Draft Letter to the Editor,

In response to Norman Endacott's rather "foresters know best" letter to the Advocate last week, I can't resist making the following points and suggestions.

It is a shame that retired foresters, such as Norman, limit their public responses to criticizing legitimate community concerns, rather than addressing the current destruction of the Wombat.

Mr Endacott's letter bemoans the implementation of the Timber Industry Strategy as being the result of the Cain Government's 'reforming zeal'. It is these 'reforms' that are aimed at providing balanced multiple-value forest management. The WFS is still waiting for its implementation.

It is clear to our community that even with the Timber Industry Strategy and its reforms, the disaster in the Wombat is the result of past mismanagement. This is despite broad concern from members of the timber industry, conservationists and the broader community.

Long term NRE local staff have also demonstrated an inability to see or properly react to the fact that our forests are being logged at a terribly unsustainable rate. Are they hired to act as custodians of the forests that belong to the people of Victoria or as agents for the greedy end of the timber industry? The WFS has found Geoff Scales (new NRE Senior Forester) a breath of fresh air with his frankness over the condition of the forest.

In dealing with the Kearney's Road coupe, Mr Endacott should have also read that the Midlands Forest Management Plan identifies this area as 'Research Area 323', an Armillaria reference site (pg 69). The Plan states that Special Management Zone shall 'exclude timber harvesting and other management activities, which will affect research objectives until **2020** (pg. 90). The coupe takes in some of this area. WFS comments were in this context.

The other complaints that the WFS have made are straightforward:

1. That the main watercourse through the coupe is the Loddon River, and as such should have been given a buffer strip status, not the temporary stream/ filter strip status it received. To the WFS this demonstrates that the objectives of management are about delivering big logs over other more important forest values, such as water.

   NRE justification has been to call the stream temporary as it does not flow more than 90% of the year. Well, commonsense says that the headwaters will generally not flow all the time. In this case a local resident, on whose property the Loddon rises, can attest that this waterway does flow more than 90% of the time.

   The NRE web-site carries the following statement in relation to the current Farm Dams Review '*Major waterways are easy to identify. However, in drier areas or in the upper reaches of a waterway, it is difficult to determine what is a natural channel and more particularly what is a regular flow. The subjectiveness of decisions has been a major criticism."*

   The recently signed RFA had no trouble defining this waterway as 'Sedgy Riparian Woodland' nor does the Melways Street Directory have trouble defining this waterway as the Loddon River. The difference between NRE's interpretation and the rest of the world's interpretation is that if the river had received the proper protection of a buffer then no trees could have been taken from it, whereas in a filter strip trees could and were cut down.

2. The coupe is called a shelterwood one cut (SW1) in the Wood Utilisation Plans which meant that the retained basal area should have been between 6-9m^2 ha. The reality in the Kearney's Rd coupe is that most of the area has significantly less retained tree than is required by the shelterwood system. This reflects either a failure by NRE staff to properly carry out the correct marking out of the coupe or a deliberate exercise in stealing yet more trees than should have been taken. Can Mr Endacott please measure the average basal area of the coupe and report back in his upcoming letters the reality?

3. That the stream crossing in the middle of the coupe is a clear breach of the Code of Forest Practice, as it has had no road base applied and is currently eroding away.

4. That the stacks of bark are too big and breeches the Code. Acknowledged as a breach by NRE.

Before Norman replies to this and previous articles concerning Kearney's Road, I ask that he visits the site and carries out a full inspection, bearing in mind the above issues we have raised.

A more productive coarse might be to have his profession carry out some soul-searching as to how some of it's brethren have managed to preside over the unsustainable logging of a number of Forest Management Areas across the State.

Over the next month the current Statewide Sustainable Yield Review will be released, we believe that it will indicate the need for massive reforms and adjustments across the State. Do NRE foresters' and managers' loyalties lie with their profession, their employer, 'Victorians' whose forests they manage or their mates in the timber industry. Not all are guilty and there are clearly some good foresters among them, but there needs to be accountability for what has gone on.

The WFS met with the Premier Mr Bracks and the Minister Mrs. Garbutt a fortnight ago. At a reception afterwards the Premier publicly stated that he agreed that there were major issues with the region's forests and that they were going to work through these with the Wombat Forest Society. Perhaps if Mr Endacott brings us some of his privately stated concerns we can have them addressed.

As you see Norman, we don't need to regain any moral high ground, we are, as always, being very effective working within the democratic process.

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