



Submission from John Bardsley to VEAC Central West Investigation

John Bardsley to: veac

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To: VEAC Central West Investigation

From: John Bardsley,

I'm writing to request that VEAC change the status of the Wellsford State Forest to National Park. I believe that this would provide greater protection for the animals and plants of the forest, and help to maintain the connectivity to the Whipstick Forest and via the Mount Sugarloaf Nature Reserve, the Campaspe region, and the forests to the West of Heathcote.

I have been involved in the Bendigo Family Nature Club, which is an arm of the Bendigo Sustainability Group, and it's mid-winter camp fire where children and their parents can enjoy cooking damper, playing in the bush, and join a trip to the "Big Trees". I've been involved since 2012 as First Aid Officer. These large Ironbarks are the only known, pre-European trees remaining on public land in the vicinity of Bendigo. They are of great cultural significance, awe inspiring and a habitat for diverse species of the Box Ironbarks forest. These trees are not adequately protected under the current status of the Wellsford State Forest and are threatened by surrounding logging and inappropriate fire regimes.

The site where we hold the camp fires is the Gonyah Picnic Area. Each year between 40-80 children and their parents have attended. For many parents and children this is their first visit to the Wellsford forest. Unfortunately, apart from a fire place and a dam, there are no facilities. It is to be hoped that if the forest was made National Park a priority would be to provide lavatories and perhaps a camp ground.

Parts of the Wellsford have regularly been felled for fire wood collection. Several years ago the area cut down was in a gully containing many threatened *Acacia ausfeldii*. Most of these were destroyed. The blame for this certainly rests with the forest managers who should have recognised these threatened trees and allowed this area to be cut.

Fire wood collection has been occurring for many years. It has been claimed that the reason for allowing tree cutting and collection for fire wood is to allow the financially disadvantaged to collect free fuel. That this occurs to any significant degree seems unlikely as the cost of chain saws and trailers would seem to be prohibitive to the sector of the community. Observing the collectors at work several years ago showed that there was scant care of the understory, and the majority of collectors drove expensive 4WDs and many had tandem trailers. There was no apparent supervision by forest managers.

Since 'Black Saturday', 7 February 2009, the Wellsford has been subjected to many inappropriate planned burns. It had been claimed initially that these burns were to reduce fuel load to protect Bendigo from future bush fires. Subsequently it has been admitted that these burns were "quota burns" aiming to reach the 5% annual burning of public land in Victoria, as suggested by the Bushfire Royal Commission. It was clear that the burns were not to protect Bendigo. Bushfire winds come from the north and north-west. Any fire in the Wellsford would burn away from Bendigo. Some of the burns appeared to be uncontrolled. A burn on the north of the forest was so intense that nearly all of the *Eucalyptus leucoxylon* were burnt to below ground level. It is to be hoped that if the Wellsford were given National Park status more

appropriate fire regimes would be instituted, and only after proper, extensive monitoring of the biodiversity. My preference is for no management fires at all.

The 2017 Timber Utilization Plan identifies 5 coupes for logging in the Wellsford, among these the "Big Trees" coupe and an adjacent coupe. These coupes should not be allowed to be logged whilst VEAC is making its considerations of the value of the forest, as if it were to proceed the forest value would be diminished making it less likely for a determination of greater future protection. I, therefore, ask you to suggest an immediate moratorium of cutting in the Wellsford, and removal of these coupes from the T.U.P.

The Bendigo Forest Management Area is made up of 8,616 hectares of fragmented forest. Many contain rare, threatened or depleted vegetation types (93-100%), and many of these are in the Wellsford (V.N.P.A. Western Forests and Woodlands Report). If logging continues this will increase fragmentation of the already depleted forest, and adversely effect its adaptation to advancing Climate Change.

A protected Wellsford forest, in its entirety, would provide a chance for the maintenance of biodiversity. A logged and burnt Wellsford would diminish biodiversity. Better, more sensitive stewardship of the forest would be a major outcome of its being gazette National Park.

Yours faithfully,
Dr. John Bardsley, F.R.A.C.P.

Sent from my iPad