



New submission for investigation "Statewide Assessment of Public Land"
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From: veac@veac.vic.gov.au
To: veac@dse.vic.gov.au,

Submission for the investigation "Statewide Assessment of Public Land"

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Information provided by the author:

Title: **Mr**

First Name: **Bertram**

Last Name: **Lobert**

Organisation: **Strathbogie Ranges Conservatiion Management Network**

Description:

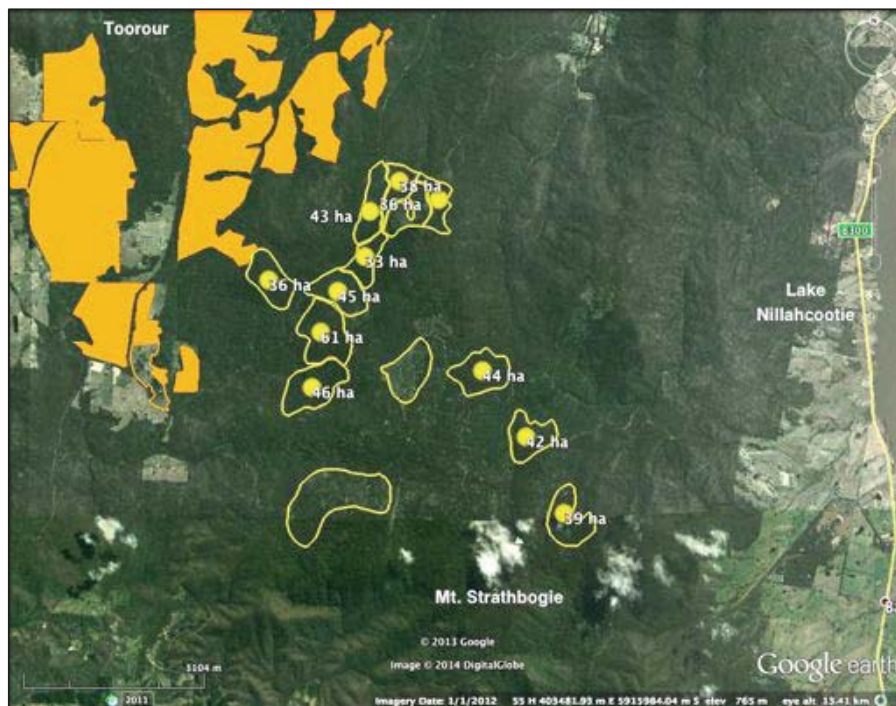
We are extremely concerned about the significant damage being caused to the last remaining intact forested areas of the Strathbogie Ranges State Forest by both commercial logging (VicForests) and Fuel Reduction Burning (by DELWP). These activities are having a major and irreversible (in our lifetimes) negative impact of significant forest values. The relatively recent arrival of VicForests in these forests is totally inappropriate. These are by and large mixed species forests of relatively low quality, having been cut-over for more than 100 years. More than 80% of the forests of the Ranges have been cleared for agriculture and what remains has value far beyond the low-quality timber product that it supplies. Planned burning of these forests on the scale conducted by DELWP is eliminating mature trees from large areas of forest. There is ample evidence that these forests never burnt regularly and that current burn frequency is drying out the forest and promoting fire-promoting species. We have pointed this out to DELWP fire planners but the culture of burning is strong and there is considerable resistance to changing practice. At least 4 threatened species and several threatening processes (FFG Act) are involved, but these appear not to be taken into account. There is little infrastructure at risk in these forests and burning to protect public safety is questionable. The location of reserves (SPZ, SMZ) in the forest have little or no impact on fire planning, to the detriment of the values therein. We request a review of: 1. Public land areas that were assessed by the LCC (1980s) before there were clear guidelines about meeting National Reserve System standards and 2. A review of 'soft' management zones for SMZs, SPZs and mapped 'old growth' forest in State Forest where these might better be given formal classification as conservation reserves; 3. Hancocks Victoria Plantations 99 year leasehold arrangement to bring all native forest areas within the lease back into the public land estate.

Click [here](#) to review and validate the submission

Strathbogie Forest Logging – What’s Happening?

VicForests, the Vic. Government’s business-arm that manages timber harvesting in native forests, plans to log about 500 ha of Strathbogie forest in the next few years.

Where are the planned coupes? Most (338 ha) are concentrated in a small, linear band and connect end-to-end. If these 12-or-so coupes are harvested in the next couple of years (as planned), there will be a 4.5 km long scar right through the heart of the forest.



Coupes scheduled for logging in 2014-16. Areas refer to coupe size. The ‘net area’ harvested may be less than total coupe size. The two coupes without area figures have been logged, but not ‘signed off’ by DEPI.

What sort of forest is being logged? This forest is known by foresters as ‘mixed species’ forest, because it contains a mixture of eucalypt species, not pure stands (as is often the case with Mountain Ash and Alpine Ash forests). In the Strathbogies, mixed species forest usually includes Blue Gum, Manna Gum, Messmate and Peppermint, as well as smatterings of other tree species.

Most of the proposed coupes are in forest that was logged 30, 40, 50 years ago. These forests now contain a few saw-logs, along with some grand, old trees and often lots of younger trees - the regenerating forest. Those saw-logs that do occur are on the small side. So, just as this 40 yo forest is starting to ‘come good’, it’s on the chopping block again. And because the machines are much bigger and heavier now, than 40 years ago, the logging will be much more destructive (see the pictures below).

How will the timber be harvested? According to VicForests’ ‘Timber Release Plan’ The method of harvesting proposed for all these coupes is ‘seed tree treatment’, sometimes known as ‘habitat tree treatment’.

“Seed tree system – a silvicultural system used for harvesting and regeneration. All merchantable trees are harvested apart from those specifically retained for regenerating the coupe by natural or induced seedfall and for habitat purposes.” (p.79).

The difference between this and clear-felling, is that seed tree logging leaves about 5 trees/ha standing within the coupe to provide seed for regenerating the forest and/or as habitat trees for wildlife. Unfortunately, once the rest of the forest is removed and the 'trash' burnt, many of these habitat trees often die within a few years of the logging.

What will the harvested timber be used for? Our biggest fear is that the economics of harvesting these forests is driven by wood-chipping and/or firewood and not saw-logs. Unfortunately, recent logging in our region appears to be motivated by short-term economic goals, not sustainable forestry. We've watched as similar forest around Tolmie has been logged for wood-chips to heat glasshouses to grow hydroponic tomatoes near Mansfield. Growing these tomatoes is consuming around 10,000 tonnes of woodchips per year (approx. 10,000 cu m).



A coupe near Tolmie recently seed tree logged for woodchips to grow hydroponic tomatoes.

Logging these Tolmie forests produces about 50 cu m of 'saw-log'/ha and 200 cu m of 'residual log' (aka wood-chips)/ha; total of 250 cu m/ha. In other words-

Growing tomatoes near Mansfield requires the wood-chipping, the destruction, of around 50 ha of native forest (perhaps more), this year, next year and every year. And how much revenue is being generated for the tax-payer? Next to nothing – VicForests relies on Govt. handouts to stay in business! Does this sound like good business, or sustainable forestry?

What happens to the coupes once harvesting is complete? “Regeneration operations must aim to approximate the composition and spatial distribution of canopy species common to the coupe prior to harvesting, where they can be determined. Silvicultural methods for regeneration must be appropriate to the forest type (including understorey species) and local conditions. (Mandatory Action p.23, The Code).

Unfortunately, mixed species forests aren't always easy to regenerate, as VicForests knows. There are examples of 'seed tree' coupes in the Strathbogies where the forest has not been regenerated, despite several attempts.



A coupe that was seed tree logged about 9 years ago – note the dead 'habitat trees'. The soil looks like it's been scalped and is covered with bracken, silver wattle, thistles and dogwood.

Where is the regenerating forest?

When this happens, VicForests may resort to seeding the area with locally collected seed or even planting tree seedlings. The further we go down this path, the more risk there is of turning these forests into plantations. Is this desirable, is this good forest management?

When all goes well and the forest does regenerate, it should be left for long enough to support the flora and fauna that live in those forests and, if desirable, grow more saw-logs for future harvesting. It seems that what is happening now risks doing neither of these things!

So, what do we do?

- Write to VicForests and tell them what you think of their timber harvesting plans.
- Write letters to your local paper.
- Join in the regular forest walks being organized by Strathbogie Sustainable Forests Alliance (SSFA)
- Spread the word - tell your family and friends.
- Talk to representatives of the SSFA: Sim (5790 5139), Terry (5790 8606), Fiona (5790 5203).
- Visit <http://strathbogiesustainableforests.wordpress.com/>

Logging in Victoria is governed by the Code of Practice for Timber Production (2007). Here are a few excerpts from The Code to give some context to VicForests' plans for Strathbogie forests.

Code of Practice for Timber Production (2007), published by the Vic. Govt.

Purpose of the Code

The purpose of this Code of Practice is to provide direction and guidance to forest managers and operators to deliver sound environmental performance when undertaking commercial timber growing and harvesting operations in such a way that:

- permits an economically viable, internationally competitive, sustainable timber industry;
- is compatible with the conservation of the wide range of environmental, social and cultural values associated with timber production forests;
- provides for the ecologically sustainable management of native forests proposed for continuous timber production;
- enhances public confidence in the management of Victoria's forests and plantations for timber production. (p.5)

The seven Code Principles are that:

1. Biological diversity and the ecological characteristics of native flora and fauna within forests are maintained.
2. The ecologically sustainable long-term timber production capacity of forests managed for timber production is maintained or enhanced.
3. Forest ecosystem health and vitality is monitored and managed to reduce pest and weed impacts.
4. Soil and water assets within forests are conserved. River health is maintained or improved.
5. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural heritage values within forests are protected and respected.
6. A safe working environment is provided for all forest workers.
7. Forest management planning is conducted in a way that meets all legal obligations and operational requirements. (p.8)

Mandatory Actions

The size of clear-felled, seed tree or shelterwood coupes must not exceed 40 hectares net harvested area. Where appropriate, such coupes may be aggregated up to 120 hectares net harvested area over a period of up to five years. Aggregated coupes must not be contiguous (forming a coupe greater than 120 hectares within a five year period). (p. 15)

[<http://www.depi.vic.gov.au/forestry-and-land-use/timber-production/timber-harvesting-regulation/code-of-practice-for-timber-production>]

This information sheet has been compiled by the *Strathbogie Sustainable Forests Alliance*.

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