FRIDAY 9 DECEMBER 1994 **THE AGE**

Poll boosts campaign to end export of woodchips

By GARETH BOREHAM, Canberra

The push for the Federal Government to end export woodchipping has received a fillip with a poll showing eight out of 10 Australians are opposed to the logging of native forests for overseas markets.

The Newspoll survey, conducted last weekend, was commissioned by leading conservation groups in the lead-up to this month's decision on export woodchip licence renewals.

The Wilderness Society's national campaign coordinator, Mr Kevin Parker, said the poll gave the Prime Minister, Mr Keating, a clear mandate to intervene in the licence rulings. "He has been given an imprimatur to take very strong action," he said.

The Resources Minister, Mr Beddall, is due to decide on the licences shortly with advice from the Environment Minister, Senator Faulkner. He presented his recommendations to Mr Beddall on Tasmanian, Western Australian and south-east New South Wales forests this week.

The 10 companies seeking renewals of their licences include the timber giant Harris Daishowa, which has applied to raise its woodchip exports from Victorian forests by almost 50 per cent.

If Senator Faulkner, who is committed to the phasing out of export woodchips and the protection of sensitive forests, is unhappy with Mr Beddall's ruling he may take the issue to Cabinet.

Yesterday Senator Faulkner said that he was not surprised by the poll result because Australians took the logging issue very seriously and had strong views about the protection of native forests.

But the National Association of Forest Industries dismissed the poll as "completely loaded".

The association's executive director, Dr Robert Bain, said the poll question — "Do you personaly approve or disapprove of trees from Australia's native forests being felled and exported as woodchips to Japan?' — was factually wrong.

"What we are exporting is residual wood. If we did not export it, the wood would be left on the ground or gathered up and burnt," he said.

Environment Victoria's campagin coordinator, Ms Linda Parlane said Australians from every walk of life were "unequivocally opposed" to export woodchipping.

Surprisingly, the poll found that more blue collar workers (83.2 per cent) disapproved of export woodchipping than white collar workers (76.3 per cent).

According to conservationists, the poll showed that Mr Keating could ban export woodchipping altogether and still receive strong community support.

"JOBS NOT WOODCHIPS FOR THE WOMBAT FOREST"

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False Accusations Against WFS

In recent weeks the State Government and certain timber industry representatives who profit from the woodchipped destruction of the Wombat Forest, have concentrated on misrepresenting the aims and objectives of the Wombat Forest Society.

We've since learnt that this is a standard tactic against any community group which is concerned for its forest environment, but the attacks boil down to one rather shallow claim: that the real motives of the WFS are to close down the timber industry in the Wombat entirely, and that the WFS wants a total end to the jobs in our local communities.

This was claimed in print as recently as two weeks ago in an internal State Government newsletter to staff of the logging department (DCNR), by South-West Forest Manager, Mr Gary Morgan, who is based in the department's Ballarat office. He claims that our true, and hidden motive, is to completely close down the industry.

Wrong, wrong, wrong. The aims and objectives of the WFS were listed in the very first mail-out to local residents in May, and have been repeated in the September *Wombat Forest Guardian*, as well as being available at our weekly Sunday market stall staffed through rain, hail and shine by volunteers.

This claim is a lazy and dishonest attempt to scaremonger. It will not deflect the WFS from its aims — a sustainable and sensitively-managed forest industry in the Wombat for all forest values, not just timber — but it is important for all members to reinforce the truth of our aims in the local community.

Quality household goods, bric-a-brac, craft items etc wanted for Wombat Forest Society market stall. *Each Sunday the WFS holds a stall at the Daylesford market. We are always looking for good quality items to be donated so we can sell them to support our campaign work to save the Wombat Forest.* ***Please bring any donations to the stall on any Sunday.***

Wombat Forest Guardian

DECEMBER 1994. NUMBER TWO. QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE WOMBAT FOREST SOCIETY INC. PO BOX 51 TRENTHAM, 3458.

Woodchip Decision Imminent

Dear Members and supporters,

Since we posted you the September edition of the *Wombat Forest Guardian*, a lot of the hard work by the WFS committee seems to be bearing fruit. As I write this, we await the final decision of the Federal Government about whether or not to renew the export woodchip licence for Midway Wood Products, who, as you know, source their woodchips for export from whole trees in the Wombat forest.

We have heard from sources in the Federal Government that the decision is likely to be handed down in the next seven days, and as you read this, the result may be known.

If the licence is cancelled the decision will be based on irrefutable video, photographic and (Statutory Declaration) written evidence of massive breaches of the licence conditions by Midway, gathered and presented to the Government by the Wombat Forest Society.

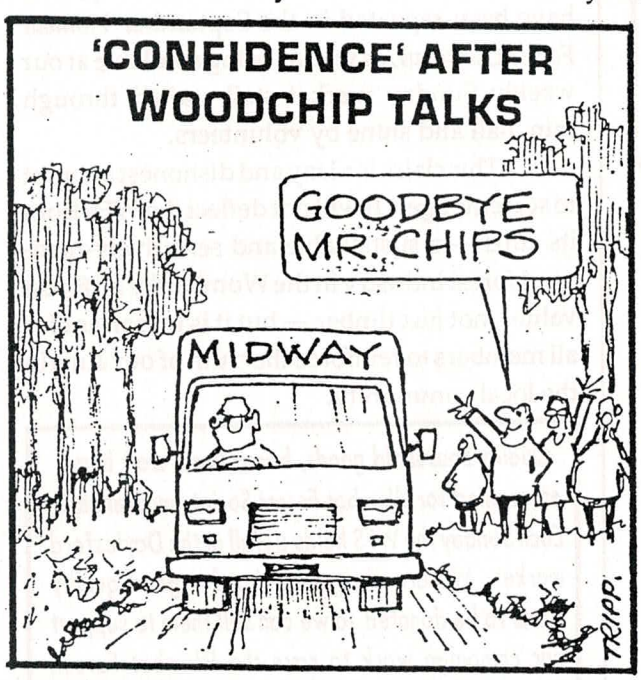
On 17 November a delegation of four WFS committee members flew to Canberra to present this evidence to a range of the key Labor MPs, ministerial advisers and bureaucrats who will be making the licence renewal decision. Showing our evidence had a dramatic effect on many of the people in Parliament House who saw it. Some MPs instantly altered their views on export woodchipping, and the whole day was packed from start to finish with meetings, viewings of our video evidence, and high pressure lobbying.

I am delighted that the hard won funds of the Society were put to such efficient use, and I'm certain that every member has had their money's worth! We now feel like VCE students who've done their exams, and can't do much more till the results come through. Your committee of up to 15 local people from all parts of the forest continues to meet every single week to maintain, extend and adjust the campaign as necessary.

If the decision of Federal Resources Minister, Mr David Beddall, is not to renew this licence, it will constitute one of the most significant forest victories in Victorian history.

This would be the first time in the 30 year history of export woodchipping that a licence has been cancelled outright.

Our Society is an unusual community group because it is made up of ex-sawmillers, timber workers and local residents who have banded together to end export woodchipping from their forest, and to preserve local sawmill jobs by getting timber harvesting back onto low-intensity selective falling, instead of the current methods of pseudo-clearfelling which simply feed the woodchippers.



Cartoon reproduced courtesy of Gordon Tripp, *Midland Express*.

Change To Selective Falling

Regardless of the decision, the second objective of the WFS will remain for us to achieve: low-intensity, selective falling instead of the high-destruction, regeneration burning, and degradation of the forest under the current system.

If we can return timber harvesting to sustainable levels, and treat our forest more sensitively, perhaps we can preserve the non-timber values which are currently being ignored. These include:

- flora and fauna
- water catchment
- tourism; and
- forest-related businesses and other community values.

These issues are discussed in more depth in the enclosed fact sheets, and I hope you will take the time to read them, and pass them on to family and friends.

If the decision is to cancel the woodchip licence, the WFS will have achieved a spectacular forest victory purely from the volunteer efforts of local forest residents and their supporters who began their campaign a mere 7 months ago.

Thank you,

Alan T Gray
Director,
Wombat Forest Society Inc.

 Ballarat Courier 18 May 1995

No hidden agenda for forest society

I am writing in my capacity as director of the Wombat Forest Society to clarify some matters regarding the aims of the Society, and the widespread community concern about overharvesting for timber and woodchips from the Wombat Forest.

In the past six months people in the timber workers' union, PR executives in the timber industry, and senior State Government foresters have spread false and specific accusations about my true intentions.

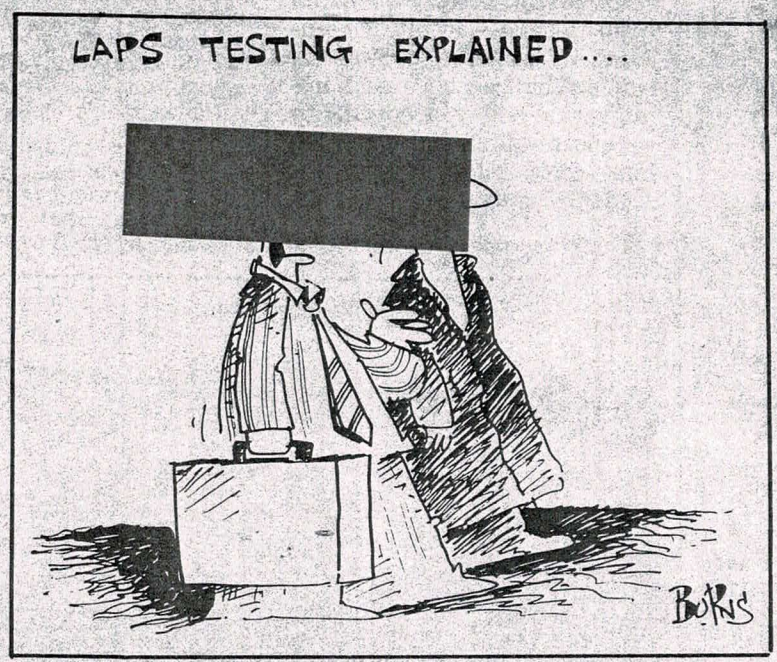
It is claimed that my hidden agenda as director of the society is a total shutdown of the entire timber industry in the Wombat Forest with its attendant employment and social consequences.

These accusations are contained in Government newsletters and statements made directly to Society committee members. The truth is that neither I, nor the rest of the Wombat Forest Society committee, have ever sought a total shutdown of timber operations in the Wombat Forest, and nor is there some hidden agenda directed and funded by "outside, extreme Green elements".

In fact, it is the Society which has been working behind the scenes for the past six months to create employment by improving the quality of the severely degraded regrowth left behind after the woodchippers and some of the greedier sawmillers have had their fill. If we wanted a total close-down of the industry we would not be trying to create better quality sawlogs for our children — we would be attempting the opposite.

The Society simply wants to see a timber industry operating on a sustainable basis, while considering other forest values such as flora and fauna, tourism and other forest related activities in our publicly owned forest.

— ALAN T. GRAY, Director.



"It'll tell you who are the problem children we can't afford specialist teachers for."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters should be no more than 300 words, and sent or delivered to: The Editor, *The Courier*, 110 Creswick Road, Ballarat, or faxed to 053 331651. Letters may be edited for length or clarity. Preference will be given to shorter letters which are typed or clearly written and double-spaced. They must be signed, whether the name is intended for publication or not, and the writer's name and address clearly written. Letters making personal attacks will NOT be printed anonymously. Home or business telephone numbers should be provided so that letters can be verified.

of amalgamation, and we can expect a drop of $4m in our collective rate bill next year.

Chief Commissioner Robson's achievement in making the $5m savings since May 1994 is especially commendable given all the extra costs borne by the council in the past 12 months.

These include purchase of the old water board offices; redundancies for 50 or 60 staff, with the costliest of these only taking place since last Christmas; unbudgeted costs for three commissioners and an interim chief executive; purchase of a $1.2m computer system; unanticipated costs to complete the regional aquatic centre; and the recruitment of an almost entirely new senior management team.

I am sure that Commissioner Robson is above playing accountant's tricks in announcing the savings.

The 1994/95 budget forecasts a $6 million surplus, merely because of a new way of accounting for council reserve funds which are, and always have been used to replace trucks, machines, not the result of writing off reserve funds in one year, but is a sustainable recurrent saving.

Commissioner Robson confuses me a little when he talks about shedding further staff. Surely with $5m saved in the first year, despite a host of once-off additional costs, there should be no need to shed more staff to continue to make savings.

Perhaps the staff he is thinking of shedding are some senior ones, particularly in the finance area. Commissioner Robson was able to set next year's $18m rate revenue expectation before presentation by officers of the draft budget for 1995/96.

I'm all for persuading him not to retire and go fishing next year. With him capable of operating such an efficient organisation without the need for officer advice, he's too valuable to lose.

— JOHN BARNES, Scott Pde, Ballarat.

Umpires not given support

general and those others given the responsibility to make decisions.

I imagine this would not have been an issue had this player's services not been required at the weekend. Keep up the good work umpires.

— HARRY GOODFELLOW, Sebastopol.

ALP may need name change

I am opposed to the Keating Government selling the people's bank (Commonwealth Bank). This is a departure from the original objectives of the party's Principles of Action (constitution adopted 1939).

I am strongly against the selling of any government undertaking to private enterprise. The debate that private enterprise is more efficient and competitive and provides better service is a heap of rubbish.

If government enterprises are inefficient it is the responsibility of the Government to change the management, so they will be viable