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HEALESVILLE, Victoria

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Greetings all,

This is an urgent issue very dear to many people in our local community. Last night I attended a meeting of 70 concerned locals from around the small timber town of Toolangi in the CJ Dennis hall.

*(If you are familiar with forestry issues excuse me if I am teaching you to suck eggs - not intended at all, partially this email sheds light on recent developments regarding Victorian forests - so watch out in the media, be a part of this in what ever way you can :-)*

I feel privileged to have some time on my hands at the moment. And time to be a part of an issue close to my heart. Namely the future of - **Mountain Ash forests of the Central Highlands** - In particular the small 'green refuge' that managed to survive Feb 7 2009 fires - just north of Healesville.

These forests are places of great natural wonder. They are many things... water storage, carbon storage, and habitat for the Victorian faunal emblem - Leadbeaters possum for instance.



Last Sunday the Central highlands managed to make all TV news channels by covering a group of 100 people staging a peaceful protest in a logging coupe to my north, just a half hour drive up the road from my home in Healesville. This coupe is one of three to be logged in the coming weeks – they are high conservation value forests.

***I will state up front - I am not 'anti logging'!***

Though I resent the way VicForests is 'managing' these forests, for several reasons. My reasoning is not for the very cute possum that appears below in a photo, and other charismatic animals that call these forests home. And I resent being labeled a 'greenie' in trying to stop this logging, this is not about 'saving the whales, a possum, or the forests'. This is about being good land managers, being good stewards of our future, providing jobs for our future.

## Why do I personally resent VicForests logging these forests?

### In a nutshell a two-page summary - seven points:

1. To turn a rich wonderland that gives so much - into consumables like office paper, or advertising material in your letterbox, or worst of all - Toilet paper? Strange logic, though it gets stranger in reading my points that follow.

*(Some relevant trivia - I recently weighed a days worth of advertising material that landed in our letterbox at nearly 1/2 a kilogram)*

2. I strongly believe the central highland forests have been overcut - particularly in light of the 2009 fires. The unburnt forest should be managed carefully as a green refuge - not heavily cut! Forest Ecologist Professor David Lindenmayer, who has studied these forests for 27 years, backs up this point and the next one with substantial research.
3. The salvage logging of Mountain Ash trees killed from the fires has been way overdone. Dead trees are still critical for habitat. The decay process for a dead tree can take 80 years, and different species of animals are seeking these giant homes at their various stages of decay. During this salvage operation the extra traffic of heavy equipment over the forest floor jeopardizes the successful regrowth of the forest. This is a real issue – as VicForests is having trouble regenerating some coupes.

This harvesting is completely unsustainable - one could liken it to mining! Just like the iron ore and coal we export. This is not timber harvesting, but timber mining!

4. And perhaps most distressing: Jobs for Victorians! Has been the claim to justify the heavy cut since the Feb 09 fires. However this now seems farcical in light of recent findings aired on ABC TV's Stateline. I urge you to take the time and watch this video link! <http://www.abc.net.au/news/video/2011/06/10/3241404.htm>

VicForests' contract terms to companies purchasing sawlogs states: - *"Timber processing is to take place in Australia"*. This is to encourage jobs here - value adding here.

I am disgusted to learn thousands of tonnes of sawlogs have been packed into shipping containers and sent to China! Many are A grade logs. Where are the jobs for Australian timber workers if we send shipping containers filled with logs to China? We have been repeatedly informed that forestry is good for jobs... what - Chinese jobs?



Tottenham yard – west Footscray, Melbourne

5. These forests are proven to be excellent at providing Melbourne's drinking water south of the divide for over a hundred years, and irrigation water north of the divide to the Goulburn River. However there is a substantial reduction in runoff into streams for 40 years following logging. Why? You may ask. The answer lies in the millions of baby trees in the logging coupe, the situation can be likened to a giant plant nursery - these young trees heavily use available water for 40 years till they establish themselves. This has been well documented by scientists, a phenomena Melbourne water is well aware of. In relation to this, a study found that these forests over a 100-year time span supply more water to irrigators if catchments are unlogged – which is obvious! **But critically, the study found, that the value of the extra irrigation water is worth more economically growing food than the value of the sawlogs extracted over a 100-year span if logging took place.**

With the Goulburn River and its irrigation farmland being Victoria's breadbasket.... do we not remember those recent drought years? And they'll be back in time. Premier Baillieu and VicForests do we not remember the tension between country and city over the Goulburn River's dwindling flows? The pipeline so divisive between country and city? The desalination plant? And all the heated debate when Lake Eildon's level was dropping and dropping down below 20%. Ah the serenity at Bonnie Doon ☺

6. These forests are the most carbon rich in the world - a staggering 2,000 tonnes per hectare. Absolutely stupid to think some people advocate growing trees for carbon storage on farming land, land better suited to growing food.
7. And unbelievably taxpayers have been subsidising VicForests to the tune of millions of dollars - its plain to see in VicForests annual report.

***Anyhow - I hope you find the time to check out some of my photos and the story below :-)***

Victoria's Faunal emblem



***Leadbeaters Possum was declared extinct in the 1950s,***

Having not been seen since 1909. When rediscovered in the 1960s it became Victoria's faunal emblem.

With the Feb 2009 fires 40% - 50% of the possums habitat was burned - the unburned forests need to be treated as a green refuge. The coupe the protest took place in is a known habitat for Leadbeaters possum - it contains several old habitat trees - with hollows - perfect habitat. Sure the possum is cute and cuddly - it's an icon, as are these trees - why don't we celebrate the world's tallest flowering plant? And I'd love to know that a very unique owl has a future - the Sooty owl. This is a seriously spectacular animal, rarely seen only occasionally heard as a spine tingling bomb whistle perhaps under a moon, or on a moonless night. Both the unique possum and the owl need large old ash trees to live in, along with a number of other habitat requirements that these tall forests provide.

Large areas of the central highland forests are regrowth from the 1939 fire (the drive up the Black Spur from Healesville to Marysville for instance). Hence 1939 regrowth is only 72 years old, at 72 they are perhaps late teenagers as Mountain Ash can live to over 300 years. Note how in this photo the big trees are all relatively young ones (no hollows) shooting up for the light, the photo is a good example of Mountain Ash forest from Badger Creek Weir. Its similar to the 3 coupes of high conservation value - an area that wasn't burnt in Feb 2009). But different, in that there are no old trees like the three coupes to be logged contain.



Below is a photo of the coupe from this Monday (the same coup the protest on Sunday took place in) - I'd take a guess and say the trees are at least 70 metres tall... You can really see how they have rocketed up for the light - so straight. Which I grant is perfect for forestry.



Within the northern edge of the coupe is a rainforested creek line with ancient Myrtle Beech trees, and several significant old habitat trees with hollows are within the southern boundary. Significantly there are patches of wetter gullies that survive catastrophic fires, this forest is not simply 'all 1939 regrowth'. Vicforests in the past have clumsily killed significant habitat trees with the regeneration burn; they claim not to log pre 1900 trees (hence 111 years of age), trees older than 100 years – but neglect to mention the huge risk the regeneration burn poses?

VicForests has claimed this coupe is 1939 regrowth – no doubt most trees are, however when in the coupe on Monday this tree was clearly older than 72 years of age, proof the catastrophic fire of 1939 did not kill all trees, unlike the other logs on this pile it had started to form a buttress. This is a mixed age forest - as is often the case.



Looking at the following photo I'd be happier knowing that the logs were going into Australian furniture or housing - employing Australians.. however -



Two things - Firstly most of this timber is destined for manufacture of paper. Not furniture or housing frames - it seems paper is where the money is! Subsidised by taxpayers these logs are very cheap and this easy money is driving the 'mining' of our forests. Secondly and perhaps even worse in terms of jobs for Australians is the massive quantities of sawlogs shipped to China. This we have only just found out a month ago.



Photo at left is in Melbourne, Tottenham yard West Footscray showing sawlogs bound for China. Not much value adding here!

As mentioned above (in my third point) VicForests is supposed to ensure "*Timber processing is to take place in Australia*".

If you haven't viewed this story, I urge you to view the ABC's Stateline program below: -

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/video/2011/06/10/3241404.htm>

It seems that Harvey Norman is one company exporting logs to China. So please check out the following youtube short movie in reference to Harvey Norman's, the group GetUp wanted to run with this add on TV, though it was too controversial for TV stations to run with. It's quite entertaining: -

<http://www.getup.org.au/campaigns/save-our-forests/no-harvey-no/share-the-ad-they-dont-want-you-to-see?t=dXNlcmlkPTU1OTUzNCxlbWFpbGlkPTE3OQ%3D%3D>

### ***The world's tallest flowering plant***

Mountain Ash - *Eucalyptus regnans*. The tallest flowering plant in the world! Some say they were taller than the redwoods only our first settlers plundered them, turning true giants into palings and shingles as they split so well. These photos were taken last year on a wet day in May close to here; these trees must be reaching up to 80 metres. The photos make them look distorted; I haven't played with the image, the camera has naturally produced this, these trees are big. May they be able to live on and justify their species name – the *Eucalypt* that reigns!



Mountain Ash seeds start life smaller than pinheads!



***“From little things big things grow” – may last night's small community meeting grow and grow!***

### ***Regeneration burns***

The few old giants left are at great threat from the regeneration burns that take place in the coupes following logging. This is standard forestry practice for regenerating mountain ash trees, and unfortunately these regeneration burns can get away and kill old trees nearby. The large tree below is only around 50 m from a coupe soon to be logged; it is well and truly older than 1939 regrowth. Too many times very old trees are killed following regeneration burns.



#### What can you do?

If you personally feel powerless or strapped for time - please exercise your powers as a consumer and choose recycled products, don't support unsustainable paper by buying Reflex office paper and many brands of toilet paper. Spread the word - send this document onto friends.

For a lighter moment - Zoos Victoria has a campaign advocating recycled toilet paper - they even have a super hero - CRAPMAN! I kid you not :-). Please try recycled toilet paper if you don't already (I have for years) and why not spread the word - use some humor :-). Google Crapman :-). He rocks up at Healesville Sanctuary on school holidays and weekends! Maybe you can catch him - in real life! Make sure you have some handy toilet humour and roll with it!  
<http://www.actwild.org.au/feed/how-to-be-a-superhero-crapman-explains/> ☺

### ***Back to office paper***

There are plenty of alternatives to straight non-recycled paper - We know Reflex paper comes from these forests! I recently bought a ream of paper made from wheat, and it works perfectly well as a substitute - it was hard to tell the difference.

The following webpage recommends various brands of recycled paper: -

<http://www.wilderness.org.au/campaigns/forests/paper>

Please make the time to visit the following website and sign the ethical paper pledge, indeed encourage your employer to sign up also: - <http://www.ethicalpaper.com.au/>



**Central Highlands forest**

This is not East Gippsland, this forest is within easy reach of TV channels landing a story for evening national news seven days of the week - at just over 1 hours drive from Melbourne's CBD.

These unburnt forests are east of Toolangi and just north of Healesville - The Central Highlands forest. A green refuge that survived the two February 2009 fires -the Kilmore fire to the west and the Murindindi fire to the east.

Thankyou muchely for reading through to here :-)

Kind Regards

Don, Healesville

*Ps. these are all my photos except for Leadbeaters possum, and the shipping container with logs, feel free to use my photos – just acknowledge my name - Don Butcher.*