

## Jim Walker submission to VEAC Central West Investigation

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To: [veac@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:veac@delwp.vic.gov.au)

The VEAC Central West Investigation Draft Report is a very weak report considering the crises now confronting Australia and the rest of the planet. Environmental modification by humans is resulting in depletion and extinction of thousands of species of plants and animals. We are now living through an extinction event on a scale equivalent to and potentially greater than the five great extinction events known from the past, where up to 90% of species were wiped from the planet.

The Living Planet Index ... tracks the state of global biodiversity by measuring the population abundance of thousands of vertebrate species around the world. The latest index shows an overall decline of 60% in population sizes between 1970 and 2014.

Freshwater species numbers have also declined dramatically, with the Freshwater Index showing an 83% decline since 1970.

WWF. 2018. *Living Planet Report - 2018: Aiming Higher*. Grooten, M. and Almond, R.E.A. (Eds). WWF, Gland, Switzerland.

Institute of Zoology (Zoological Society of London)

Founded in 1826, the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) is an international scientific, conservation and educational organization. Its mission is to achieve and promote the worldwide conservation of animals and their habitats. ZSL runs ZSL London Zoo and ZSL Whipsnade Zoo; carries out scientific research in the Institute of Zoology; and is actively involved in field conservation worldwide. ZSL manages the Living Planet Index® in a collaborative partnership with WWF.

Australia is a world leader in mammal extinctions. These extinctions appear to be accelerating. Commercial freshwater fisheries in Victoria have been exterminated.

Many native mammal species have been exterminated in the Central West Region of Victoria, including quolls, bandicoots, and many smaller mammals. Those mammals that are still extant should be restored to the region.

Land clearing (which includes clearfell logging) is acknowledged as a major cause of species extinctions, yet the VEAC Draft Report allows that logging continue within the remaining public forest in the area under investigation. The casual observer would have to wonder just how independent the VEAC committee is from political influence and bureaucratic pressure from within DELWP.

While the new proposed areas for reserves can be thoroughly endorsed, new reserves should include all native forest in the public domain. Expanded reserves are much needed if there is to be any hope of saving what is left of indigenous species, let alone restoring lost species. It is a great pity that the VEAC assessment cannot include recommendations for reserves for private land, as there are opportunities to link blocks of bushland, and other native vegetation, at relatively low cost.

The 'fashion' in government at present to turn parks and reserves into money making ventures ignores the role of parks in preserving native wildlife and plants, storing carbon, and supplying fresh water and fisheries.

The land is owned by Aboriginal people, who maintained it for more than 70,000 years. Colonial Australians with all their science and technology and 'cleverness' have yet to demonstrate that they can understand the land and use it sustainably. It would be mutually

beneficial to come to an arrangement with Aboriginal owners which serves all parties, instead of just the short term interests of some colonials. Parks and reserves, once created must be managed, and no-one knows better than Aboriginal people how to do this.

## **Water**

Fresh water is clearly far and away the most valuable resource, especially in a land as dry as Australia. Yet, government agencies continue to clear forests and destroy old trees as if they have no value. Amazing isn't it? One large tree can lift up to 378 litres of water out of the ground and discharge it into the air in a day. Each tree is at least 50 percent water; it is a water store. Large trees lower the water table and keep saline groundwater water from rising to the surface where it can destroy buildings, pasture, agricultural crops and gardens.

Forests generate and protect water supplies, especially in the hill areas. Trees add height to the hills forcing extra precipitation. Leaves and branches capture mist, fog, and low cloud moisture and drip it down to the ground.

These precious assets are being deliberately destroyed by governments, either for short term job creation schemes, or to generate export income so the 'business' classes can have Ferraris and Maseratis to drive around town.

## **Feral Deer**

Feral deer have no place on public land. Feral deer have no more claim to protection than feral cattle, horses, goats, pigs, or rabbits. Deer degrade the land, damage waterways, damage and eliminate browsed vegetation, and potentially transmit livestock diseases. They should be eliminated before the damage is done, not afterwards.

## **Mt Cole and Mt Lonarch**

All of the Mount Cole and Mount Lonarch areas should be totally protected to protect water supplies, as well as native plants and animals, but are currently subject to clearfell logging and firewood collection. There is very little sawlog quality trees left, so the value of most of the extracted wood can only be as subsidised woodchips and firewood. The pine plantations could be replaced with indigenous species over time.

## **Firewood**

So-called 'quality' firewood (e.g. Red Gum) currently retails in Melbourne for up to \$390 ton, Flooded Gum from NSW sells in coastal resorts such as Lorne for \$175 ton delivered, so why firewood is coming from native forests in Victoria, and into Victoria from native forest areas in NSW, is hard to fathom. All species of eucalypt will burn with good heat, so markets are distorted by misconception. Surely commercial hardwood plantations on private land can supply firewood at a profit.

It is both environmentally and economically counterproductive to continue logging these native forest areas.

## **Beeripmo Walk**

Many people have complained about clearfell logging impinging on their bushwalking experience, particularly near the Beeripmo Walk. Only VicForests could imagine that their clearfelling areas are attractive in any way. People generally go bush enjoy natural

surroundings and to get away from destructive industrial enterprises. For the tiny bit of wood extracted it seems the potential of tourism is to be destroyed. The same applies to other parts of the forest of course.

### **Wet forest poorly represented at present in this region**

Wet forests are targeted by loggers because the wetter areas produce the biggest trees, as a rule. There is an urgent need to save any remaining wet forests in the area under investigation from the logging industry, or other destructive uses

### **Old growth trees**

There are very few large old trees left in this region. The giant remnant Red Gums on farms are being eliminated by wildfires, wind throw, collapse and harvesting for firewood. Government agencies such as VicForests, VicRoads, shire councils and fire and emergency services have been systematically removing old trees (often perfectly sound) across the State on the basis that the trees are a safety hazard, prone to catch fire, will not become a sawlog, or just because the Labor Government allocated millions to tree felling so the cash may as well be collected. So the very few large old trees remaining on public land are the more significant for habitat, honey supply, water table stability and water supply. Needless to say, VicForests and other DELWP departments, do their best to destroy them, whatever the cost, with no accountability or transparency. All native forests should become short rotation industrial plantations in VicForests view.

### **Dogs**

Mt Cole-Pyrenees Fact Sheet states 'Dogs may be allowed on lead in visitor areas, along a restricted number of tracks, or in cars as specified by the land manager in management plans: no overnight camping with dogs.'

Dogs should not be allowed in parks because a very significant number of dog 'owners' think their dogs should be able to do whatever they like as it makes the dogs happy. Dog on leash areas in both city and country parks are often areas where dog owners let their dogs run free, generally without repercussions. Complete bans would make management easier than the half-in half-out restrictions proposed.



**WARNING**

GRAVEL ROADS



SURFACE CONDITIONS  
CHANGE OFTEN

**DRIVE CAREFULLY**





**CAUTION  
LOG  
TRUCKS  
AHEAD**







Water & Planning Victoria

# DOMESTIC FIREWOOD AREA

## CUT IN DEFINED AREAS ONLY

Video surveillance cameras may be installed in this firewood collection area.  
Authorised Officers conduct regular patrols of the forest.  
Please ensure you abide by collection rules, as significant penalties apply.  
- If you suspect illegal activity contact DELWP Customer Service Centre on 136 186.

[www.delwp.vic.gov.au/firewood](http://www.delwp.vic.gov.au/firewood)