

29/6/19

Response to “Modernisation of the Victorian Regional Forest Agreements”

From : [REDACTED]
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- Freehold Landowner in RFA Area “Gippsland” adjacent “Central Highlands”
- Building Owner and frequent visitor in RFA Area “East Gippsland”
- Frequent visitor and patron to State Forests in RFA Area “Central Highlands”, “North East”, “Gippsland” & “East Gippsland”

Hello,

I reside in South East Melbourne and as listed above have significant interest on the outcome of the Modernisation of the Victorian Regional Forest Agreements.

Before I continue, I must point out the following:

- I find the report to be quite inconclusive and assume Dr William Jackson was paid a princely sum for the paper as a taxpayer I would rather not know how much it cost. I think that the same paper would be possible to produce by Graduates in the field with local’s inputs for their aspects.
- Requesting response process – I was only aware of this as I read the paper, even though I am a landholder, rate-paying member of the public in one of these RFA Area’s.
- The open sessions are being held in the city or Geelong – none are in the South Eastern Area? Why has the East side of town missed out of having a session?

I am self employed in our Family businesses – both of which are heavily reliant on energy & the stability of energy.

Over the last 20 + years I was enjoyed the unique benefit of accessing our State Forests as a camper, 4WD, bushwalker, kayaker, fisherperson & photographer. I am an avid target shooter and although I have the necessary means and licenses to go hunting I have not shot at an animal – I do however support the rights of friends, family and others to pursue this activity.

I grew up in South Australia and by the time I was 13 had the privilege of circumnavigating Australia with my family camping in many different areas. When I moved to Victoria I was drawn by the vast range of topography and having access to these differing landscapes provided great joy over many years and it still something that I share with new friends who have taken to these activities with the same joy.

These friends often comment on how what we have in Victoria differs to places like NSW where majority of the access is limited by paid passes, bringing in firewood, limited access. I have seen similar being brought in over years to many National Parks sites where marked and barriered camping sites, firepits, signed paths are normal.

I avoid such areas as I have a camper trailer & a pet which I prefer to bring so access to these parks is not viable as we can't drive into the grass to park it & dogs are prohibited.

With camping - I also find it contrary to my wishes to be corralled into an area which is so small that I can hear and see the adjacent campers the whole time, if I leave the city to go camping I prefer to have quiet enjoyment on my own.

Recently, I have completed some hiking in Wilsons Promontory – both overnight hikes where both visits were beautiful however the current management policy of that National Park I believe deters from the enjoyment. Tidal River is not managed as well as it could & Sealers Cove had considerable rubbish and the drop toilets were that bad that most were defacing in the adjacent bush, again everyone was so close that it detracted completely from the experience.

There are certain rules which we abide by, which as a camper and being able to enjoy this activity by way of turning up to a pristine site with little obvious evidence of human disturbance is common courtesy we ensure we abide by the rules of “tread lightly”, “leave it how you found it”, “take all rubbish” & most importantly “make sure your fire is out”.

The majority of people follow these rules – all sorts of people take enjoyment from our State Forests, a lot more people are doing this as overseas travel is expensive.

Over the years we have seen a lot of people not following these same codes – however we try to maintain and instill into our children these “rules” so that there is a new generation coming through who knows them and gets pointed out to them when others are not. Similarly we ensure whoever is with us we call-out or make them aware of when they may miss following these rules, in turn over the last 10 years we have had a large number of friends come into the activities we have enjoyed and seen enormous benefit that they each as individuals appreciate and learn the lessons that the bush can show them & their children.

A lot of this enjoyment will be lost and abandoned if changes are made to the State Forest that restrict current access or change in the way that the open enjoyment is now.

Some of the public especially New Australians are not aware of the rules – the signs are up but perhaps not read & it is irritating to see no respect for these environments, also surprisingly locals to the given area are the worst behaved, leaving rubbish and driving off tracks.

Trail bike riders are another cross-section of the public who often miss the rules, they cut new tracks through forest, often unlicensed and are very transient so feel they can conduct themselves in whatever way they want as they will not be in the area after a couple of hours fun. We experience this constantly firsthand at our property and have had many instances where intoxicated, dangerous, unlicensed riders are being a general nuisance – this is an irritation as it is behaviour that is against the rules and endangering to us and themselves. The reality is – if they hit my bull-bar I will have to live with the consequences, if they hurt themselves it is my civic duty and I will always provide whatever assistance they need – but again it is not necessary.

Similarly, rough 4wd drivers are constantly seen cutting tracks, crossing rivers incorrectly which endangers themselves and the environment with diesel spoil in pristine waters, people who do this tend to find themselves in a predicament where they have to get help from people like me and I make sure I educate them whenever it is possible.

Hunters – we are a small but growing community in Victoria, there are large groups who as the 4wd's think they can flout laws – my main concern is the deer hunters who spotlight and shoot too

close to town and campers. There is a need to continue to allow hunting as the deer population is increasing and I feel that the recreational hunters is the best way to manage it providing they treat the animal with respect and adhere to the rules, aerial culling is creating its own problems with wild dogs and between the two I prefer to have greater deer population than wild dogs. Most hunters are law abiding and are so to ensure they continue to enjoy their sport – however the areas that have above issues occurring needs a greater Police presence and active patrols during seasons to ensure all regulations are being followed.

We have also had firsthand experience on two occasions of dealing with bushfires – it is infuriating to think that these are caused by people who fail to extinguish their campfires or throw a cigarette out their window.

Both occasions we had to evacuate – leaving our property without knowing if we would lose it all.

The stress at those times and the trauma of the experience stays with you from that day on, even with time past I am vigilant and on high risk days are aware of my plan and enact it without hesitation.

There is no excuse for this behaviour, and it devastates me to think of all the habitat and native animals that have perished, let alone the human life and suffering that occurs with these events.

As a land owner and camper I am vigilant in all areas to avoid bushfire however due to my own experience to date and reality I am aware that there is a strong likelihood that I will have to continue to deal with the reality as have generations before me.

This is part of living in the bush, it is not changed due to climate change & that there is a strong chance I will have to deal with the devastation of a bushfire first-hand one day.

As a business owner I have been watching the process which Vic-Forests have limited the access the standing timber for logging. As a farm owner ██████████ to the Heyfield Mill community I felt for the local workers and businesses that have been impacted by the effective closure of that mill, this is on top of the stress created by Hazelwood Power Plant & recent actions of talk of closing Yallourn Power Station makes me shake my head and wonder how this community will actually work through this, additionally I wonder how I will maintain operation of my own businesses when the stability of the power supply is reduced.

I find that as I have experience and inhabit these forests for long periods of time over different seasons, I wonder how these reports are accurate, to me I have if anything seen an increase in wildlife and a prevalence species in my region. Having sections of the State Forest allocated to logging has happened for so many years, clear-felling opens section of the forest which creates firebreaks.

It may disturb habitat for a short time but as I have seen over the years - these trees grow back, healthy and during the time of logging there is upgrades of roads which benefit locals too.

I would hope that the current allocation of forest is increased with the view of maintaining an industry for the local communities, the public like me do not accept that there is a need to shut-down an industry & whole town for the protection of the Leadbeater Possum.

If we are logging for timber for our use in flow-on industries like home building and furniture making these industries will continue with imported products, these products may be logged from similar forest but ethically I would rather support a local industry & one that is being monitored correctly with all parties needs met – the industry and the conservationists.

My suggestions to the modernisation in regards as a member of the public to access to State Forests going forward would be:

- Maintain current allocation of State Forests – with no change to current rules.
- Have an increased presence in designated current campsites from representatives from DELWP, Forest Fire Management to actively “patrol” and educate users found to not be following rules especially during peak times.
- Create a series of short public ad’s run on social media and television to educate people to the rules and expectations for using the state forest system, to continue the enjoyment the public need to be aware of this.
- Have an increased Police presence in areas that have an obvious issue with Hunters who are not being safe or respectful to the sport – as a Licensed Firearms holder I would love to have these cowboys found and held to account as they will spoil it for the rest of us.
- Similarly – Have a specific blitzes on areas frequented by trialbike riders, carry out checks for licensing and adherence to specific rules for this pastime. Due to the social media prevalence both this and the Hunting checks should be considered to be can be carried out by “plain-clothed” officers to find individuals caught in the act.
- Allocate Crown Land tracks or Land where the Land-Management Agreements or leases have lapsed to create Plantations to increase the opportunity to support the current Forestry Industry.
- Create a collaborative approach and ensure that all views are considered, the current trajectory of shutting down industries and walking a solely conservationist line will be detrimental to too many people over many areas & change the opportunities for the future generations to access the Forests & limit the commercial viability for too many communities.
- Ensure all future processes and reports are kept public and accessible so that there is an ability for me as a member of the public to be aware of what is happening.

I would hope that this submission gives a clear understanding of the needs of myself as an interested stakeholder over many areas that will be impacted by the outcome of this process.

If there is any need to contact me, I would be happy to assist.

Thank you and Regards

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