Wombat Forest Society/Resource Minister Geoff COLEMAN. 6/7/95.

PRESENT; Resource Minister, Geoff Coleman.

Federal Member for Ballarat: Michael Ronaldson
State Member Ballarat: Barry Traynor.
Wombat Forest Society Water Researcher: Loris Duclos
Wombat Forest Society Forest Interpretation: Tim Anderson.
Wombat Forest Society Treasurer: Greg Morgan.

AIM: To examine win/win scenario for firstly an agreement that the Wombat State Forest is in serious trouble and secondly what can be done to save not only the remaining forest values and timber jobs, but also what sort of remedial action can be implemented in order to bring the forest back on line as soon as possible. I t was also an aim that if the minister does do something positive immediately then the Wombat Forest Society would not run " I told you so media".

MEETING: It was decided that a good start would be to have the WFS do an initial presentation highlighting the research and findings the society has under taken in the past year. The WFS pinpointed the start of the problems in the Wombat coincided with the introduction of the Sheltered Silvicultural System in the early nineteen seventies. Around this time a number of the forest's Continuous Forest Inventory (C.F.I.) Plots were abandoned. The Tragedy of this action was that the plots retained did not represent the forest average, these plots represented the better quality of forest and therefore gave skewed figures as to the Wombat's growth rate. The Dept. of Conservation and Natural Resources have quoted the sawlog increment of growth for the Wombat at between 1.5 to 2.5 cubic meters of sawlog growth per annum per hectare. The WFS believes that the real average increment of growth to be around one cubic meter per hectare per year. It has been a concern to the community that theDCNR has consistently justified its practices with the statement that " ...The area subject to harvesting each year is less important than the volume harvested..." . As just highlighted above this is a very vulnerable system to use to regulate sustainable timber production. A system that sets a rotation period suitable to the various competing forest values, divided by the area of the forest i.e. 36,000 hec forest cut over an eighty year rotation would allow 450hec first cut each year, the average for the Wombat over the last five years has been in excess of 1250hec per annum (from Gary Morgan DCNR SW Region Manager.). It was quoted that over the last twenty three years (since shelterwood came in) , around sixty seven percent or the forest has had logging on it . This is obviously well in excess of sustainable limits and the medium to long term viability of our unities timber industry was severely compromised.. The Minister and Mr Traynor agreed and indicated that some sizeable reductions in sawlog quotas were going to be introduced next year when the sustainable sawlog quotas are revised under the Timber Industry Strategy. It was hinted that the small sawmills with quotas of between 1000 and 4000 cu mtrs sawlog would find it very difficult to survive with the new figures. (I believe that the Minister , Mr Ronaldson and Mr Traynor are already aware of what these figures will be.).

The Minister was then shown the Landsat Image the the WFS had commissioned from the State Data Center Ballarat. This was the clincher in our submission. It clearly shows that the Wombat State Forest has been irreversibly overcut due to either incompetence or duplicity. Mr Coleman studied the Image closely and even went to the extent of getting a magnifying sheet to give it a closer look.

At this time Loris proceeded to do a presentation that put the relevance of the Wombat as a water catchment

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Loris presented the Minister with the following documents :

1. Hydrogeology of the Mineral Springs of Central Vic. Nov 1994.
   A Shugg DCNR &, M Knight Nat. Cent. for Ground Water Management.
2. DCNR Wood Utilisation Plan for the Wombat 1995/1998.
3. High Conservation Evaluation of the Midlands F.M.A.
   Environment Victoria, Dec 1994.
4. Review of the Shelterwood Silvicultural System as practised in the Wombat State Forest.
   Sept 1994. Index & 4.10 Environmental Care.
5. South West Division Field Conference, Daylesford Forest District. 1968.
6. Newspaper articles Ballarat Courier 24.3.95.
7. Management of Forested Catchments Central Highlands Water . Nov 1994.

8. Everyone Lives In a Catchment, Central Highlands Water.
9. Coliban Water Authority Management of Forested Catchments.
10. Loddon, Campaspe, Bendigo Creek River Management Authority,

Coleman Meeting 6/7/1995. (cont.)

11, Coalition Forest Policy for Melbourne Water Supply Catchments.

12. Victorian Timber Industry Strategy. August 1986. p. 43.
13. Code of Forest Practices for Timber Production. May 1989. 3.2.3 water
14. Outline of the Wimmera Water Resource Valuation. May 1994. Proposal Francis Grey & Associates.

Loris basically put forward the case that the other important values of the Wombat are not being adequately catered for by the DCNR and its management practises in the forest. It was therefore in order that an analysis covering Resource Equity in the Wombat be carried out to safe guard the future. The minimum standards set out in the Code of Forest practises are frequently ignored and that down stream managers have been misled by the DCNR as to the type of forest practices used in the Wombat. At the conclusion of this presentation Mr Coleman put forward the proposition that the best thing to do would be to close the forest and keep it as a catchment and recreation forest. The delegation from the WFS was aghast at this suggestion and put forward the case that it should be possible to maintain a timber industry and address the above concerns.

At this stage the meeting went into a phase of discussion on possible future scenarios.

A lengthy discussion took place on the viability of RADCON's Radial Sawing and a. its viability and its suitability for the Wombat as a way of lessening the number of job losses due to the DCNR's mismanagement and overcutting.

The WFS delegation reiterated its belief that a return to Selective Felling would be a way of evening out the future availability of sawlogs , instead of the two stage clearfelling that leaves sixty to seventy years to wait for the next cut.

Photos were produced that clearly illustrated the types of concerns with coup marking and logging operations as seen presently in our forest.

The point was made that Midways, which only employed ten or so people , had a license to extract residual roundwood. The Timber Industry Strategy showed that that sustainable residual levels to the year 2014 was set at 63,500 m3/yr. Mr Malcolm Mc Dougal (Managing Director of Midways/ ex Geelong Regiuon DCNR Manager), had inter Departmental letters stating this sent to him when he was in the Dept. How is it that CSR Hardboards has a license for 70,000 tons and Midways a license for 64,000 tons? Combined they are taking twice the prescribed sustainable limit. CSR is appropriate for the Wombat because they take a lower grade of chip and therefore can use a greater proportion of waste , employ in excess of 200 people locally and value add in Australia. How did Midways get their license.

Mr Coleman stated that he was waiting for the Dept to produce its regional assessment (the Midlands Forest Management Plan). The WFS delegation expressed concerns about the objectivity of the committee compiling this plan. Tim produced the F.O.I. showing that Tim and Alan had been wrongfully taped at its first submission and shouted at by the committee at our second submission. For these and other reasons the WFS has little credibility in the committee and doubts the Management Plan will be the complete picture.

The Shelterwood review was produced and it pointed out that in the whole paper , not once was that question of nutrient cycling considered. Given the Wombat's history of being totally cut out last century , that secession of selective felling treatments carried out from the 1940's until the seventies and close to seventy percent of the forest has had at least one shelterwood treatments it is appalling that this vital area has been ignored. the type of soil that the Wombat grows on (predominantly podsol) is only good for three cycles of trees. This has happened and the WFS feels that the species shift from approx. 10% peppermint to around 40% peppermint is not due to shading problems and the shade intolerance for Messmate to regenerate, as commonly put forward by the DCNR. If the Wombat has got nutrient problems it would show up in species distribution along and down slopes. he peppermint favour the less rich soils, the messmate are mid slope species and the swampgum and blackwood favour the gullies. If the were nutrient problems then we would observe a move down the slope of the peppermints. This is something that the society has verified through observation and asking timber workers.

The quality of the regeneration was also of concern. Mr Coleman was informed that although successful regeneration did occur this was far from the norm. The delegation pointed out that regeneration was often either too thick or virtually non-existent. Again this common types of failed regeneration coupled with the Dept cutting regularly over the sustainable limit and not factoring the delays that failed regen. will lead too, then there will be a huge gap between the present forest being cut out and the regen, coming back on line.

Mr Coleman was informed that the WFS was implementing a New Work Opportunity Scheme inthe Wombat in order to get some vital rehabilitation underway in order to get the forest producing sooner. It was also pointed out that this scheme was designed to get normally opposite paries working together for the common good of the forest. The Society had invited DCNR, Central Highlands Water, Hepburn Shire, CSR, VAFI and the local timber industry to work with it on this scheme.

It is a shame that the DCNR has ignored thte members of the local timber industry who have for about ten years been telling the Dep that something wasn't right in the Wombat , and that the area that had been cut was too much. If at that time some proper double checking had been carried out , then the Wombat State Forest and our local timber tradition may have been saved,.

CONCLUSION: The meeting reached no real conclusion. The delegation was in a state of numbness at the reality that the forest was in a severely damaged state just one hundred years after it was closed for the same stuff up. The ball is now in the hands of the Minister to do something desisive now to bring into place a number of remedial actions. These should include 1. an inquiry into the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to see if the overcutting and lack of adhearence to the Code of Forest Practice is due to incompetant mismanagement or duplicity with sections of the Industry and some members of the Department (past or present) .