



TIMBER TOWNS VICTORIA

A Local Government Association

SUBMISSION

in response to the

VICTORIAN ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
COUNCIL REPORT

Central West Investigation



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Timber Town Victoria (TTV) is an incorporated local government association representing the interests of municipal councils in relation to forestry on both public and private land. The Association's primary function is to provide a forum for local government to address the management of forests and forest industries and their impact on local communities.

Timber Town Victoria provides an important service to Victorian councils affected by forestry activities; an important information service and a valuable state-wide network. Recognised as the peak local government body on forestry, TTV provides policy advice to the Municipal Association of Victoria and other forestry development projects.

A core objective of the Association is to provide all Victorian municipalities with an interest in forest management with an opportunity to actively contribute to policy setting and information dissemination through TTV. No other state in Australia has an association such as TTV. The Association believes this can adversely affect local government's ability to provide a united front on issues of common interest and on the ability to the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments to effectively consult with the sector across the country.

Timber Town Victoria understands the following about this review document:- that the VEAC was established to conduct investigations and make recommendations to the Minister relating to the protection and ecologically sustainable management of the environment and natural resources of public land. It is tasked to do so taking into account:

- a. the principles of ecologically sustainable development;
- b. the need to conserve and protect biological diversity;
- c. the need to conserve and protect any areas which have ecological, natural, landscape or cultural interest or significance, recreational value or geological or geomorphological significance;
- d. the need to provide for the creation and preservation of a comprehensive, adequate and representative system of parks and reserves within the State of Victoria;
- e. the existence of any international treaty ratified by the Commonwealth of Australia which is relevant to the investigation;
- f. any agreement at a national, interstate or local government level into which the Government of Victoria has entered, or under which the Government of Victoria has undertaken any obligation in conjunction with the Commonwealth, a State, Territory or municipal council, which relates to the subject matter of the investigation;



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- g. the potential environmental, social and economic consequences of implementing the proposed recommendations;
- h. any existing or proposed use of the environment or natural resources.

The purpose of the investigation into public land, State Forest, in the vicinity of the Wombat, Wellsford, Mount Cole and Pyrenees Range forests is to:

- a) identify and evaluate the condition, natural and biodiversity values and cultural, social and economic values and the current uses of public land in the specified area; and
- b) make recommendations for the balanced use and appropriate management arrangements to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural values.

The VEAC study is to determine what, if any, measures are appropriate to “conserve and enhance the natural and cultural values of the public lands while trying to accommodate a diverse range of recreation and other activities”.

- advises that there has been considerable consultation, especially with the traditional owners;
- states that there is a critical role for forests in combating a “global decline in nature” exacerbated by climate change; and
- recommends converting 77,377 hectares of state forest into national and regional parks which have considerably less scope for human commercial and recreational usage.

VEAC’s expenditure for the Central West Investigation for the 2017-18 financial year, including salaries and on-costs, was \$902,505. Of the funds allocated, some \$54,000 was approved for a “Social and Economic Analysis of Final Recommendations for the Central West Investigation Area” by the Gillespie/Midas Social and Economic consultancy. The consultants’ report was issued, after submissions had been closed, in June 2019.

VEAC’s report says that, “a large number of submissions expressed concern about the ecological condition of the forests as a result of timber harvesting”. Other information suggests that a considerable number of submissions objected to the draft recommendations. These were given little attention in VEAC’S final recommendations, which were endorsed by the consultants’ report, that seek to reduce the State Forest area by 77,377 hectares, converting this into other forms of land tenure with more restrictive access as summarised below.



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Public Land Category	Current	Recommended	Change
State Forest	89,278	11,901	-77,377
National park	22,967	73,113	50,146
Conservation Park	-	5,246	5,246
Regional Park	5,264	24,992	19,728
Nature Reserve	6,703	8,051	1,348
Bushland Reserve	1,047	2,808	1,761
Total	35,981	114,210	

Timber Towns Victoria understands that the native forest industry in Victoria predominately depends on harvesting of multiple use public forests located in Victoria's east and north east, with a very small amount of harvesting occurring in areas of native forest west of Melbourne.

Multiple-use native forest is managed by the Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. Areas that are to be harvested are formally identified as part of timber release plans, and once approved, VicForests manages timber harvesting and regeneration in these areas.

Once harvested, logs from native forests are processed at 34 processing sites located in Victoria, including pulp and paper production (Australian Paper), 28 sawmills, and a small number of woodchip mills and portable sawmills. Of these 34 processors, three process logs from a mix of native forest and plantations, while the remainder rely solely on logs from native forests.

In addition to producing fibre to supply the wood and paper processing industry in Victoria, it is recognised that publicly owned native forest is used for a number of other purposes other than timber – such as tourism, bee keeping, firewood production, and a wide range of recreational activities and events including bushwalking, picnic and camping areas, bike riding trails, and four wheel driving areas.

The direct expenditure generated by the Victorian forest industry in 2015-16 was \$1,379 million in direct net expenditure (including \$1,132 million within Victoria) as a whole, up to and including primary processing, including \$803 million in the Central Highlands and Gippsland region, \$226 million in the North Central region, and \$185 million in the Western region. A substantial proportion of expenditure in the state as a whole was generated in Melbourne, accounting for much of the \$165 million difference between total expenditure in Victoria and the three regions.



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The contribution of the forest industry to Gross Regional Production in 2015-16, the direct contribution to GRP from the growing, harvesting and primary processing of wood and paper products in Victoria was \$598 million. This included \$179 million generated by the native forest industry, \$291 million by activities dependent on softwood plantations, \$48 million dependent on hardwood plantations and \$80 million dependent on forests outside of Victoria.

VEAC estimates of dollar values foregone as a result of its recommendations and the consultants estimate the Net Present Value of benefits foregone from the usage exclusions in newly designated areas at \$22.5 million. This is a considerable underestimate.

Losses from foregone timber getting (\$20 million according to the consultants) are likely to range between \$51 and \$99 million, depending on whether total value and not just value-added is counted. Already, in comparison with the Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) signed onto by Premier Bracks in 2000, the sustainable logging yield accepted by the parties has been greatly reduced, meaning the loss is \$100-200 million.

Grazing and timber-getting are already heavily restricted as a result of previous decisions post the establishment of regional sustainable yields under the recommendations of the 1986 Timber Industry Strategy. Since then we have seen a progressive closing off opportunities for the activities, which has continued even since the Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) signed by Premier Bracks and Prime Minister Howard in 2000 were supposed to have drawn a line on any further restrictions. In the case of timber-getting only 6 per cent of the State Forests are now open to harvesting the annual available area having been reduced from 25,000 hectares 40 years ago to just 3,000 hectares today. The Victorian Government has announced a termination of all logging from old growth forests by 2030.

In the area under review, sustainable forestry, as specified by the RFA, could allow a tenfold increase in timber-getting. The Midlands FMA area included the Wombat Forest, the Mt Cole forests, and the Pyrenees forests prior to 2002, collectively had a sustainable yield of 41,100 m³ of sawlog/annum. By February 2003, this had been reduced to 8,600 m³ of sawlog/annum. Of this 7,000 m³ was from the Wombat Forest, and the other 1,600 m³ was from the Mt Cole and Pyrenees forests.

The fires in NSW and Queensland in November 2019 draw attention to the detrimental effects brought by National Parks that have been left in a pristine state unmanaged by man. The vegetation in such areas will eventually burn violently and uncontrollably. In doing so, they will destroy adjacent homes and farmland and even human lives.

National Parks have been promoted by environmental activists as repositories for values that mankind – especially the modern economy is destroying.



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The truth is that uncontrolled nature, as recognised by Aborigines of the millennia, is dangerous and people will only attach value to it if they have been led to believe this is not the case.

These issues were also recognised in the 2008 [Parliamentary Inquiry](#) into the Impact of Public Land Management Practices on Bushfires in Victoria, which commented (p.140) upon the importance of good quality access tracks to parks and reserves for firefighting and recreational use. On page 173, “Removal of commercial use from forests” was identified as having a negative impact on bushfire suppression capacity. Trucks, dozers and other earth-moving machines are necessary for clearing tracks and fire-breaks in critical times.

Indeed, there is a perverse effect of no longer permitting commercial activities like forest thinning which reduces the risk of out-of-control bushfires. These would also be exacerbated by road closures making access for firefighting vehicles more difficult. Such matters are highlighted by the wildfire disasters during November 2019.

Timber Towns Victoria strongly urge the Victorian Government to:

- question the data contained within the report;
- consider jobs losses in rural communities versus Melbourne base has a 1 to 35 impact – study commissioned by *Rural Councils Victoria – Population Attraction and Retention Strategies for Rural Victoria Communities July 2017*;
- understand the social impact on the community;
- understand the economic impact on the community; and
- consider the need to re-evaluate the merits in setting aside large swathes of land from human management to its natural state.

In closing Timber Towns Victoria continues to support all timber communities and objects to the notions within the report that timber forestry is not sustainable and rejects the recommendation to transfer any further land to be ‘locked up’ from native forestry activities.