Wombat Forest Society
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PRESS RELEASE

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WOMBAT FOREST LOGGING CLOSURE

The Wombat Forest Society applaud the Bracks Government on the recently announced 79% reductions in logging volumes and subsequent phase out of logging in the Wombat Forest in accordance with ecologically sustainable forest management principles. These substaintal reductions in the Wombat Forest and other Forest Management Areas are the most significant win for Victorian forests for twenty years.

The new logging volumes, based on the independent assessment of respected forester, Dr Jerry Van Clay, Southern CrossUniversity, Lismore, have vindicated the Wombat Forest Society's own analysis of sustainable yield modelling, showing the disturbing gravity of unsustainable logging in most Forest Management Areas in Victoria,.These Forest Management Areas include North East, East Gippsland, Central Gippsland, Portland, Dandenong and Mid-Murray which have combined reduction in sawlog volumes of 215 561m3 and subsequent decrease in woodchip volumes.

The current sawlog outputs in the Wombat Forest have now plummented from 72 000m3 in 1996 to now 8 600 m3 in 2002, a reduction of one eighth, once again supporting the Wombat Forest Society's long held campaign on unsustainable logging. A significant reduction in woodchipping has also occured in this time frame. The Wombat Forest Society has always held a non-negiotable position on ecological sustainability and equal opportunity for all forest stakeholders.

The Bracks Government's brave political decision in the Wombat Forest, based on open and intelligent process, shows the previous Kennett Liberal Government's contempt for the Wombat Forest Society and community concerns of overlogging in the Wombat Forest to be highly negligent.

In 1998, the Wombat Forest Society and the local timber industry co-signed a groundbreaking letter to the Kennett Government, detailing our shared concerns regarding overlogging in the Wombat Forest, The Liberal Government Conservation Minister, Marie Tehan, continually ignored this statement despite constant lobbying, indicating an an arrogant contempt for us all.

Finally, after the threat of direct action, the minister, Mrs Tehan, responded with an A4 paper, dismissing all concerns. Obviously, both the Kennett Government and NRE advisors chose to ignore these unique concerns and continued on the statewide bludgeoning of our our local forests like greedy pigs to a bottomless trough.

More alarmingly, senior NRE management continued to misrepresent and ignore our stated, intellectual and persistent concerns for the next five years to all government.. The Wombat Forest Society now hold these NRE staff with much disappointment and bewilderment, believing that they should be now held accountable the considerable loss and difficulties that our local community must now endure.

Further to this complacency and collusion, the destructive woodchipping practices of Midways and demand for big logs from our largest sawmiller have contributed to the destruction of many non-timber values within the Wombat Forest and the unfortunate demise of the local timber industry. These greedy and unfetted actions have lead to the second closure of the Wombat Forest Society in 100 years, the earlier leading to a Royal Commission in 1898 and subsequent establishment of the Forest Commissions Victoria (created in 1919), to investigate the demise of the 'ruined forest'.

The Wombat Forest Society is now calling on all levels of Government and our local community to find meaningful employment and support for our displaced workers and families. The timber industry workers and smaller sawmills have supported the Wombat Forest Society fight for sustainable management and intergenerational equity and, themselves, are the victims of irresponsible and exclusive process.

The Wombat Forest Society acknowledge and respect our local workers, having always provided local industry and the forestry union shared position at all public meetings. These local workers have shown an honesty and intergrity toward these local forest issues and the Wombat Forest Society approach and we feel deeply saddened for their employment loss.

The Wombat Forest Society have always believed that the overlogging of our local forests is a whole community responsiblity. The future management of the Wombat Forest should now be back to the community, providing a restoration phase of this wonderful forest.

Finally, the Wombat Forest Society would like to acknowledge the tenancious and hardworking efforts of Joanne Duncan, Gisborne MLA, who has constantly supported our campaign to both Minister and Government despite the many difficulties that the forest debate contains. A wonderful effort.

Yes, Our Forests, Our Future.

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