wombat Forest Society. The primary aim was to challenge the unsustainable logging levels and end the export woodchipping. The WFS spent the next 6 years developing forest modelling and auditing systems that ultimately triggered the Bracks Government's review into Statewide Sustainable Yield, headed by Jerry Vanclay form Southern Cross University. This review

validated the Society's own findings[2]. The WFS believed in working within process and actively worked to allow all sides within the community to have their say. The situation in the area was unique in the cooperative way in which most sections of the community worked together on this issue, while respecting ideological differences. The WFS had lobbied for Community Forest Management as a progressive solution to the problem.

During the late 1990s a wave of new groups started with the aim of fighting the Regional Forest Agreements and closing the Wombat Forest to logging. Many of these people opted for the type of forest campaign seen in other areas, centred around a media-driven approach and blockading. Emerging from the newer groups were individuals with personal political ambition who seemed to use the divisions and actions in the forest as a vehicle to raise their profile prior to the 2002 State election.

This change in climate saw many long-term participants in the Wombat Issue become the subject of abuse. This atmosphere led many of these people to withdraw from participation. This has been an immense loss to the debate, as some have been observing and studying that Wombat Forest for decades and have very valuable information to contribute.

The Bracks Government announced one of the most significant reforms to Victoria's forests in early 2002, with the 'Our Forests Our Future' package. This saw the Midlands' sustainable sawlog yield levels slashed to 8 600m pa (Note: 72 000m3 in 1996). There was a corresponding average reduction of 31% across the State. A part of these reforms was the announcement that the community would have determination over the management of the Wombat Forest.) *"The Bracks Government will work with the Wombat Forest community and the local industry, and will phase out logging by 2009 if local industry and community decide that is the best way to manage the forest in the future."*[3]

A further announcement was made, along with the suspension of the Regional Forest Reference Groups in April 2002. The media release also announced that…"*Ms Garbutt said implementation of the wider number of reforms announced by the Bracks Government would require comprehensive consultation with industry and affected communities and pointed to the development of a community forest management model in the Wombat Forest as (a) key example of this.*

A group will be established in the Wombat Forest to determine the most appropriate ways of involving the community in decisions on the management of the forest into the future.

Should the Wombat experience prove workable, this sort of model could be applied to other selected parts of the State.[4]

Later in 2002, the Government appointed a team of consultants including John Petheram and Peter Stephens from Melbourne University School of Resource Management, and Don Gilmour with over 40 years of experience including work within Community Forest Management and IUCN overseas. The team produced a discussion paper that was released in October 2002. This provided a starting point for the Wombat Communities to look at the potential of CFM, as well as examples from overseas. The report also examined some issues to be considered locally and suggestions on how a CFM process could be implemented and 'ways of operating' within the community.

A process of community consultation was commenced in late 2002 to investigate the expectations of the community, as well as whether the community wanted to tackle the CFM opportunity. Christine Forster, who has extensive involvement in rural resource management processes in Victoria, headed this process. Dr Anitra Nelson of RMIT facilitated a series of meetings around the region and in Melbourne to gauge expectations and involvement in the Wombat issue. These meetings culminated

[2] 600 Jobs to go in logging shakeup. Sarah Hudson. Herald Sun. 21 February 2002.
[3] Government Acts to Protect Forests and Workers. Media Release. Office of the Premier. 21 February, 2002.
[4] Suspension of Regional Forest Reference Groups. Media Release. Minister for Environment and Conservation. 17 April 2002.

in a combined interest, user and stakeholder group meeting in mid-November that saw the participants give support to moving into Community Forest Management.[5]

The CFM Process

A series of meetings were held across the region and in Melbourne in August/ September 2003. These meetings outlined the CFM process and timetable and asked each town to nominate two representatives to attend one or two workshops to design the shape of the Wombat CFM management structure. The representatives were to be from 2 different organisations from each town. While many said this was a difficult task, one aim was to get the towns to start to organise for CFM. This means that at some stage communication strategies need to be developed within and across the communities of the region and this was considered to be as good a staring point as any.

Two facilitated workshops were held in September and November 2003 to work on the development of a suitable structure, operating principles and a common vision for the forest and its management. Out of these meetings a decision was made to form an Interim Stewardship Council and a number of Working Groups including: Governance, Hydrology, Biodiversity, Wood Products, Non-Wood Products, Education and Public Involvement, Heritage and Weeds.

The CFM timeline required these groups to work in an interim capacity developing a Manifesto that details all operational and structural aspects, resourcing as well as defining conflict resolution protocols and directions. The Working Groups have been very effective in establishing themselves and commencing a range of tasks including collecting relevant literature and resources, establishing relationships with Departments, academic and scientific bodies and individuals and initiating research and on-ground activities within the forest.

The timeline is working towards a formal phase into CFM on 1 July 2004. Since the November Structure Workshop, in excess of 100 people from across many facets of the community have been committing enormous amounts of time towards the CFM project. An eighty nine page Manifesto is currently in draft version 1.4. This can be viewed on the new Wombat CFM Web-site: www.wombatforest.org .

This document reflects the sophistication at which the community has embraced and run with the prospect of active involvement, participation and planning relating to the Wombat State Forest. The initial CFM mailing list totalled 240 individuals, interest and user groups, authorities, industries and Shires. Over the past 6 months that list has grown and is approaching 700. Some of the interest and user groups represent 1000s of members. Two Wombat News and Views newsletters have been produced to date, the latest edition can also be found on the CFM web-site.

The November Savoia Hotel meeting also developed two other components to the initial CFM model. The first is the Forest Assembly, normally held every three months. The Forest Assembly is designed to keep the CFM Stewardship Council and Working Groups in touch with the broader community and direction is taken from those that attend the Forest Assembly. These meetings are open public meetings.

The first Forest Assembly was held in the Daylesford Town Hall on Saturday February 28 2004. One hundred people attended and worked through the proposed manifesto, with another scheduled for April to finalise and sign-off the manifesto. The Working Groups gave reports of their activities and the issue of sustainable timber harvesting based on 'restoration principles' was discussed.

[5] Note: This section is largely a reprint from a paper by the same author. 2003. Community Forest Management. Progress, Process and Issues.



Photo 1 Wombat CFM Forest Assembly Feb. 2004.

Given that this community has been involved in over 15 years of engagement over the forest and in later years deep animosities where evident, the February Forest Assembly illustrated how far the community has come in very short time. The day was carried out with a genuine goodwill towards each other and commitment to the opportunity of Community Forest Management.

Current Timber Licences

The ALP Policy on Forests and National Parks (2002), at the last State Government election stated:

- *Negotiate to end all wood chipping in the Wombat Forest by 31 December 2002.*
- *Negotiate with remaining sawlog licence holders to further reduce harvesting to achieve a sustainable level by 31 December 2002, by supplying timber from an alternative source in the short term and buying back further licenses.*
- *Establish a trial of community forest management, which will involve all stakeholders in the local community in making decisions about future management of the forest. The community management process will recommend the future level of selective logging, firewood production and other forest uses. One option is to cease all commercial logging when remaining licences expire or license holders take up the buy back option.*

The newly formed Interim Stewardship Council (ISC) and some of the Working Groups have been consulted by DSE over what areas of the forest should be scheduled for suitable 'restoration trials' sites to supply the existing sawlog licences. The process has developed multiple assessments for the sites looking at hydrology and soils, silviculture and inventory, biodiversity and heritage (Pre-European and European). The assessment teams have a DSE expert, an academic expert and one or more community experts.

The process of examining each site (to date 17 coupes have been assessed) has required the assessment teams to look at the bigger picture, usually on a catchment by catchment basis. The path that CFM is already heading has enormous potential for land management issues for this part of Victoria. In looking at hydrology issues the coupe is not put within just an immediate locality context, but also within a broader spatial context.

At this point 'private forestry' becomes involved in Community Forest Management. The Governance working group, in collaboration with the ISC, have produced a proposed set of Management Objectives and has also adopted a modified version of the Suzuki Foundation "Guiding Principles for Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management" for the Wombat CFM.

Wombat CFM Management Objectives

The following are adopted as interim objectives, to be refined as CFM becomes more firmly established:

- *To initiate and implement a long term forest restoration plan to protect and enhance water catchment volumes and quality, forest structure, maturity and indigenous bio-diversity, thereby restoring forest health and productivity*
- *To promote ecologically responsible and sustainable management of the forest by the protection and enhancement of biodiversity and water catchment values*
- *To promote and enhance social and economic values that the forest provides in terms of cultural heritage, spiritual/emotional wellbeing, forest products, recreation and tourism*
- *To engage in community consultation and encourage active participation in all aspects of forest management. This process should be inclusive, provide equal opportunity to all, respect diverse interests and be accountable*
- *To engage in ongoing monitoring and evaluation of community forest management.*

Guiding Principles for Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management

We adopt the nine guiding principles of ecologically sustainable forest management as defined by Ronnie Drever MRM and published by the David Suzuki Foundation, Vancouver, 2000, resequenced and supplemented by a tenth:

1. *Make the well-being of the lands and waters the fundamental goal of management*
2. *Plan forest practices in a hierarchy starting with the 'big picture' level*
3. *Ensure local knowledge and control are central to decision-making and planning*
4. *Protect rivers, streams, lakes and their associated riparian areas, wetlands and affected marine shores*
5. *Focus on what to retain rather than what to remove*
6. *Establish a rate of resource utilisation that sustains the integrity of the forest*
7. *Restore degraded landscapes, forests and sites*
8. *Conserve all native plants and animals (maintain biodiversity)*
9. *Acknowledge uncertainty, act cautiously and monitor the consequences of forest practices*
10. *Evaluation of results shall be made against environmental and social measures before economic considerations* [6]

Over time the capacity of the community on a regional scale will be greatly enhanced by participating in the CFM process. The depth of knowledge relating to all land use types and environmental and social considerations will be greatly improved. The natural division being used in the Wombat are the catchment boundaries.

[6] . Governance Working Group. (February 2004) Manifesto for the formal establishment of Community Management of the Wombat State Forest Version 1.4

Part 2

Environmental and Social Issues surrounding plantations

Public and Private Forestry exist within the same catchments in most areas. The relationship between them from a forestry sector perspective is generally distant. Whilst the harvest contractors may work between the two sectors, the economic and product bases are quite distinct.

The region around the Wombat Sate Forest contains a mix of private forestry. Immediately abutting and within 30 kilometres of the Wombat Forest are extensive pine plantations, essentially established on cleared native forest in the 1960's to 1970's. The region is also highly targeted for joint-ventures, being less than 100 kilometres from the export facility. Farm forestry also occurs on a number of scales.

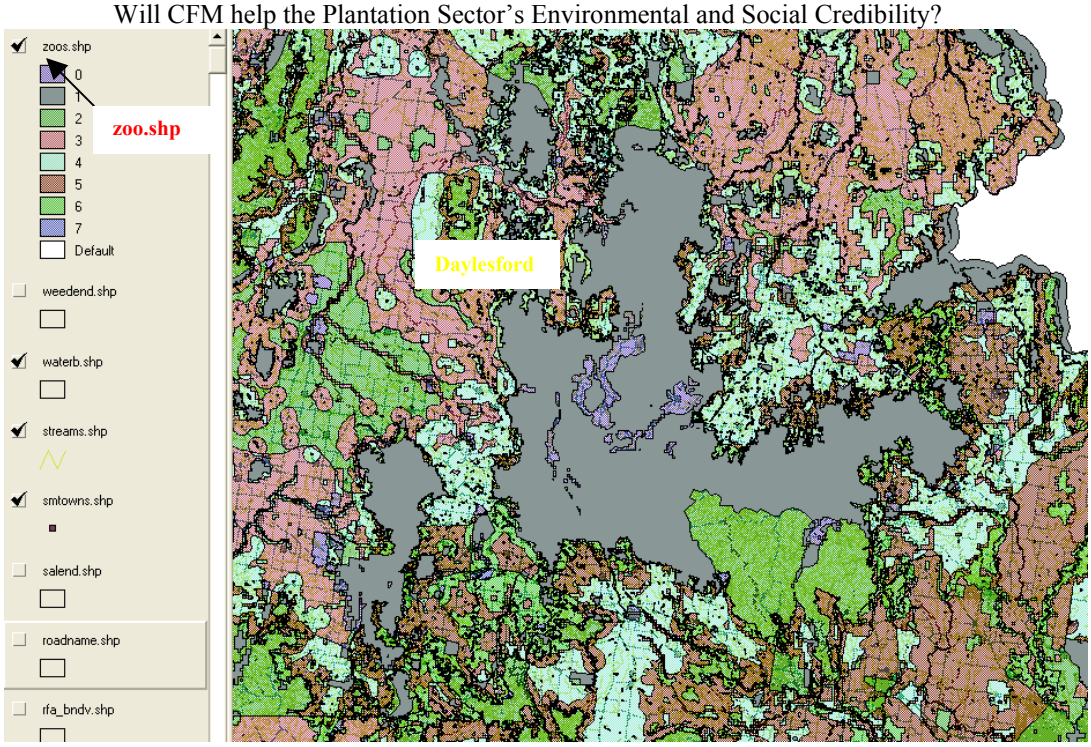
The prime reason for the existence of the privately owned and joint ventures is economics. The region is considered a prime area with rainfall 600- 1100mm annually, good soils and close access to processors. The region is also the top of the Great Dividing Range and important headwaters to 6 rivers. These rivers are heavily used for domestic and commercial consumers. The northern rivers (Loddon and Coliban/Campaspe) are heavily allocated for irrigators, between 92-100% allocated. This is over and above any consideration of environmental flows.

Both the native forest and the private forestry/plantations occupy the same landscape, same catchments and same communities. Two different mapping CD ROMs have been produced within the two sectors for this region.

The first is a tool being used by extension officers as part of the West RFA Sawlog Farming Project (West RFA SFP). This initiative was created by the State Government in 2000 as a part of the response to the issues of future continuity of supply of sawlogs from native forests in the region. The aim of the project is to produce up to 150 000m3 p.a of hardwood sawlogs for the local industry, but within the context of the triple bottom line. The project (State) contributes towards the establishment of most plantings based on a weighting system that looks at the non-timber benefits of putting trees in a particular location.

A CD-based GIS system was created by DNRE Bendigo office that allows areas within the project boundaries to be assessed from a number of aspects including:

- Biodiversity enhancement
- Productivity
- Salinity abatement
- Weed control
- Erosion Control



Map 1: The West RFA SFP Zone of Opportunity map only applies to private land. source: West RFA SFP CD Department of Natural Resources and Environment. 2000.

The lower 'Zones of Opportunities' numbers ('zoo.shp' in the legend) identify the preferred or more desirable areas for commercial tree growing. Note that the grey areas shown on the map above are the public land areas that are not State Park. The grey areas are the Wombat Forest and covers the area that the Wombat Community Forest Management is concerned with. The Zones of Opportunity combines environmental, production and exclusion layers into a simplified map. The CD is also capable of looking at all of the above layers separately and down to the individual site or property level.

The concept for the West RFA Sawlog Farming Project is a step in the right direction for achieving environmentally and socially acceptable private tree production. Many of the region's plantations are essentially concerned with economic return and are established in high rainfall, water production areas. In the catchments that are highly allocated for irrigation purposes, is it fair that these plantations are not accountable for their water usage in the same way that irrigators are?

"*There is a growing body of scientific evidence to suggest that plantations represent the worst possible outcomes for water yield and that widespread plantations without due consideration of water impacts could have disastrous results for both the environment and the community*" Carmel Flint and Susie Russell, NEFA. 2002.

'Tree plantation developers should be forced to buy irrigation entitlements to offset their own water use.'

That's the message from; leading catchment hydrologist Dr Rob Vertessy, who says it's high time the plantation industry was regulated and made accountable for its water consumption.

Dr Vertessy, who is the director of the Co-operative Research Centre for Catchment Hydrology, said large-scale plantations were putting added pressures on water resources. He said that, with the need to allocate extra river flows to the environment, new allocations of water to plantations should be off set by up front transfers of water from other users.

Dr Vertessy has also called for regulations on the location of new plantations, to ensure they do not worsen salinity problems in rivers.

"It seems a little iniquitous that we have controls on farm dams….but there is no controls, or even guidelines, about where there should and shouldn't be plantations," he said. (Sellers 2003)

Suggestions that industrial model plantations offer any more than fleeting augmentation to biodiversity are laughable. Vast monocultures that culminate in total clearfell removal after 20 years cannot add meaningful inputs to regional biodiversity strategies. The "Guidelines for establishing and managing timber plantations in Victoria'[7] contains one paragraph relating to environmental benefits, '*establishing trees is recognized as a way of addressing some of Australia's environmental problems such as salinity and rising water tables, particularly in lower rainfall areas'*.

In the case of this quote, the reality is investment is virtually always targeted at economic returns based on locating plantations in high rainfall, high productivity zones. If salinity **is** an issue that the plantation sector wishes to claim it can help address, a different base to the purely economic model will be needed to facilitate plantations in the middle and lower catchments.

If plantations are to be used as an effective tool to combat salinity, they need to be planted in the middle and lower rainfall areas of catchments. Millions of years of rainfall has washed the salt from the higher rainfall areas and higher elevations within the catchments. The salt is held in the middle catchments, where typically 400-600mm annual rainfall is in balance between water availability and take up by vegetation. Targeted tree plantings in these regions can help reduce groundwater recharge and thereby reduce salt loads into the river systems. Trees in the lower catchments help combat salinity by reducing the watertable. These areas are not on the radar of the economically driven plantation investment companies.

Wombat Forest Explorer

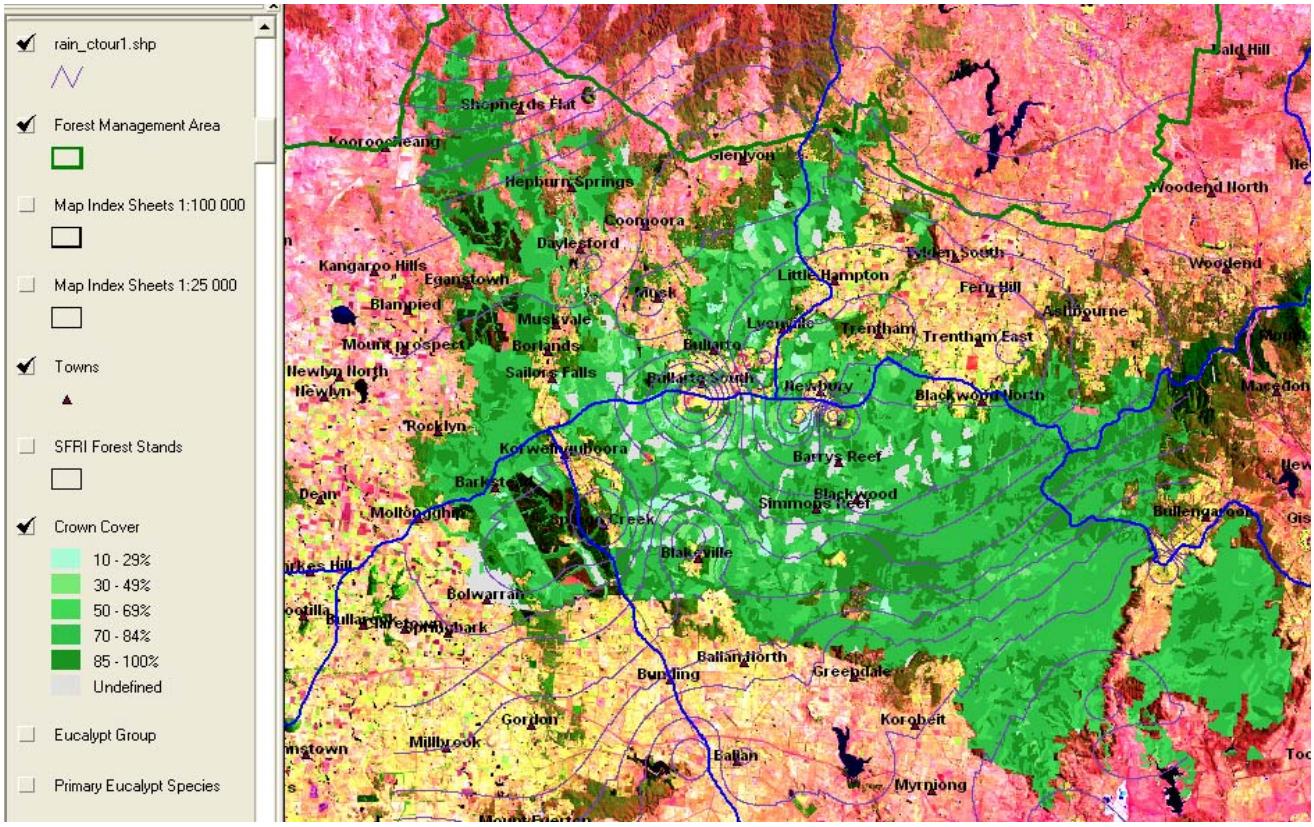
The Statewide Forest Resource Inventory section of DSE is producing a groundbreaking CD based mapping and analysis tool for the Wombat CFM program that allows the community to create and plan differing forest scenarios based on up to date spatial information. The CD uses an ESRI™ shareware GIS program (Map Explorer) that allows limited but useful interactivity. There are currently a number of community members testing a prototype of the CD. The developed version will be licensed to the Wombat CFM Group and will contain a range of social, economic and environmental information. It is intended for release in the first half of 2004 and a series of training sessions will be run by DSE on using the CD.

The CD helps shift the way community engages in forestry and other land related issues. Providing a set of comprehensive GIS layers, different users can produce spatial modelling for individual projects. The CD has already broken out from the strict forest boundaries and has been applied to submissions to Hepburn Shire regarding roading operations. The CD has also been used in preparation of material for a submission to the Forest Stewardship Council, regarding an operation within the Daylesford Water supply by the private forestry sector and in discussions around fire-protection planning.

The map below looks at a similar area to the map above from the West RFA SFP CD. The Wombat CFM CD looks at the public forest land only in terms of forest inventory and other related information. Both CD's relate to growing timber and fibre, both CD's exist within the same landscape and catchment context, but are produced by two distinct sections of the same Government Department.

[7] Regional Plantation Committee. Guidelines for establishing and managing timber plantations in Victoria. February 2000.

With the enormous range of inherited land degradation issues in Western Victoria, trees are a key to combating many of the problems. Yet with the distinctions highlighted above, when will a truly integrated 'whole of the landscape' land use strategy become a reality?



Map 2: The CFM process applies to public land as seen by the green areas in the above map. Source: Wombat Forest Explorer CD. Department of Sustainability and Environment. 2003.

Industrialisation of timber and fibre production

Australia, like many other countries around the world, has seen a corresponding rise in community unrest, reaction and in some instances, intervention with the increased intensity and 'industrialization of forestry'. This has occurred in both the native forest and plantation sectors. The Routley's 'Fight for the Forests' in 1973/75 highlighted many major issues with both types of timber and fibre production.

Within the 'forest movement' there have been two different views to the answer for wood and fibre production. Some National and State bodies along with a number of regional forest interest groups have advocated a transition out of native forest logging into plantations. Some of these groups have received indirect funding from the big-end of the plantation sector. There has also been many National, State and regional groups that have seen major issues with large scale mono-culture plantations as an alternative. Their location (often-in headwaters and freshwater recharge zones), chemical inputs, water usage, exotic species and social disruption are the general concerns of these groups. Hancock Watch is an example of a web-site that looks at a range of these issues.

The recent '4 Corners' story on Tasmanian forestry and plantations highlighted the shift away from supporting plantations from a number of conservation groups in that State. Some of these groups and Parties had been vocal supporters of the transition into plantations only a few years ago. There is growing realisation that large scale plantations are not the environmental answer to the intensive industrial management and utilisation in native forests. Plantations are based on the same industrial, optimisation principles as native forests with the addition of lesser environmental standards of care

(e.g. Victorian Code of Forest Practices for Timber Production Revision 2, 1996) as well as the spectrum of chemical inputs.

It needs to be asked if the ancient Australian continent can sustain the optimisation/industrial model that was developed on continents in the Northern Hemisphere that are much newer and therefore have newer, deeper and richer soils?

There is also unprecedented social opposition to the rapid expansion and concentration of plantations (primarily blue gums) in Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia and Victoria. The wholesale buy-up of farms and farming land, with the associated de-population within the local community, has highlighted a large hurdle the plantation sector needs to get over. There is entrenched and growing resentment to plantations.

The front cover of the Weekly Times March 24 1999 highlights this issue, although in this instance the story centres on pines, the 4 Corners story painted an equivalent issue within the blue gum sector in Tasmania.


Tribunal backs farmers in battle to retain land

Pine war victory

BY PAUL SELLARS

FARMING claimed a major victory over forestry last week when a group of Western District landowners won their appeal to stop the spread of new pine plantations.

Farmers in Lismore and Bradvale defeated plans by forestry giant, Hancock Victorian Plantations to plant an extra 1000 hectares of pines in their district.

Local residents feared the company's expansion plans would lock up valuable farming land, create a fire hazard and a haven for vermin, isolate remaining members of the community and fail to inject money into the local economy.

Peter Grist, who grew up in the area, said residents had appealed to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal because they feared more pine plantations would spell the death of their community.

"The people against the pines are generally delighted this decision has gone our way and they can see they have a future farming in the district," Mr Grist said.

The tribunal ruled the group's concerns about the social and economic impacts of plantations were legitimate and said it was "premature" to grant a permit before a strategic plan for plantation forestry in the shire was developed.

Tribunal member Jennifer Moles also called into question the

Areas suitable for timber plantations

Echuca
Shepparton
Wodonga
Wangaratta
Myrtleford
Bendigo
Hamilton
Ballarat
Geelong
Dandenong
Bairnsdale
Orbost
Mt Gambier
Portland
Warrnambool
Colac
Morwell
Traralgon
Sale

Source: Department of Natural Resources and Environment

Making a stand: the VCAT decision was welcomed by Western Plains Pine Plantation Group members (from left) Dick Shearn, Greg Barr, Lachie McBean, Bill Grist, Ben Shearn.

Illustration 1: Community concerns are increasing with the fast growing plantation sector. Source Weekly Times March 24 1999

The accompanying Editorial stated that:

"*Local communities have a legitimate concern about the social and economic impacts of large pine and other softwood plantations.*

...But all levels of government also need to consider what happens to a small town or farming district when land is systematically bought up by forestry operators to be turned into plantations."(Weekly Times March 24 1999)[8]

The bases of these issues are similar to the issues within the native forest sector. The native forest sector failed to listen to the community, who had and still have major concerns over the ever increasing intensification of management and utilisation objectives. These contributed to the decision of the Brack's Government in Victoria to try something different and something that would be able to keep community opinion central to the process, Community Forest Management.

Part 3.

Can CFM help to improve the Environmental and Social credibility of Plantation?

[8] Weekly Times. Pine War Victory Paul Sellars. 24 March 1999.

What is already apparent with the Wombat Community Forest Management project is the rising awareness by the community of the natural systems within the forest and how they impact on the broader landscape. Some sections of the community have organised field trips with scientific and academic experts to help with their understanding on specific aspects of the forest.

Linkages between the community and universities have also been forged, with collaboration between researchers and local people with an interest or valuable local knowledge in relevant areas. This is providing a 2-way benefit; the researcher gains the benefit of local knowledge and assistance in the field, while those that participate from the community gain valuable insights from working with the researchers.

In the discussions around the adoption of a modified version of the Suzuki Foundation's Guiding Principles for the ecologically sustainable management of the forest, the Working Group had modified the 4th Principle "*Protect rivers, streams, lakes and their associated riparian areas, wetlands and affected marine shores*". 'Marine shores' was deleted on the assumption that a forest 100 kilometres from the nearest marine environment was not likely to look at 'marine shores'.

In the ensuing discussion within the interim Stewardship Council and other forums, it was argued and agreed that 'marine shores' were relevant as both the north and south flowing eventually flow into the sea. This illustrates the way that CFM is looking at the bigger picture.

One of the most discussed goals of CFM relates to hydrology. Of strong emphasis has been the desire to improve water quality and quantity. The desire for the increases in these values is motivated by a commitment to improving the overall environment, with emphasis on inter-generational equity, in this case environmental flows for the river systems.

With the almost complete utilisation of water from the forest by downstream commercial and domestic users, any increase may only have the effect of increasing available water consumption. A path that CFM will take is a 'water awareness campaign' to all downstream users and residents to highlight hydrologically related environmental issues. More efficient irrigation practices and 'water wise' domestic campaigns can help ensure increased water flows for environmental values.

One measure to improve water yield is via vegetation management. Discussions on the adoption of less intense logging methods have included canopy management that is sympathetic with water yield issues.

A recent field trip among the Interim Forest Council, Working Group and community members inspected a 15 hectare site within the Daylesford water supply catchment that was planted with pines as a part of a catchment hydrology study by Monash University. This site was part of the Victorian Plantation Corporation estate that Hancocks had bought. Hancocks have recently cleared the site. There was no communication with the community over the planned harvesting, despite long-term issues and concerns over logging operations from the Daylesford community. The drainage lines had received no special consideration or treatment. In fact the drainage lines had been crossed by machinery along their full length. A main snigging track through the coupe follows a lineal soak.

Photos 2, 3 & 4 below are at the Stewarts Creek site. Photo 4 is a V-notch Weir that was part of the infrastructure installed as part of the Stewart's Creek Hydrology research. The presence of this should have been a constant reminder to the operator and Hancock's that they were in a proclaimed water supply area.

It is ironic that this should happen just as Hancocks are going through a process to gain environmental credential through Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification. A number of complaints are currently being lodged with FSC over this operation by members for the Wombat community.

This highlights the failings of a major plantation company to recognise that they exist within a broader community. While the operation may be acceptable under some sections of the Code of

Forest Practices that relates to Private Land, the real issue is the apparent disregard for a community that has demonstrated a clear and persistent interest in what happens within their area.



Photo 2: Daylesford Water Supply Catchment



Photo 3 Stewardship Council Inspection

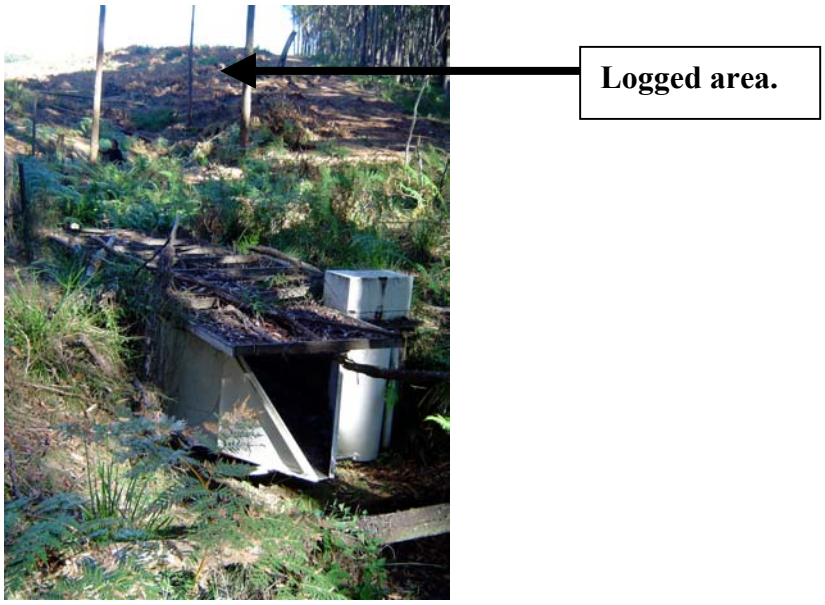


Photo 4 Stewardship Council Inspection

The operation has been an affront to some within the community that supported the 'transition into plantation' ideology. The impact on the catchment and the landscape is far far more severe than the community designed operation at the Mudlark site.

A potentially important and positive outcome of this operation is currently under way. Hancocks had inherited the site which was part of a Hydrology study carried out by Monash University. Hancocks are in negotiation to transfer the site to DSE now it has harvested the pine trees. The community has expressed a strong interest in being involved in the restoration of the site and a reinstatement of the weir to measure sediment run off over the next few decades. A contribution from Hancocks towards the restoration process would be positive move.

This could be a important opportunity for Community Forest Management to work collaboratively with Hancocks on a positive outcome for the site and relationships.

Within two months of the formal commencement of the implementation of the CFM process, calls had been made by residents to the west of the Wombat Forest for CFM to include the private land to the west in the CFM process. There is a large private interface with the Wombat Forest that is also native forest. Adjacent to this is agricultural land.

The concept was to put this part of the region into the forest context and also the broader environmental context. This is an opportunity for collaboration between a wide range of stakeholders on a planned strategy to deliver long-term environmental outcomes, coupled with economic returns, based on positive social interactions.

To conclude this section I will describe an imaginary future vision where a number of current land-based initiatives in conjunction with public and private forestry and the community are working collaboratively for long-term environmental, economic and social sustainability.

Some time in the future…

Community Forest Management has been operating for a number of decades in the region. The early phases of this project had seen awareness of forest related issues within the community lead to greater capacity to work effectively on other land based management issues as well as strong regional networks. An sensitive application of the adopted ecologically sustainable forest management principles has been adopted for the native forest areas. High quality timber is being produced within the ESFM principles and firewood for local consumption.

Early CFM projects have also developed and implemented strategies for wildlife recovery, regrowth thinning programs, waterway management and restoration schemes.

Over time, those that were active within the Community Forest Management process worked through the range of management issues. This highlighted that some of the issues that were being dealt with and managed in the forest were also issues out side of the forest. Governments and the community saw that in order to effectively deal with the broad environmental issues that were the legacy of 150 years of European land use practices, an integrated approach was needed. Indigenous communities were actively involved and led research into traditional indigenous knowledge and management practices.

After a number of years of consultation, discussions and modelling a 'Whole of Region, Whole of Catchment Sustainability Strategy' has been released. The Strategy is a blue print for achieving regional social, economic and environmental sustainability. The strategy has involved participation from National, State and Local Governments, Catchment Management Authorities, public and private forestry sectors, Landcare, Victorian Farmers Federation, Wombat Community Forest Management, User and Interest Groups and a wide range of community members.

The strategy is based on a catchment and sub-catchment divisions, identifying salinity recharge zones as well as fresh water and groundwater recharge zones. Within this context, areas of remnant vegetation, areas of public and private forest, waterways and cleared land have also been mapped.

The Catchment Management Authorities are co-ordinating waterways to be permanently planted with mixed local species of trees and understorey (were appropriate). This work is being carried out by Landcare, Wombat CFM and other volunteers, DSE, Green Corp and other groups. The stretches of waterways being revegetated that are privately owned are being subsidised by a combination of CMA funding, National Action Plan on salinity grants, rate reductions, carbon and biodiversity credits as well as paying the owner an annual off-set payment for the retirement of the land from intensive production. Areas of remnant vegetation in combination with corridors for biodiversity connectivity are also receiving similar subsidies and income offsets to the waterways. These plantings are exempt from the 'water use levy' and in some cases have been able to also offset some of these fees for the commercial tree growers. Plantations below 500mm are exempt from the 'water use levy'; this has created an economic driver for strategic planting in the middle and lower catchments. Companies that have established plantations in both the upper and middle/lower catchments have been given 'offset rights' to the levy, which has lead to important salinity mitigation outcomes.

Areas within each catchment are zoned for targeted broad scale tree planting. These areas fall into a number of zones identified across the 'Whole of Region, Whole of Catchment Sustainability Strategy' as suitable for salinity abatement, erosion and weed control and combined timber production zones. These areas are being planted with a combination of mixed species and most zones are mixed age class areas with targeted 20, 40, 60 , 80 and 100+ year rotations.

The species are aimed at providing a diverse range of wood products. These include specialty species for high end value adding, structural species, durable species, fibre species, firewood species and specialty craft species.

A range of booming wood processors are now established across the region providing employment for a significant number of small and medium towns. These processing facilities produce milled and machined timber products and mouldings, structural timber for local use as well as export sales.

A local network of wood workers, craftspeople and artists are using locally produced timber to create a range of high quality products that are sold under a regional marketing strategy both domestically and abroad. This craft industry has become a major tourist drawcard, with an established tourist trail that guides people between studios and workshops. Local accommodation and hospitality businesses receive considerable secondary business from the rise in tourism, leading to direct employment outcomes.

A successful firewood supply strategy has exceeded all expectations of supplying the region with locally produced firewood. The original aim was for the region to be self-sufficient in most of its wood products consumption. Surplice firewood is being sold outside of the region, leading to a rise in local seasonal employment. Community Forest Management participants and local service groups deliver free and subsidised firewood to elderly and needy families across the region as a part of the Regional Social Support Service.

A number of the private plantation companies, joint venture growers and farm forestry networks are producing a diverse range of sawlog products. Research has shown that trees do not need to be grown in rows of straight lines and geometric blocks to achieve growth and harvesting economies.

An improvement in non-wood based production on farms has lead to greater economic returns for farmers. Studies have found that the improvements in returns from diversification into both traditional farm products and mixed timber products combined with increases in productivity have evened out cash flows and profitability for the farming community.

These companies and private wood producers have all attained Environmental Certification for their products due to overwhelming support from the community and the ability to easily demonstrate the environmental and social context of every tree they grow. The area and its producers are now held up internationally as positive role-models, leading to premium prices for their products with buyers falling over themselves to buy from the region.

A number of universities and other institutes are delivering a wide range of natural resource, environmental and forestry based courses for the local community and other students. This rise in community awareness in land management issues and participation has lead to the relevant CMA's achieving vastly increased outcomes and works per dollar spent.

The Landcare movement has integrated some specialist species in its non-riparian planting[9] to supply niche markets, the financial return is being channelled into further catchment and land restoration projects. These specialist trees can only be harvested under a set of pre-defined requirements, i.e. percentage removal ratios over time.

[9] Suggested by Cr Max Knight at a recent West RFA SFP meeting.

A number of seed banks and nurseries have been established to collect and provide local provenance species were targeted and general tree and understorey species to the region. This has lead to employment for a reasonable number for people.

……...And they all lived happily and sustainably into the future.

Conclusion

A Forest Management Plan looks at many issues that relate the forest to the landscape, the forest to the people and the forest to its outputs. Below are the chapter headings from the Midlands Forest Management Plan:

- Planning Process
- Legislative and Policy
- Forest Management Zones
- Biodiversity & Conservation
- Timber Production
- Non-timber resources
- Forest Protection
- Recreation & Tourism
- Cultural Heritage
- Roads & Forest Works
- Research
- Education
- Streams & Catchments

Plantations relate to at least 10 of the above chapter headings. These areas of consideration help to place the native forest within the bigger picture. If plantations are the alternate source for wood-based products, and if the argument that has come from this sector for a level playing field to native forest produced products is valid, then it is not good enough for this to be simply economically based.

The social and environmental impacts also need to be judged. CFM has already demonstrated that the community is interested and capable of working towards a balanced understanding and management for public forests. The Wombat CFM project is already moving past the public and private land boundaries in the way that it is looking at the landscape and also at the positive opportunities it offers.

The same issues of the intensification in management and utilisation within the native forest sector apply to the plantation sector. The many sections of the forest movement are rapidly abandoning the 'carte blanc' support for the plantation sector, and seriously questioning its methods. Until both sectors accept that economics and efficiency are not the way the broader community judges their performance, the debate will continue.

Community Forest Management is offering opportunity for divided and entrenched argument over native forests around the world to move forward into collaborative arrangements that are delivering new and often unforseen opportunities. Here in Australia the same opportunity exists. If we are to tackle some of the enormous land degradation issues that currently face rural Victoria, the distinction and the quarantining of the private and public forestry sectors needs to vanish.
The reality is that they both co-exist within the same landscape, the same communities and the same catchments. CFM appears to be a catalyst for greater understanding and capacity across the community, even bringing together divided parties.

If we are to live within a sustainable society that lives within a sustainable environment, it is time to end the divisions and distinctions of the past and look collaboratively at pulling all of the issues and all of the solutions together and look for fully integrated outcomes.

Community Forest Management offers the potential for an integrated solution by providing a capacity for all stakeholders to engage in the discussion and the process.

The Community Forest Management is also breaking free of the State Forest boundaries with requests from a geographic section of the region that contains large areas of privately owned adjacent forest, to be considered for inclusion into some of the restoration and biodiversity strategies. Bundled with this proposal has been another phase, involving farm-forestry establishment on previously cleared land that again is strategically integrated into the Wombat CFM ecological planning.

As in other parts of the world, Community Forest Management in the Wombat has the potential of shifting a community from division and conflict over their forest and its management and utilisation, to commitment and pride. It can also provide a window for the plantation sector to work towards improving its environmental and social performance and credibility.

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