

Inquiry into the operation of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

4 September 2008

To the Committee members

I am a public citizen who has lived in McMahons Creek near the township of Warburton in the Upper Yarra Valley, Victoria for the last 10 years. In this time I have watched Warburton bloom from a disadvantaged low socio-economic area to an increasingly popular destination for tourists and tree-changers. Due to the beauty of the surrounding Central Highlands, offering bushwalking, tourist drives, snow play, wilderness camping, bird watching, wildlife gazing, pristine water for swimming and fishing, environmental education, health resorts - this is not at all surprising. Around Warburton one can see 6 out of the 10 species of owl in Australia. A new resort is in the process of being built. It is called Edgewater Spa resort and will continue to promote the area as a highly attractive destination for national and international visitors looking for an eco holiday package.

The continuous clear felling of this native forest due to section 38 of the EPBC Act exempting Regional Forestry Agreements needs to be urgently reviewed and halted.

Last summer logging trucks from clear felling coupes at McMahons Creek and Armstrong Creek catchment areas were on the roads 24 hours a day, a huge increase to their previous activity. There were road accidents involving trucks. There were shocked residents who felt emotionally and physically violated by their presence. There was increased wildlife dead on the side of the roads. There were public meetings and petitions begun. There were rallies outside of Parliament House in Melbourne. There was the forming of a local environment group. There were many letters written to our State MP Tammy Lobato, to the local newspapers and to local council members by members of the local community. A clear felled logging coupe to supply woodchips for the paper industry is not the vision many in this community have for the Upper Yarra Valley. I am pleased that our local council has voted unanimously to stop logging in water catchment areas and that 15 further councils across Melbourne have done likewise. This to me shows strong leadership. This to me shows that Melbourne and close to 2 million people represented by the 16 councils values its world class high quality water catchment area and the value of preserving it in times of uncertain climate change.

I am asking the Federal Government to also show strong leadership. To amend the EPBC act so that it is effective in all parts of native forest, no exemptions. Our insane usage of paper (in which 85% of our native forest here goes) needs to be acted upon and more creative solutions found and sustained. This is urgent and the first step is to stop logging native forests.

On a global scale, the Central Highlands is essential for carbon storage. ANU scientists have calculated the average amount of carbon stored in unlogged natural eucalypt forests is about 640 tonnes per hectare. A new ANU study last month highlights that untouched natural forests could carry 3 more times carbon than previously thought. (Australian Story Mathew Franklin and Siobhan Ryan)

Ross Garnaut in the 2001 State Environment Report has said:

“Australia is uniquely placed to use biosequestration to soak up Carbon emissions through forestry and native revegetation.”

In the same report Opposition Treasury Spokesman and previous Environmental Minister Malcolm Turnbull has said:

“And for those people that are anxious about climate science it is an absolutely no regret policy because nobody could argue that there aren’t numerous environmental benefits in stopping the deforestation of the world’s rainforests.”

The Department of Sustainability and Environment are failing in their responsibilities to implement environmental protection of significantly endangered species under the Regional Forest Agreements. The Baw Baw Report commissioned by the volunteer group Central Highlands Alliance shows how RFA’s were not protecting endangered wildlife, notably the Baw Baw Frog. This ultimately led to protected zone area of 5500ha being established. This was a community led endeavour not a Government initiative. The Leadbeater’s Possum is also an endangered species of the Central Highlands that RFA’s are not protecting. There appears to be little understanding of the type of hollows they require and thus the conservation of habitat is not adhered to. Logging contractors are encouraged to remove dead habitat trees for occupational health and safety reasons.

When driving the tourist circle from Warburton across to Marysville, clear felled Armstrong catchment area is now an ugly reminder of what is going on, clearly seen from the highway and from the tourist platform on Lake Mountain itself. The arrogance of the Victorian Government is in plain view for all those local and visitors who would wish to lose themselves in the natural world for a day. Many people live here and visit this area because it provides a space that keeps the wild in us alive and the reverence for the natural world and the other species that we inhabit this Earth with.

Logging of Cement Creek and Starvation Creek catchment areas is due to begin in November 2008. Please halt this travesty and show strong leadership for Australians, for the Global community and for the Earth. Please preserve this treasure for the planet, for the fauna, for the flora and all of humankind. Please allow our children to enjoy what we have enjoyed, before there is no turning back.

As the indigenous people of the world, original custodians, would say
Namaste

(The spirit in me greets the spirit in you)

Real environmental protection is a matter that requires a deep reflection, not just a rational economical one.

Yours sincerely
Joanne Goossens