Wombat Forest Society Forest Forum.
Daylesford Town Hall.
March 23 1996.

Keynote Speakers Summary.

Michael Ronaldson MHR:

* Looking into the future the Wombat Forest will become important for its recreational uses. A place to unwind.
* The Region must not wake up one day and ask "where did we go wrong?"
* Farm Diversification into the area of Agro Forestry may help save the forest and jobs.
* A 'Wholistic' look at the jigsaw of Values may be a more useful approach than examining the individual pieces too closely.
* There can be no one winner in this debate and what will be needed is an intelligent approach and abounding goodwill.
* All players and the community need to keep an open mind.
* Good Wishes.

Tim Anderson: Wombat Forest Society.

* Has been involved in looking at the management and practices in the Wombat for the last six or seven years. Represented the 'Conservation Interests ' on the Dept of Conservation and Environment Consultative Committee.
*Involvement is to safeguard future children's Rights to the forest for work and recreation.
* When the Wombat Forest Society was formed it had equal representation from forest workers and conservationists.
* Over the last two years have had meetings with most players in the debate and found that most of these groups and individuals all want much the same things from the forest, and been left wondering what all the conflict has been about.
* In talking to a number of forest workers it is apparent that these people are concerned about the lack of wildlife in the forest now and the quality of the water in its streams.
* The information from the DC&NR until recently had been hard to access by the public and we need to reinforce the Rights and Interests of the public over the condition of the Wombat Forest.

John Wright. Victorian Association of Forest Industries. Forest Manager.

* Welcomed the invitation to talk and listen to with the community in regards the Wombat Forest.
* His constituents of VAFI earn their living from the forest, and also care for it and its future.

* Good to hear Tim Anderson and Michael Ronaldson MHR talk about how to harvest the forest, not whether or not there should be harvesting.
* There are areas of common interest.

Industry Perspective's:

1. Multiple use and value forest. The forest needs to be managed skilfully to accommodate these interests. A State Forest is not a 'Tree Farm'.

2. A Timber Industry bases on native timber is necessary - but needs to plant trees and harvest timber. There is an element of conservation in this principle.

3. Timber harvesting needs to be managed carefully. Controls and prescriptions are now in place and are adequate.

* DC&NR has done a poor job of explaining and defending its actions. It actually does a good job but is a ' sitting duck'.

Paul Love. Local Representative CFMEU:

* Jobs are important but not at the expense of the environment.
* Mistakes have been made but DC&NR has assured people that all was OK and sustainable.
* The Code of Forest Practise needs to be enforced.
* The WFS has reorganised itself and the Union hopes that this will lead to good dialogue. This is a different situation from East Gippsland. Orbost is a divided community, two groups hate each others guts. This leads to a nasty atmosphere , its different from the Wombat Forest Campaign.
* The Wombat Action Group banner says " Jobs Wages and Environment."
* The Export Woodchip ban was a stupid, irrational decision.

Loris Duclos. Wombat Forest Society.

* Good water management is essential.
* Downstream users depend on us for water quality and flow.
* Forest Managers must show due regard for these values.
* Mineral Water Recharge Areas were recognised in early 1995.
* Machinery, burning etc have changed
* VAFI commissioned an economic study of the socio-economic benefits of their industry to this region. WFS has some concerns about the methodology , but congratulates VAFI for undertaking the study.
* The development of Melbourne's Western Growth Corridor has implications for water use. Most water is already allocated and will be subject to increased demands.
* Protect the importance of this resource to the community.
* Water is essential for community health and maintenance of ecosystems.
* Timber Industry must act responsibly.
* Everyone must speak openly and honestly, and accept compromises.

Pam Manning, A real local.

* Fought against the Department over forest clearing for pine plantations at Basalt. They lost the battle, but saved other native forests from being cleared for pines.
* Daylesford attractions are: Mineral Water, Nature, and the forest.

* Serves on the Committee of the Great Dividing Trail Association. The Trail doesn't divert around areas of concern, but encourages walkers to see how the forest is managed, and to make comments.
* Also serves on the Midlands FMA Advisory Committee, and has been accused by some of complicity with DCNR to improve their image. Not so.
* Today is a fantastic forum. Congratulations to WFS for raising community awareness of these issues. The New WFS Committee is a good step. Less aggressive, more consultative.

Dr Frank Harrop, Field Naturalists / Bird Observers' Club.
* 26 years in Australia.
* 126 visits to the Wombat forest since January 1977.
* Thought the forest was well managed until 6 years ago.
* Intensity of logging increased, with too much debris left behind.
* Wants more reserved sanctuary west of Blackwood. This is a gorgeous part of the forest.
* Main interest is birds, especially summer visitors to the forest. The Rose Robin is a significant bird.
* Satin Flycatcher is the only bird to increase in numbers. All others have declined in numbers.
* Need for more attention to restoration of the sanctuary area at the headwaters of the Werribee River. This is a beautiful part of the forest. The Nolan's Track area is also beautiful.

Barry Golding,
* The Wombat Forest is not a carpet of forest; there is great variation from dry to wet areas.
* There needs to be recognition of the need for protection of Box-Ironbark forests.
* In the Greater Glider area near Spargo Creek there is greater structural diversity than in other areas of the Wombat Forest.
* The reason for the development of an improving mature forest in the 1970's and 1980's was the closure of the forest around 1900, after the over-cutting of the previous 50 years.

Robin Ramsay, President, Wombat Forest Society

Robin invited the participants to approach the forum workshops as an information-sharing session, encouraging them to listen to other workshops as well as the workshop of their main interest. He hoped that each person gained an increased understanding of the complexity of the issues in the debate of the future of our forests

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Timber and Forestry Workshop.
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Key Issue 1 : Sustainability.
Issue 2 : Timber Utilisation.

1. Sustainability.

John Slorach (Midland Logging Company) : It may be necessary to increase forest area, possibly by involving farms adjoining State Forest.

John Wright (VAFI) : In the Draft Management Plan Age Classes are not tabulated, and although documented their figures are questionable.

Tim Anderson (WFS) : Around 70% of the Wombat Forest has had Shelterwood-1 cuts since 1973. There was then a brief explanation of the Shelterwood harvesting system.

John Corrigan (Eureka Sawmill) Not all sawmills are demanding more messmate, eg.: Eureka Mill.

Although many people find the Shelterwood system hard to understand , the community is entitled to ask questions and explain its expectations of forest management.

J.W.: Sawmills have the right to take sawlogs up to their quota limits.

J.C.: Not all mills take their full allocations each year.

J.S.: Thinning may reduce the number of regrowth stems, from 10,000 to 1,500 per Ha.

Geof Proctor (Black Forest Sawmill). : Leaving twice the number of trees will result in twice the quantity of sawlogs.

John Endacott (WFS): Question re. the objectives of management of the Wombat Forest?

J.S.: The Wombat was historically a Messmate forest.

Bill Kerruish (CSIRO): Thinning at an early age gets the best growth response, and has least impact on the site.

George Howard (forest worker): Machine thinning is disgraceful, hand thinning is the superior method.

B.K.: Scandinavian machine thinning methods are very successful, but in Australia coppice regrowht defeats these methods. Poisoning at a young age of unwanted stock is a suitable approach.

T.A.: Poisoning is expedient and economical, but leaving many young, dead, standing trees may leave prime growing stock vulnerable to wildfire.

B.K.: Keeping stands more open enables more complete biodiversity. Overstocking creates monoculture.

J.S.: Presented a simple explanation of Shelterwood, and then his own version of a possible Silvicultural system.

SHELTERWOOD : Early Age thinning - 7-12 m2/Ha Basal Area
2nd CUT : Remove remaining sawlogs

Need to fertilise ?

SLORACH ALTERNATIVE :

- Thinning - remove 50% (old age)
  fertilise (P)
- Felling - clearfell coupes up to 20 Ha., around 30 years after thinning
- Regeneration - each coupe assessed on its own merits, some burnt, some not burnt.

OBJECTIVES:
- Thinning - age 10 years
- Thinning - age 30 -to 40 years
- Thinning - old age

DCNR RESOURCES.It was suggested on several occasions that it is necessary for everyone to lobby Government for increased funding to DCNR to enable it to meet its obligations.

G.H.: Commented on the detriment to the forest of frequent staff changes at Daylesford and Ballarat.

HABITAT. There was some discussion of retention of habitat trees, selection vs. 'Clump Theory'. Nothing conclusive. The pursuit of retention of clumps of habitat, implies the retention of the Shelterwood system. Habitat clumps are reported to be favoured by naturalists and wildlife enthusiasts because of their favourable Edge / Area ratio.

J.E.: Re. coupe minimum sizes, some people are recommending maximum coupe sizes of 15-20 Ha. 2-6 Ha coupes are possible, but not necessarily desirable due to the Edge / Area effect of competition from surrounding forests.

G.P.: Flora and Fauna experts have arguments against coupes of too small a size. Also there are concerns about the ability of an under-funded DCNR to manage too many small coupes.

Q.: Re. tree maturity?

J.W.: Tree maturity is relative to the nature of the regrowth forest.

T.A.: According to the graph (Figure 4., P. 12, Review of Sustainable Sawlog Yield, Midlands FMA. Report 95-5) by increasing harvesting rotations from 80 to 120 years, there would be an increase in sawlog yields of up to 100%.

G.P.: Mentioned the importance of the firewood issue.

Lunch.

T.A.: Introduced session by talking about the forest nutrient cycle. Acacias may be of limited benefit, they fix the nitrogen in the soil. Burning is destructive, as organic matter is turned to ash and nutrients become soluble and can be transported off the site. As nutrients are washed away down slopes should be expected. Observations more or less confirm this.

WOOD UTILISATION: By by value adding the sawn timber products, two to eight times profit may be realised compared to that of woodchips.

J.C: Spoke about value adding, about broad interests, experimenting with kiln drying and various types of sawn timber products, and of attempts to find markets for various products.

J.E: Spoke about the values of timber, particularly hardwood scantlings vs. pine for house frames; the problems of marketing, allocations of poorer grade logs foe structural uses; and the need to increase the values of the trees in the forest and their resulting sawn timber products (that is royalty price structure).

Dallas : It may be more expensive but we need to develop markets for quality timber from sustainably managed forests.

T.A; There is a global movement to label and market "eco-friendly timber" from sustainably managed forests. A conference will be held about this in Brisbane in late May.

J.C: Local sawmillers are aiming to value add. Now there are sixteen kilns in the district. Jack Opie's report indicates the level of expenditure in this direction. Flooring has great potential, but house framing is a diminishing market. (The quality of the timber is not appreciated because it is not seen. If you can see it you can appreciate it). It is better to value add quality timber and make it visible in high quality use eg. furniture.

G.P: Joan Kirner's policy encouraged the establishment of many kilns. The key is to identify the market / species. Higher density timber equals higher quality. There are problems with sap wood (lyctus borer) but Black Forest Sawmill is going for accreditation for sap wood dipping. Sapwood may comprise thirty to forty percent of saw logs, and is worse than thin air.

Andrew Martin (Builder) : F27 beams have a limited market which will deminish; roof trusses are more convenient and easier, so people (builders) will order them.(G.P. & J.C. agree.) There are problems with value adding. There is a perception that Australian Hardwoods are second grade.

G.P: Black Forest Mill has many enquires from countries in Asia , Europe and Nth America for export of its products.

T.A: Many portable mills have been denied access to the Wombat Forest, but smaller operations have great potential to add value to the resource. There has been an environmental campaign to ban the importation of export timbers. This may extend to a campaign FOR pine timber AGAINST our hardwoods. Can we counter this future campaign. (Good Wood Guide).

Cameron Price (Graduate Forester) : Environmental costs need to be incorporated into timber product prices.

J.E: How to <u>increase</u> the value (price), hardwood ?

G.P: Produce better timber with less sapwood , or make gum veins more acceptable. The input to DCNR is more than $2 Mil . The issue is timber quality equals tree quality; one of the worst defects is gum veins which is a fire (burning) .

B.K: There has been overcutting and over estimation of timber resources. Log grading standards have changed . Bio-diversity needs to be optimised. Most countries produce bulk softwood. Australia has had an abundance

of hardwood, plenty to burn, but this supply is diminishing. In Australia softwood is now becoming abundant, the most intensively managed timber production. There is a need to add resource s to the management of select hardwood areas.

FIREWOOD:

David Endacott (FMA Committee): Wombat Forest is divided into two sections southern - high rainfall - common species messmate and peppermint. Northern - low rainfall - durable species box/ironbark plus some specialty coupes. This drier forest area can produce desirable firewood the price difference reflects this. It should be better managed.

T.A: The marketing of this has not been tackled.

Gavin Jamieson (City of Ballarat): Agreed but it is an old suggestion. G.P. & G.H. both agree that most fire wood is not accessible.

D.E: There is a need for zoning for firewood. There will probably be continuation to the trend to closure of the bush for collection of dry fallen firewood.

J.E: Q: Re the economics of extraction by DCNR or Contractors of harvesting residue from the coupes to landings for stockpile and sale to the public?

T.A: The draft management Plan was deficient because it was released without the accompanying Statement of Resources, Uses and Values, of the Midlands FMA. This resources statement is unpublished, and was released selectively very recently; too late and too close to the deadline for closure of submissions in response to the draft Management Plan. This provides an argument for extension of the deadline.

D.E.: Shelterwood has increased the amount of litter on the forest floor, and this has been good for some wildlife. The small species and birds have never had it so good. There have been concerns about decisions made by DCNR without adequate data or research. This is not true. Decision-makers have had access to good research and data. Much of this information is publicly available. DCNR has failed to explain itself. Everyone should pressure the Government to adequately resource DCNR.

CORPORATISATION / PRIVATISATION

G.J.: There are problems with the public's access to State Forests. (e.g.: Plantation Corp., and the closure of forest roads.
The corporatisation of forests will exempt the corporate owners from the FoI Act.

There was the comment made that the Q.C. who was consulted during the drafting of the Code of Forest Practice, worked to instructions to draft the code so there could be no prosecutions.

G.J.: Disagrees with this interpretation. There is provision for continuing breaches of the code to incur $1,000 / day fines - these maters do not have to go before a Court.

Dallas : We should expect replies, acknowledgment s, and consideration of our submissions. We should expect good future performance from DCNR. We should demand accountability from DCNR.

Apiarists rep.: What is the WFS view on the presence of beekeepers in the forest.

T.A.: All users have valid interests in the management of the forests. All sides of the issue must be considered.

Apiarist: We are the only industry which can harvest from the forest with benefit to the forest, and no evidence of them having been there.

D.E..: Good forest management for timber meets the needs of beekeepers, both have very similar interests. Messmate honey production is not mentioned in the Plan