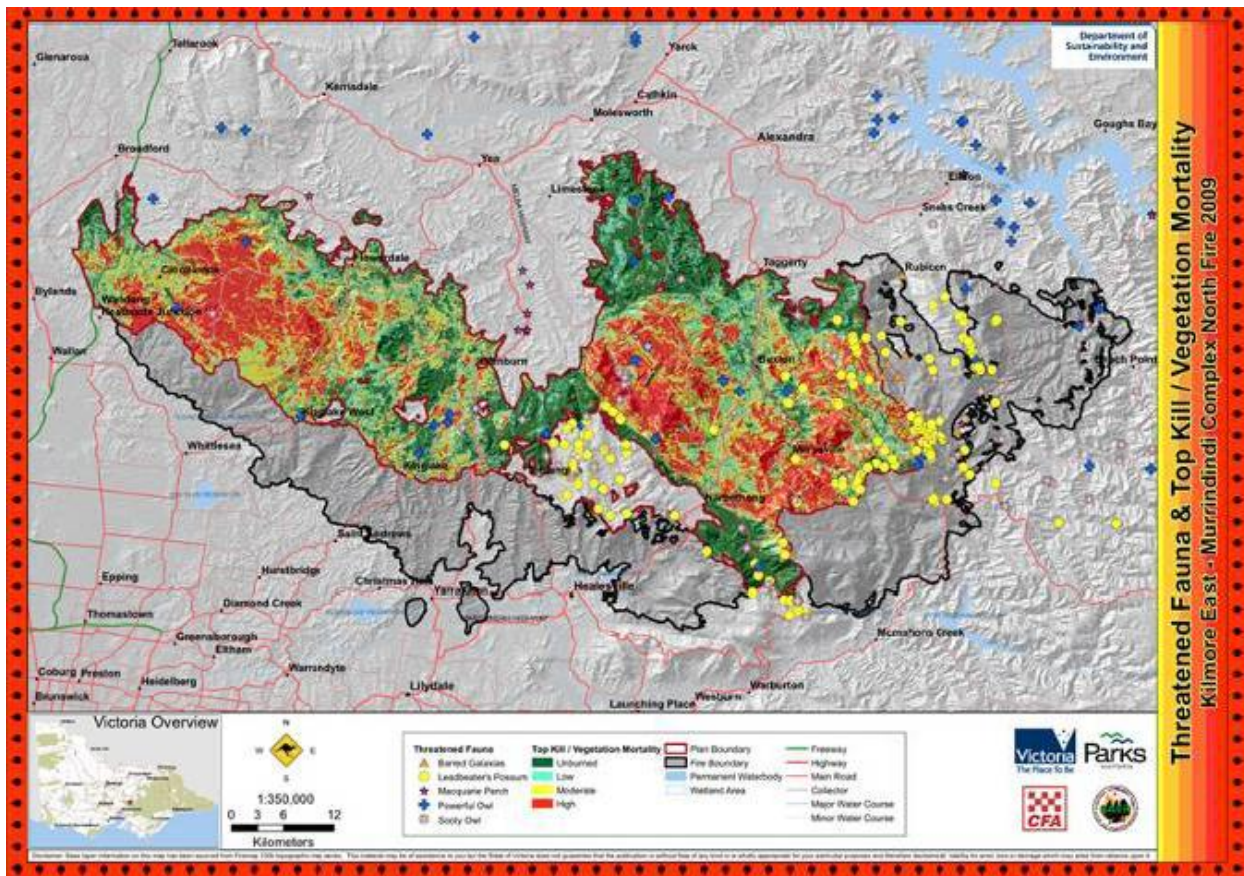


SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE ENQUIRY, AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT

Below is DSE's map of the 2009 Black Saturday fire showing the Central Highlands of Victoria and what is commonly known in this region as the unburnt donut in the centre of the map. It shows known endangered Leadbeater's Possum sightings before the fire, indicated by the yellow dots and the destruction of Leadbeater's habitat after the fire.



After seeing most of the forest burnt around our district in the Black Saturday 2009 fires I was horrified to see clearfell logging continue or even increase in the Central Highlands with greater concern for the refuge donut that was not burnt. I was compelled to find out more and do something to STOP this from continuing.



In brief, I am a professional thermographer of 12 years and for the last 2 years I have conducted extensive nocturnal surveys developing survey techniques with highly sensitive thermal cameras, parabolic microphones and infrared night vision cameras in the area on the map above where Leadbeater's Possums have been known to inhabit. After having success in locating new Leadbeater's Possum sites I was contracted to participate in DSE's Leadbeater's survey project earlier this year.

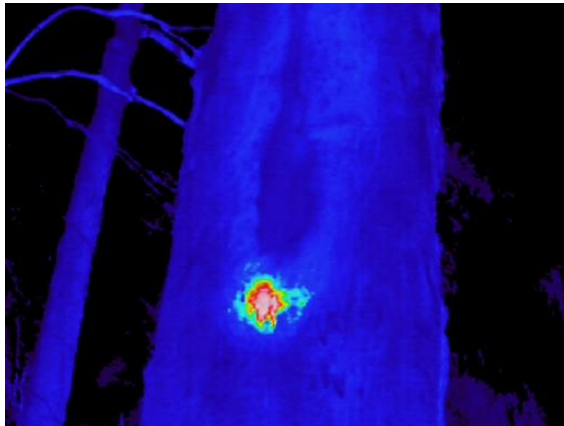
I have learnt through questioning VicForests and then attending a Supreme Court hearing involving VicForests that they do not conduct *any* such flora/fauna surveying, let alone use the latest survey techniques to identify any wildlife or endangered species before they bulldoze and burn coupes. In fact they use no movement cameras, no hair traps, no nets, no traps, no sound recording devices or anything to determine what lives in or around the coupe they are about to clearfell. The response from VicForests in court was essentially *we walk the coupe and just look at it to determine if it is Leadbeater's habitat 1A or not and conduct desktop surveying*. In 2009 a North South pipeline was constructed through part of the Central Highlands. In that project the environmental obligations and effort that went into wildlife protection (which didn't destroy anything like the amount of ecologically sensitive forest the logging industry destroys) was something like you would expect to be conducted. If the native forest logging industry continues (which it should not) it should be made to conduct these types of surveys from an independent body/contractor before highly biodiverse and ecologically valuable areas are about to be clearfelled and intensely burnt. **Why is the logging industry exempt from conducting quality wildlife surveys expected from other industries when their operations are in such biodiverse, ecologically sensitive areas?** I have personally found endangered Leadbeater's Possums in active or about to become active logging coupes using these latest survey techniques at my own initiative and expense.



Above and left are volunteers that spend great amounts of personal time collecting quality data on logging coupes that the logging industry should be compelled to conduct. Many small hollows are/were found which Leadbeater's Possum (LBP) could use, LBPs were found in this log coupe after much surveying. How can it be quantified that an endangered species is there or not if only minimal surveying is conducted?

Even when LBPs are located in an intended coupe, VicForests is not under legal compulsion to protect the area as the legislation now stands. **The only potential legal protection for LBPs is for defined habitat not for confirmed live sightings of the animal. This must change.** The Victorian Flora & Fauna Guarantee Act (FFGA 1988) provides for habitat protection not LBP protection per se.

Here are some examples of what can be found with comprehensive surveys. Unexpected small hollows in trees thought not old enough to have established hollows in them. It normally takes 120+ years to form any valuable hollow. **One cannot understand that if the logging industry rotates forests at approx 80 years then how are enough hollows supposed to form to accommodate wildlife that use hollows?** The trees that VicForests retain as habitat trees after harvesting often either get burnt in the regeneration burn or get damaged by wind or dry conditions in years to come.



Here an arboreal mammal's heat is being emitted from a hollow.



Bees located in a hollow baring tree.



The next couple of images show how VicForests clearfells predominantly for wood chips (up to 80%) in the very area that was not burnt. The fact is they have not adjusted their timber release plan enough or at all to consider what happened in February 2009. VicForests has lost much of the available mountain ash forests in the 2004/5 and 2009 fires, but unfortunately they had pre sold or accepted orders for supply. This means VicForests has contractual timber supply obligations which it must hold to and with that **has harvested in areas that are on the edge of fire affected forests that in my opinion should be refuges for wildlife that would eventually repopulate the fire effected forest.** Below are examples of this at Marysville and Toolangi although there are many more examples.



Acheron way near Marysville

Yellowdindi, Toolangi: The edge of the 2009 fire on left side of photo, the rest is obvious. Leadbeater's Possum found very close to this site but it was difficult and took months of night work indicating the population are few and far between.

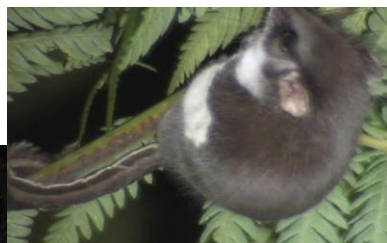
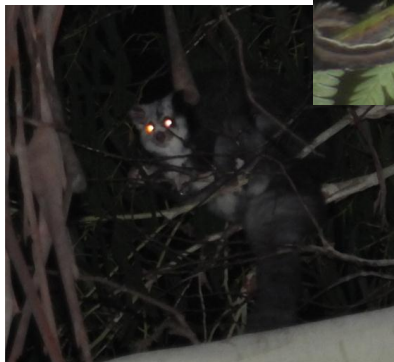


Harvesting of these large trees over 10 meters circumference is restricted. That is today in 2012. What happens to all the ones at 7 to 10 meters? **They will all be harvested so that in 100 years from now we will be very limited on 10+ meter trees capable of supporting large hollows for large hollow inhabiting wildlife.** This tree is 13.5 meters in circumference.

This tree is 11.5 meters but everything around it is regeneration generally of a mono culture nature, the biodiversity gone.



The above photo was taken inside a timber release plan coupe known as “Freddo” in Toolangi, destined to be clearfelled. It consists of a beautiful seasonal stream and mature Myrtle and Sassafras trees, but is not classified as rainforest as it has Mountain Ash imbedded in the gully. The only restriction here is the 20 meter buffer required from a stream. So what you see here will be gone once harvesting begins.



Please note in my observations I have found a lack of ringtail possums, suggesting perhaps a decline even in such a “common” species in the Central Highlands?

If you would like further information or clarification on anything mentioned in this submission please contact me, I will be very happy to assist. I also have arial footage of the central highlands logging, the boundary of the 2009 fire, infrared and thermal footage taken of the Leadbeater's Possum and much more.

Thanks for your time.

Regards Trent Patten