Wombat Forest Society

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New Wombat Forest Society analysis predicts logging levels need to be halved.

The Wombat Forest Society has finished a review of the sustainable sawlog yield levels for the Midlands Forest Management Area. The review was carried out using post-Regional Forest Agreement changes to the productive areas and further analysis using the Wombat Forest Society's forest modelling and auditing system. The model allows a range of information and data to be assembled to test and predict logging levels.

In their recent review the society has incorporated up-dated logging history records and estimates of the amount of area that has had a final logging operation and will not be available for logging for at least another 55-60 years. The review also includes a further reduction to account for the logs that would not be available if NRE gave proper protection to the waterways in the Wombat.

The change in the early 1990s to more intensive first shelterwood logging has left a lot less trees in the coupes than NRE's long term model suggests. With fewer trees left for the second cut there are less for future log supplies.

"Our research has shown the industry has started the second cut and found log volumes from these coupes is drastically less than NRE have modelled into their sawlog prediction. " Said Tim Anderson, Wombat Forest Society spokesperson.

"In the recent controversial Kearney's Road coupe, a shelterwood one coupe, NRE has left far less than the minimum level of required trees. The industry has taken a lot of logs from this coupe that should have been left for the second cut in ten to fifteen years."

"I believe that there has been a view among some of the sawmills that they will be able to go back into some areas in around 40 years times. Due to the importance of the Wombat's catchments, the required rotation for the area should be at least 80-100 years, not the 40 and above, being sought."

The Loddon, Werribee, and Lerderderg upper catchments have been extensively logged in recent years. The west RFA has placed specific restrictions as to the size and rate of logging in these catchments. Over logging in these catchments during the past 10-20 years will limit logging levels over the next ten or more years

The WFS analysis has shown that the sustainable sawlog yield for the Midlands FMA should be between 15 000-20 000 ^{3}m of sawlog pa. If the RFA's requirements for the implementation of an Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management system are properly applied, especially the requirements for inter-generational equity, the real figure could be well under 10 000^{3}m pa.

"This generation has no right to take future generation's rights to a forest or any resource. We have no right to pre-empt what future generations will do with their tall mature forest, they may utilise them or they may choose to simply look and enjoy them. We must ensure that those that come after us get their rightful access to tall mature forests." Added Mr Anderson.

Five years ago the industry were licensed to take 72 000^{3}m pa, it was reduced to 58 000^{3}m in 1996 with great assurances from the then Director of Forest Services Richard Rawson arrogantly told community that this figure was robust. WFS analysis and the RFA have shown that this was unachievable. The RFA reduced the level to 40 000^{3}m and WFS analysis shows that the real level is at least half the RFA level. We should now see Mr Rawson's Directorship as one of incompetence and failure, with his legacy being the destruction of the Wombat and the probable demise of the local timber industry.

"We need the State Government, the Premier Hon. Steve Bracks and the Minister for Forests and Conservation Hon Sherryl Garbutt to find out how this disastrous situation has come about. In the late 1980's it was parts of the local timber industry that raised concerns at logging rates. There has been an almost constant outcry from the community and serial denial and an apparent inability to act from NRE to legitimate and obviously valid community's concerns." Commented Mr Anderson who went on to say.

We need assurance from the government that we will not get sanitised or unachievable sawlog yields. These figures must demonstrate they have properly accounted for water, mineral springs and other non-timber values. We must have an explanation for the massive volumes of sawlogs and useable logs that have been sent to Midway's for export woodchipping, despite outcries from parts of the local timber industry itself. We need an inquiry to answer whether the demand for clearly unsustainable levels of the biggest logs by one sawmill was ever justifiable."

A few shareholders and local shareholder sawmills have made short term profits from this scandalous waste of beautiful young growing trees. This short-term greed may well be the straw that closes the local timber industry for the second time in 100 years and another generation misses out on their forest.

Our communities are probably about to go through more job losses, more pain. We need the State Government to ensure adequate compensation and retraining packages to be guaranteed, and we need truth and justice."