Wombat Forest Society 10 Point Plan

The Wombat Forest Society believes that the Federal Government's DFA process is flawed unless accompanied by comprehensive Federal legislation before the federal election. However, if legislation were passed, the Wombat Forest Society believes that the following strategy is a minimum position for long-term sustainable management of the forest for all values.

1. An immediate end to export woodchipping from the Midlands FMA.

Any such operations are in breach of the State Government's own Timber Industry Strategy sustainable level of woodchipping for the Midlands FMA.

2. A reduction in the total area harvested in the Wombat Forest to no more than 1% per year of the Net Productive Area (36,000 hectares). That is, no more than 360 hectares per year, and only in areas unlikely to destroy remaining biodiversity values.

This is based on the Victorian 'Code of Forest Practice' requirement of longer rotation periods than 80 years for sensitive water catchment forests. A 100 year rotation leaves 1/100th of the forest for harvesting each year. It may be that the forest cannot sustainably support 360 hectares being harvested each year, and this is a maximum figure only.

3. The Shelterwood harvesting system be abandoned in favour of silvicultural selection throughout the FMA.

Over the past 20 years since it was introduced, Shelterwood has proven a dismal failure at providing for any values in the forest other than timber. This is openly acknowledged by current and former State foresters, local sawmillers and timber workers.

4. In line with the ESD precautionary principle, any forest areas unharvested since 1973 (the beginning of the discredited Shelterwood system) should not be harvested at least until the completion of the RFA process.

The State Department of Conservation & Natural Resources has stated on many occasions that the same quantity of timber can be harvested from Shelterwood 2 coupes as from Shelterwood 1 coupes.

5. Increase streamside buffer zones to 40 metres either side of every stream marked on VICMAP 1:25,000 topographical maps of the Wombat Forest, and 10 metres either side of every non-perennial stream and drainage line.

This is the original recommendation of streamside buffers of the Victorian Government's Land Conservation Council for management in the Wombat Forest.

6. In line with the ESD precautionary principle, there should be no harvesting in the mineral spring recharge areas in the Wombat Forest.

The Wombat Forest is a critical water catchment forest, and 80% of all Australia's mineral springs are located within the forest. An application for listing the mineral spring recharge areas on the ***Register of the National Estate*** *is underway.*

7. An immediate end to all 'regeneration' burns throughout the FMA.

These hot burns to encourage the regeneration of messmate sawlogs for sawmillers only, at the expense of a natural mix of forest species, are turning the forest into a messmate plantation of even aged coupes, not a native forest.

8. A guarantee that any timber workers threatened with loss of employment by the overcutting in the Wombat Forest be offered either:-

-work in rehabilitating the forest (thinning operations etc), or

-fair compensation packages so they can pay off equipment, start new businesses, or relocate.

It is vital that any thinning operations or other such rehabilitation works in the forest are not based on the use of poison to kill trees. Hand thinning is the only acceptable means of thinning the forest.

9. A comprehensive flora and fauna survey, independent of the State Department of Conservation & Natural Resources, to fully assess these values in the forest for the first time ever.

10. The Victorian Code of Forest Practice be enforced as a minimum standard, and that community representatives be empanelled on a Code of Forest Practice Enforcement Committee of DCNR.