



TIMBER TOWNS VICTORIA

A Local Government Association

Draft Conservation advice for Alpine Ash forests of mainland Australia

Timber Towns Victoria Submission

Timber Towns Victoria welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the draft Conservation advice for Alpine Ash forests of mainland Australia.

Timber Towns Victoria (TTV) is an incorporated Victorian Local Government Association, representing the interests of municipal councils in relation to forests and forestry matters.

TTV's primary function is to provide a forum for local government to address the management of forests and forest industries and their impact on our local communities.

TTV is an effective advocacy body that represents our members from towns and cities across Victoria. Our effectiveness is based on being a peak organisation and acting as a voice for these communities advocating to both the Federal and Victorian State Government on policy and legislation that impacts communities.

The representatives of the TTV working group have reviewed your draft advice and collectively agree that our group can play a significant role in shaping the conservation advice draft.

The TTV committee encompasses a substantial local government area within Victoria, and these local Government areas are responsible and accountable to the residents of their respective councils.

In the event of significant wildfires, which frequently occur alongside severe flooding due to the severely degraded landscapes, Councils are the first responders tasked with addressing the aftermath. There is growing frustration regarding choices made by individuals who lack a genuine connection to the land we cherish. Most critically, these individuals are not held accountable when their misguided perspectives lead to the devastation of these landscapes.

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We recognise the critical importance of the Alpine Ash forests found on mainland Australia, which are currently under threat from the heightened risk of wildfires due to excessive fuel loads. This situation poses a serious danger to a substantial portion of immature Alpine Ash forests that lack the ability to regenerate. These young trees, being devoid of seeds, cannot recover if subjected to fire. The potential loss of these forests and their associated species is a pressing concern that necessitates immediate and effective management. Therefore, we advocate for a collaborative consultation process that includes experts from various sectors, such as the community, industry, forest scientists, and local Indigenous groups, to foster more effective and constructive efforts in this area.

The primary focus should be on genuine stewardship of the landscape rather than ideological posturing. The timing of this proposal, coinciding with the holiday season, and local government election periods, raises concerns about the potential for minimal public engagement. The underpinnings of the report warrant scrutiny, particularly given the heightened risk of wildfires exacerbated by a laissez-faire approach in some of the most vulnerable regions. Considering climate change, it is imperative to adopt a more proactive management strategy rather than the inaction suggested by the current report.

It is imperative to critically assess the report's references, as some have been questioned by credible sources, necessitating thorough peer review and clarification.

The lack of robust evidence in the data is exemplified by a Freedom of Information (FOI) request made by the Native Timber Taskforce of which TTV was a member, that sought to understand the reasoning behind the claims that the Native Timber Industry was unsustainable in Victoria. This inquiry highlights the questionable references utilised in the FOI documentation received, which have since been adopted by the state government.

Historically, Connors Plain, located north of Licola, was staffed by seventy individuals dedicated to forest management during the summer months in the 1960s and 1970s. In stark contrast, the current situation sees only one or two personnel in an office in Heyfield responsible for overseeing tens of thousands of hectares of forest, a clear indication of inadequate management resources.

Insufficient emphasis is placed on planning and prevention at present, with a disproportionate focus on reactive measures, comprising 5% preparation and 95% firefighting and recovery efforts. (As described at the 2024 International Fire Behaviour and Fuels Conference in Canberra.)





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It is crucial to consider collection of seed provision in the draft conservation advice.

There is a pressing need to gather more seeds, ideally during the harvesting process, to avoid the challenges of climbing trees at their full height. Given that seeds require 15 to 25 years to mature, it is essential to recognise the vulnerability of trees younger than 25 years. Understanding the current state of seed storage is vital for the future survival of these forests.

The ecology of the Alpine Desert, particularly around Mt. Buffalo, has undergone significant changes, having experienced five intense fires since its designation as a National Park a century ago. The frequency of these fires, occurring every decade, has led to the loss of all existing seed trees, resulting in a dramatic alteration of the ecosystem and biodiversity. This evidence is one of many examples resulting from the ideology of locking up forests and hoping they survive in some of the most fire prone areas on the earth.

Alpine Ash Forests were historically characterised by early European settlers as grassy, open woodlands that were accessible by horse and cart, indicating land management practices by indigenous peoples is a stark contrast to today's lock up and leave landscape.

Local custodians and forest scientists have accumulated years of experience in land management, developing sustainable practices to care for the landscape. While these methods were not without flaws, they maintained a balance that is now disrupted by extreme fuel loads, which are indicative of an imbalance in the ecosystem.

The urgency of addressing these issues cannot be overstated, particularly considering the impending electoral cycle, which presents a critical window for action before the next election.

Proactive and sustainable management of our native hardwood forests is essential for preserving healthy, biodiverse ecosystems, supporting local communities, and ensuring a renewable resource stream. The primary threats to the longevity of these forests stem from uncontrolled fires and climate change. Life cycle analyses demonstrate that well-managed native timber production can effectively sequester carbon over time, resulting in products that are desirable for residential and commercial use.





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TTV strongly supports the submission made by the Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA) regarding the Draft Conservation advice for the Alpine Ash forests of mainland Australia. In summary:

- The draft conservation advice is biased, rushed and overly reliant on the work of Professor Lindenmayer, while ignoring other scientific research and recent evidence.
- Active forest management, including seed harvesting and fire management, is essential for the conservation of Alpine Ash forests, especially in the face of increasing bushfire frequencies due to climate change.
- More than 95% of pre-1750 Alpine Ash forests still exist, indicating effective past management practices.
- The proposed conservation actions could harm Alpine Ash communities by limiting effective management practices.
- We wish to advocate for broader engagement with the forestry sector and a deeper review of the science before any decision is made.
- Ongoing sustainable forest management actions, such as aerial seeding after bushfires is essential to support the regeneration of Alpine Ash forests.
- TTV agrees with AFPA that the proposal to list Alpine Ash forests as a threatened ecological area be ceased and reconsidered after the 2025 federal election with extensive stakeholder consultation.

TTV wishes to extend an invitation to the Threatened Species Scientific Committee panel members and the Ecological Communities Section of the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, to participate in a tour of the Alpine Ash forests in Eastern Victoria and gain a real understanding from within the forests of what is actually happening on the ground.

We look forward to your response to our invitation.

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