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Forest society's public meeting finds there is common ground

The Wombat Forest Society's recent public meeting at Daylesford Town Hall was a success, with more than 100 people attending to discuss the Department of Conservation and Natural Resource's draft management plan for the Wombat Forest.

Those who attended included CSIRO forest researcher Bill Caruish, Victorian Association of Forest Industries forest manager John Wright, Michael Ronaldson, MHR Ballarat, representatives from Midland Logging Company, Paul Love from the Construction, Forest, Mining and Energy Union, local sawmillers, field naturalists and a cross section of people interested in the Wombat Forest and its future.

"The aim of the meeting was to get as many of the players involved in the Wombat Forest issue together," said society vice-president Tim Anderson.

"Everyone involved, including the union, the society, the timber industry, local government and water authorities agree on 95 per cent of the issues involving the forest.

"It was a great day, everybody listened to each other's point of view and we discovered our common ground.

"We had four workshops to discuss wood, water, tourism and recreation and fauna and flora.

"All the different players circulated through these workshops, so people attending could hear different points of view.

"I ran the wood workshop and the Midlands Logging Company put up an innovative technique for forest management involving harvesting using a silvacultural technique.

"I believe that system put forward would go a long way to preserving the mature forest for a longer period of rotation.

"The emphasis of the day was to broaden local knowledge with regards to the submission to the Midlands Forest Management plan.

"A document was made available by the department detailing the uses and values of the forest and containing finer facts and figures.

"Those attending the meeting decided that in light of this new document, the department should extend by one month from March 31 its invitation for the public to respond to the draft management plan.

"The society has made a submission to the department along those lines, but it is important people express their concerns about the forest within the next week.

"Submissions don't need to be technical — emotive submissions are equally valid," he added.

Tim said representatives from conservation and timber interests were impressed at how the people of the Wombat Forest dealt with the issues in a mature way.

"That is a credit to all the people who attended — we all want the best possible outcome for the forest.

"However, with the evidence put forward at the meeting the question is how long can we sustain the forest.

"The question the community should ask the department is what form will the forest take 10, 20 or even 40 years from now.

"All our tall trees are being cut down — how will this impact on our emerging tourist industry, water, recreation and, of course, the long-term viability of the timber industry," he added,

said this week.

Ralph Manno also be-