

## **VEAC Central Western Investigation 12-2018**

### **Submission by Peter Flanagan**

Although I live in the city, I have frequent visits to the area of investigation over many years. My involvement is this:

- My mother has a house at Maldon, where I have stayed many times, and I have cycled in this area;
- My late grandmother was born in Bendigo and grew up in Ballarat, and I have friends living in the North-East and East of Bendigo – I visit them;
- As a Forestry student in the 1970s I undertook field work in the Wombat Forest;
- As a secondary school student I walked the Lerderderg River;
- I have friends running a tourism business in Daylesford and the Wombat Forest is a significant part of their “territory”; and
- I used to take significant holidays in the wider region (including the Pyrenees), cycle camping over the course of a week at a time.

### **Tourism and Parks as an Alternative to Forest Harvesting**

I support all proposals to increase the areas of land allocated to new parks. I would suggest that we could go further with additional lands allocated to provide better connectivity between parks to facilitate migration of animals, birds and plants between parks as demanded by climate change.

With the changes to climate reducing rainfall and drying out the Southern part of the Australian continent, ongoing droughts would encourage us to maintain our existing aging forests. Research has shown that old forests use less water than young, growing ones. This means there will be more stream flow from an old forest. I am sure that town dwellers and agricultural users downstream would prefer more water in dams than less.

Forestry has long been a low value-add business in Victoria, with the vast majority of what is extracted being turned into woodchips. It has been argued that when government services are taken into account, then the forest industries, other than tourism, make a loss for the state. A transition to tourism from forestry is the only sustainable solution.

### **Mining in Forest Areas**

Miners often argue that mines use very little land area for their activities. This belies the fact that miners need tracks to access their working areas. Larger vehicles (to move overburden, ore, and to transport machinery) are more efficient than smaller ones, but do more damage to roads and tracks. The use of dangerous chemicals to extract the gold (it is usually gold that is mined in these areas) has a toxic legacy and the heavy use of water in the separation process removes a valuable resource from alternative uses. Tailings often escape into surrounding areas and birds can access toxic water and suffer the consequences. I would argue that mines intrude into the values of parks and should have no place there.

## **The Proposed Parks are not just “More of the Same”**

If we look at the bodies of land considered for park status, we find they all have unique values. The mix of geography, geology, climate, altitude, and species brings new values to the mix of Victoria's parks.

The areas associated with the **Wombat Forest** are important to this. The Wombat Forest is of particular interest to me. It is the location where my late grandparents first met. Although it has been through extensive logging over the years, its values as a forest remain for its services as a water catchment to a number of major rivers and for various remnant endangered species. Ongoing logging reduces stream flow to those rivers. We could argue that we may well be choosing between logging or food production. Food production is more vital to our lives and has a higher value add per Megalitre of water used.

I support the **Pyrenees Park** proposal. The vegetation and threatened species here are quite different to other areas. The box ironbark forest as a vegetation type is under represented in other reserved areas. Its use in forestry is low value add. Saw logs are not a driver here, but firewood, woodchips, and low value posts form its main commercial use. If a resource is free then its use will expand beyond sustainable capacity until it is all gone. We need to keep the Carbon locked up in existing forests to counter the prospects of climate change.

**Mount Cole Forest** shows how native vegetation and sighting rare species can add value to tourism. While this economic benefit is not always visible at the site, the fact that people will come some distance to walk the Beeripmo Track means that they bring money to the region to pay for food, accommodation and other services. The headwaters of the Wimmera River are here and the water in that river (and downstream communities and farms) will suffer with more logging. Once again, I would recommend tourism over the extractive industry of timber harvesting.

The **Wellesford Nature Reserve** is of significance due to its proximity to a major regional city. This means that it is more likely to be visited and offer tourism values to this community. It has great bio-diversity values, but remains vulnerable to exploitation from mining, rubbish dumping and tree harvesting.

## **Later Steps**

With all of these proposed park additions, the resourcing by government of actions to protect the conservation values, by removal of feral animals and weeds, plus policing action of people that would cause damage needs to be adequate.