

30 June 2019

## Modernisation of the Victorian Regional Forest Agreements

### Victorian Forests

Victoria's forests are extraordinary ecosystems and home to unique species. They form part of the "lungs of the Earth" and are physically connected to our water catchments. The Federal and Victorian Governments choose to log our native forests which is:

- destroying unique ecosystems and decimating Biodiversity
- contributing to the Climate Emergency through Climate Damage (*i e* human-generated climate change), and
- threatening our water supply.

### ***Logging in our native forests must stop.***

The many species that call these ecosystems home are being obliterated and our biodiversity is decimated. Scientific research tells us that Melbourne's water supply is under threat from logging [1] and that the forest soil needs decades, maybe a century, to recover from logging and fires [2]. Not only are our magnificent, native forests destroyed through logging, but they are mostly used for pulp, which could easily be substituted from plantation timber and environmental accounting indicates that there are not even economic benefits of logging [3]. Two recent independent reviews have delivered damning reports on the state of Victoria's natural heritage and the governance and leadership from the Victorian Government.

The report from the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability, the *Victorian State of the Environment 2018 Report*, informs us that only 11% of the assessed status indicators are rated as "good", only 10% are improving and 30% are deteriorating [4]. The report made 20 recommendations including the appointment of a Chief Biodiversity Scientist. Expert scientists have noted the appalling assessment outlined in this report [5].

The report of the *Independent Review of Timber Harvesting Regulation* was provided to the Victorian Government on the 24th October 2018. This report described DELWP as "neither an effective nor respected regulator". A damning assessment. The report made 14 recommendations and the Secretary of DELWP, in the department's reply to the Independent Review, stated that DELWP has accepted all 14 recommendations. Additionally, DELWP's regulatory functions will now be overseen and managed by the Office of the Conservation Regulator, which will be led by the Chief Conservation Regulator.

Continued independent review of DELWP's function and management is warranted and ***logging and land-clearing of our native forests must stop.*** Our forests must be protected and restored for they provide our air, influence our water quality and are the home for a multitude of extraordinary and unique species. Current Federal and Victorian Environment laws are facades; torn up and cast aside at the whim of government and industry. We need powerful, incorruptible nature laws that enshrine our environment and nature, affording them the same respect and protection as human life.

## Future Generations and My vision of Victoria's Forests

I believe Victoria's Forests can be a pristine, healthy ecosystem, thriving with varied species of plants, animals, fungi and micro-organisms. Where a visit to a forest is uplifting, invigorating and awe-inspiring and you can see and hear a multitude of species going about their lives. Where humans *take only photographs and leave only footprints* and leave with a deep respect of, and gratitude for, our forests. Where nature laws are powerful and incorruptible and protect all species, habitats and ecosystems.

I want future generations to understand the beauty and value of forests and the many species that inter-connect in the ecosystems. I want future generations to value and respect nature and acknowledge and appreciate the forests' role in the web of life. I want future generations to be fierce protectors of nature, following the example given by a government that secures nature through policy and law. This can be a reality through community education, appropriate eco-tourism and powerful, incorruptible nature laws.

The liveability of Victoria is inextricably connected to Victoria's Environment and Natural Heritage, yet expert, independent reports and scientific research demonstrate this is under great threat. We are in an Environmental Emergency and we need strong, rational leadership and governance. We need the Victorian Government to adopt all recommendations in the independent reports and to deeply consider advice collected during the consultations, especially from the Science Community, Environmental NGOs and the Youth Forest Symposium. We need the Victorian Government to protect our forests and legislate against logging and land-clearing.

Yours sincerely,

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### References:

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2. <https://theconversation.com/forest-soil-needs-decades-or-centuries-to-recover-from-fires-and-logging-110171>
3. <https://theconversation.com/money-cant-buy-me-love-but-you-can-put-a-price-on-a-tree-84357>
4. <https://www.ces.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/SoE-2018-summary-report.pdf>
5. <https://theconversation.com/what-australia-can-learn-from-victorias-shocking-biodiversity-record-113757>
6. [https://www.forestsandreserves.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0021/414165/Independent-Review-of-Timber-Harvesting-Regulation-Report.pdf](https://www.forestsandreserves.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0021/414165/Independent-Review-of-Timber-Harvesting-Regulation-Report.pdf)