SUMMARY

The Wombat Forest Society and Central Victorian Forestry Company Pty Ltd present a joint submission highlighting the need for adequate programmes and funding for the Department of Natural Resources and Environment to ensure delivery of the principles contained in the FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN and the requirements identified in the REVIEW OF SUSTAINABLE SAWLOG YIELD for the MIDLAND FOREST MANAGEMENT AREA.

The submission identifies the key issue which is to concentrate on growth of the third generation forest and give it the attention it deserves while delivering other forest values which both parties believe are equally important.

The desire of both parties is to ensure the community is fully cognisant of the approach which is being taken to management of the forest. We acknowledge DNRE is already working to address some of the issues raised in this submission.

TO: Hon. Marie Tehan, MLA,
Minister for Conservation and Land Management.
8 Nicholson Street,
East Melbourne, 3002.

FROM: Wombat Forest Society.
Central Victorian Forestry Company.
Sawmillers of Midlands Forest Management Area.

15/09/98

RE: Long Term Sawlog Sustainability of the Wombat Forest.

The purpose of this letter is to present the joint concerns of Central Victorian Forestry Company and the Wombat Forest Society that the Government provides adequate commitment and resources to certain management issues, and to the maintenance of forest growth for the long term sustainability of all forest values including the hardwood timber industry in the Midlands Forest Management Area.

The organisations are also concerned that the present level of DNRE funding is impinging on the ability of the Department to manage the forest according to criteria laid down in the Forest Management Plan for Midlands Forest Management Area, the Review of Sustainable Sawlog Yield Midlands Forest Management Area and the Timber Industry Strategy, the latter of which provides the overall framework for management of all forest values and uses, timber and non-timber.

This joint submission is a unique event for both the conservation movement and the timber industry in this area. It is based on a joint perception that the need for further research and silvicultural works in the Midland FMA to produce the projected sustainable yield outcomes, and the proper management of all non-timber values, is paramount and transcends any fundamental ideological differences between the two organisations.

The Sawmillers of the Midlands Forest Management Area, the Central Victorian Forestry Company and the Wombat Forest Society acknowledge that they have participated in the Department of Natural Resources and Environment's planning processes and agree that the recommendations contained in the above reports contain fundamentally sound management systems. Each party is committed to ensuring 'worlds best practice' for the Wombat Forest and efficient use of the land base for multiple use forestry

The forward of the Midlands FMA Forest Management Plan states that.. "*the plan provides for the balanced use and care of State Forest*".. and is "*an example of integrated regional planning drawing on a wide range of expertise both within and outside the Department.*" It provides a framework in which the region's timber industry can continue to invest as well as providing a framework for the protection of natural values of the forest. Special measures are identified to add further security to the quality and yield of water used for urban supply, and a clear basis for State Forest recreation and tourism is established.

The Sustainable Sawlog yield review summary states that the review "... provides for the probable impact of wildfire" .. "and is based primarily upon Implementation of a young regrowth management program... Continuation of Shelterwood silviculture on high to medium productivity sites..Re-treatment of understocked areas... Protection of regional biodiversity, ...domestic water supply catchments and Powerful Owl habitat."

TIMBER RESOURCE AND SUSTAINABLE YIELD

+ Based on its analysis of the yield expectation graphs contained in the review, the Wombat Forest Society is of the view that harvesting and growth forecasts appear to be unsustainable for significant periods unless extensive silvicultural work to promote growth is undertaken. Industry and the Wombat Forest Society are concerned to see that the silvicultural works required to achieve the sustainable yield rate are undertaken so that the sustainable yield can be achieved.

Early thinning is needed to optimise yields and continuing Research and Development is needed to identify the best thinning regimes and to identify the actual rather than estimated growth regimes. It is acknowledged that some work along these lines is being carried out by DNRE but both groups question whether this is sufficient to meet the expectations of the Sustained Yield Plan.

+ The sustainable yield model was essentially produced from running several FORPLAN simulations based on GIS, logging history, utilisation standards, Continuous Forest Inventory Plots, growth models and forest interpretation of aerial photographs. DNRE needs to provide further elaboration of its Sustainable Yield methodology, including many of the assumptions such as rotation length and growth rates.

Dr Brian Turner of the Department of Forestry, ANU, evaluated the methodology used in the review. Both parties recognise that DNRE is currently carrying out an appraisal in a number of the above areas, and are hopeful this will help clarify issues and satisfy concern at the local level. DNRE also need to explain to the public how other forest values other than timber were accommodated in the model.

+ Industry and the Society supports ongoing reviews of the yields and volume estimates to ensure the data base is continually upgraded. Funding must be made available to the Department to continue to upgrade the resource data. Further more a summary of yields of shelterwood 1 and 2 cuts over the past 10 years should be made available by DNRE as part of the review.

+ The Forest Act specifies a commitment of government to supply the timber industry with 58,000m3 of sawlog per annum. A critical time

arises in the model at age 40 when the current regrowth is required to supply sawlog. Every silvicultural effort must be made to grow the regrowth at the required sustainable rate or greater to avoid this potential problem. This means that funding must be available to the Department to grow the wood.

+ DNRE should clarify the levels of operational funding needed for silvicultural works, to ensure that yields from regrowth are optimal, and that the timber will come on stream when sawlog supply from existing mature forests is predicted to decline.

+ The Shelterwood System was introduced into the Midlands in the mid seventies. The Wombat Forest Society believe that around seventy per cent of the Wombat Forest has had at least the first Shelterwood cut. Industry suggests that a review of the logging history since the introduction of shelterwood would give a better insight into the level of cut under this silvicultural system in future.

REGENERATION

+ The regeneration response has not been consistent. Funding must be made available to DNRE to bring unstocked areas into full production. Further applied research into early growth enhancement is required, along with research into the impact of retained trees on regeneration and growth response. This work must be conducted with due regard to the catchment values. The results of this research must then be put into practice.

+ The Wombat Forest Society is of the view that the rotation period in the Model appears to be seventy years in the shelterwood areas. The Wombat Forest Society claim that with the important catchment values and future tourist and recreational values, this rotation is contrary to the Code of Forest Practice. Industry does not agree with this claim but would seek clarification to alleviate Society concerns.

+ Some regeneration burns over the last ten years have seen many of the prime retained trees under the shelterwood system receive significant scorching. A study by K.Tolhurst from the Creswick School of Forestry has highlighted the measurable retardation of growth rates in these retained trees from this type of regeneration burn. The alternative of cooler burns is that the regeneration strike is compromised. Again further applied research is required to study and quantify the effects of

regeneration burns on the growth rates and quality of retained trees and the regeneration response.

+ The regeneration issue may be defused to some extent if the Department presents a paper explaining the methodology for regeneration needs and how forest growth to meet sustainable yield requirements will be met.

CATCHMENT VALUES

The importance of the Wombat State Forest as the head-waters of a number of Designated Catchments, is broadly recognised. These waterways flow into river systems that have heavy domestic and irrigation demands placed on them.

+ The north flowing rivers from the Wombat Forest, (the Loddon/ Coliban/ Campaspe Rivers) are all heavily allocated for irrigation. The Forest Management Plan recognised the importance of these river systems. Industry believes that the Plan along with the Code of Forest Practices has adequate prescriptions to protect water values. The Wombat Forest Society does not believe these measures are being properly implemented to take into account the importance of these catchments. The Society has criticisms about forest management within these catchments by DNRE, which are beyond the scope of this letter (i.e. to be addressed by CMAs).

LERDERDERG REPORT

The Lerderderg Report looks into the 'Effects of Forest Harvesting on Water Quality in the Lerderderg Catchment.'
The Wombat Forest Society have some misgivings as to the quality and accuracy of this report. Industry does not share these concerns. In order to ensure that current catchment management and harvesting are not degrading catchments further research should be undertaken to further study and assess the impact of logging on water yield and water quality in designated Wombat Forest Catchments.

MINERAL SPRINGS

+ The importance of the Mineral Springs to the region's economy is well recognised.

The Mineral Springs in this area form eighty percent of Australia's Mineral Springs.

+ A Hydrologist working for DNRE has produced a Mineral and Spring Water Resource Protection Discussion Paper (Shugg, 1996, Report No. 6).

Industry and The Society agree that further definitive work needs to be done in this field to define and explore the effect of urbanisation, land clearing and other human impacts on the mineral springs and the recharge areas, and the findings incorporated into forest management where appropriate.

TOURISM AND RECREATION

One of Victoria's booming tourist destinations is the Wombat Forest/ Daylesford Region. A lot of this tourism is centred on the Mineral Springs and the region's natural features and general ambience.

+ In Hepburn Shire last year there were $25 Million dollars worth of proposed tourism developments through the Planning Department alone.

+ Future Tourism and Recreational options are of paramount importance. Tourist Surveys are showing that visitors to the area are increasingly looking for out of town experiences.

+ Historically the Wombat Forest is probably the most intensively logged forest in Victoria, and remains widely used for all forest values.

+ The Timber Industry has a capital investment of $56 million with a further $7 million planned for future expansion. Expenditure into the local economies is $54 million per annum. Wholesale value of production is $58 million pa (Opie, 1996).

There is no reason to suggest that the timber harvesting and tourism cannot co-exist, many opportunities exist for tourism based on the forest and the timber industry it supports.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Sustained Yield model be tested by producing a set of overlays at an appropriate scale (e.g. 1:25,000) showing the coupes that will theoretically be cut in five year bands, up until the year 2060 (using a different colour per each five year band).
2. That DNRE explain to the community how forest values other than timber were accommodated in the forplan model.
3. That a review of DNRE operating funds for forest management be undertaken to ensure delivery of the Forest Management Plan and

Sustained Yield requirements including - thinning of regrowth and other silvicultural works essential to deliver the plans.

4. That DNRE fund further research and studies to assess the impact of all forest activities on water yield and quality in designated catchments in the Wombat Forest. WFS believe that the best possible research outcomes would be achieved by DNRE adopting a truly co-operative approach with all responsible water and Catchment Management Authorities.

5. That DNRE finance and undertake a study of the mineral springs recharge areas, define the areas and explore the effects of human impact.

6. That DNRE produce a paper of a review of logging history since the introduction of the shelterwood system in the Wombat Forest.

7. That plans for a comprehensive and appropriate early thinning and stand enhancement programme be drawn up for the Midlands FMA.

8. That DNRE present a paper explaining the standards for adequate regeneration.

9. That continuing applied research be approved to study and quantify the effects of regeneration burns on growth rates and timber quality.

10. That continuing applied research be approved and financed to study the impact of overwood (retained trees) on regeneration and growth.

11. That the DNRE prepare a paper containing a summary of yields from S1 and S2 coupes over the past 10 years and how these yields compare with the model predictions.

12. That DNRE demonstrate to the community that pre-logging and post logging management does not compromise flora and fauna values.

SIGNED

John Slorach Central Victorian Forestry Company	Tim Anderson President Wombat Forest Society	Geoff Proctor on behalf of Sawmillers of Midlands FMA

Copies to:
The Premier of Victoria,
Hon. Mr J. Kennett.

The Minister for Agriculture and Resources

and Environment,
Hon. Mr P. McNamara.

Local Members State Government, Victoria.
Hon. Mr R. Knowles.
Hon. Mr T. Reynolds.
Hon. Mr R. DeFegely.
Hon. Mr. B Traynor.
Hon. Mr S. Elder.

Federal Member for Ballarat.
Hon. Mr M. Ronaldson

Other interested State Members:

Hon. Mr P. Gude.