

Recommendation

That the area known as the “Stirling Link” be excluded from the North East Regional Forest Agreement (RFA)

This is based on the following.

1. The timber resource in the Stirling Alpine Link area is very limited and the opportunity for economic return is very limited. Almost all the land above 1400 metres altitude is forested with snowgums, which cannot produce sawlogs.
2. The area is of very high natural value. The higher the altitude, the more slowly the forest regenerates.
3. Logging would destroy established recreation paths and a major natural scenic attractions.
4. Victoria does not have an accountable body to manage logging in the area and has no way to monitor the impact of logging activities to reduce impacts.
5. An established management regime exists in the adjacent Alpine National Park. The current land manager has high levels of expertise and the boundary extension would be a small additional increment to be managed.

Background to RFA processes.

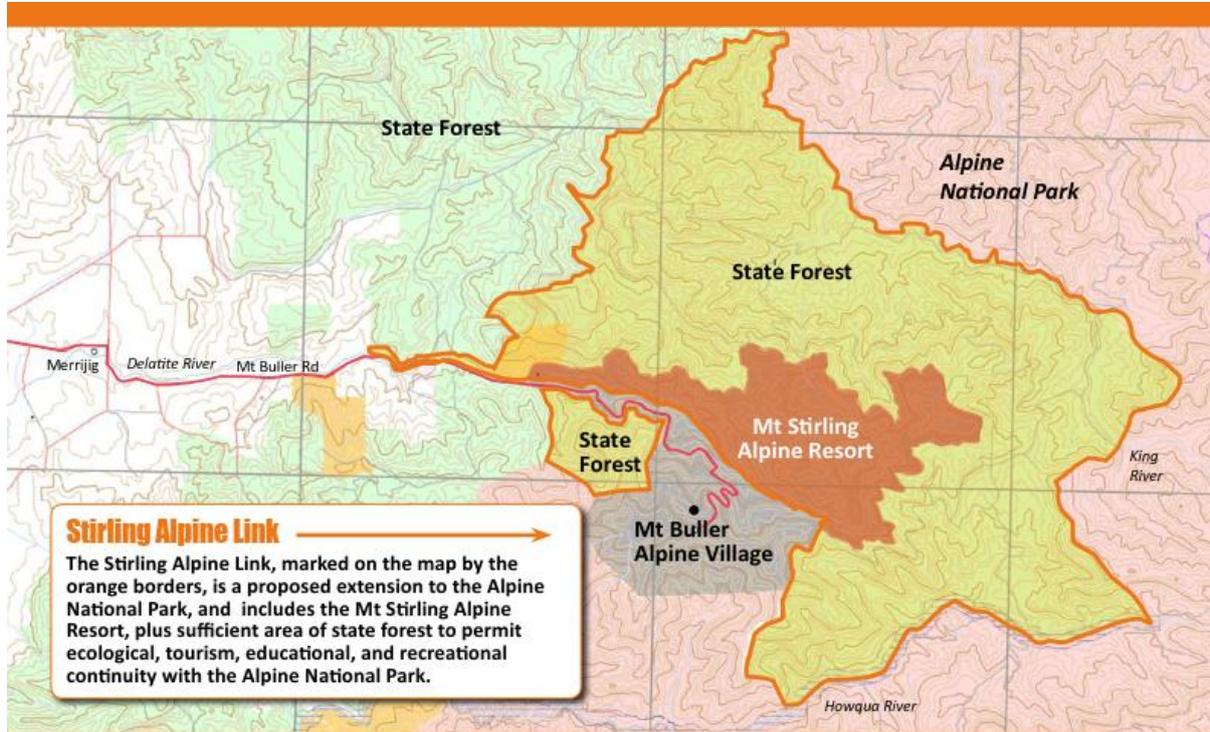
The background to the RFA history is canvassed by the Independent Consultation Paper - Modernisation of the Victorian Regional Forest Agreements by Dr William Jackson, May 2019

In my view the operation of the RFAs in the last 20 years has seen widespread harvesting native forest, and clear-fell logging, leading to

- poor economic returns
- an increase in the number of threatened species and in the severity of their threat category
- a decline in the number of arboreal marsupial animals
- a decline in the condition of habitat, leading to fewer large, old, hollow-bearing trees within a complex forest structure.
- **without significant job gains.**

Definition of the Alpine Stirling Link area.

The following map shows the area concerned.

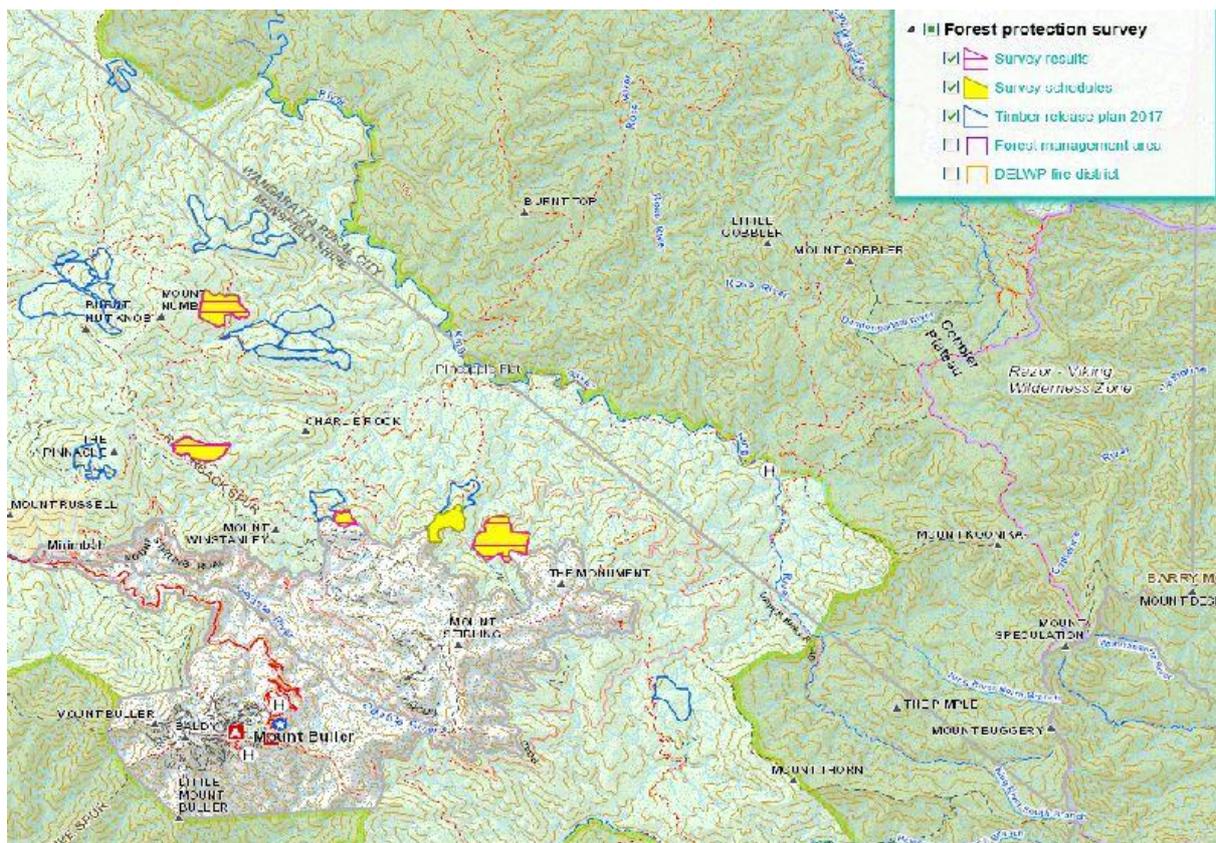


1. The timber resource

This area of State forest between the alpine resort and alpine national park has many natural values high biodiversity and it is also open to logging. The future logging plans are often updated and varied by Vic Forests but the following map indicates a recent 2019 Timber Release Plan for 2019

There are 10 coupes on the current Timber Release Plan available for harvesting, in the Stirling Alpine Link areas. Five of these have been surveyed for threatened species by Vic Forest/ DELWP, one of these coupe 400-501-003 – King Saddle East was proposed for harvest in **April 2019**, according to the DELWP forest survey web site

<https://maps.ffm.vic.gov.au/ForestProtectionSurveys/>





Legend

Green outline = Stirling Alpine Link – State Forest component

White outline = Mount Stirling Alpine Resort

Yellow outlines = VicForests coupes to be logged as of TRP 2019

Red lines = major roads

It is clear from the above and the Timber Release program that the area contains only a very limited timber resource and that any economic impact on the Native Timber industry would be very limited.

This is especially the case as some of the coupes contain Snow Gum which is not a marketable timber from the point of view of the logging industry.

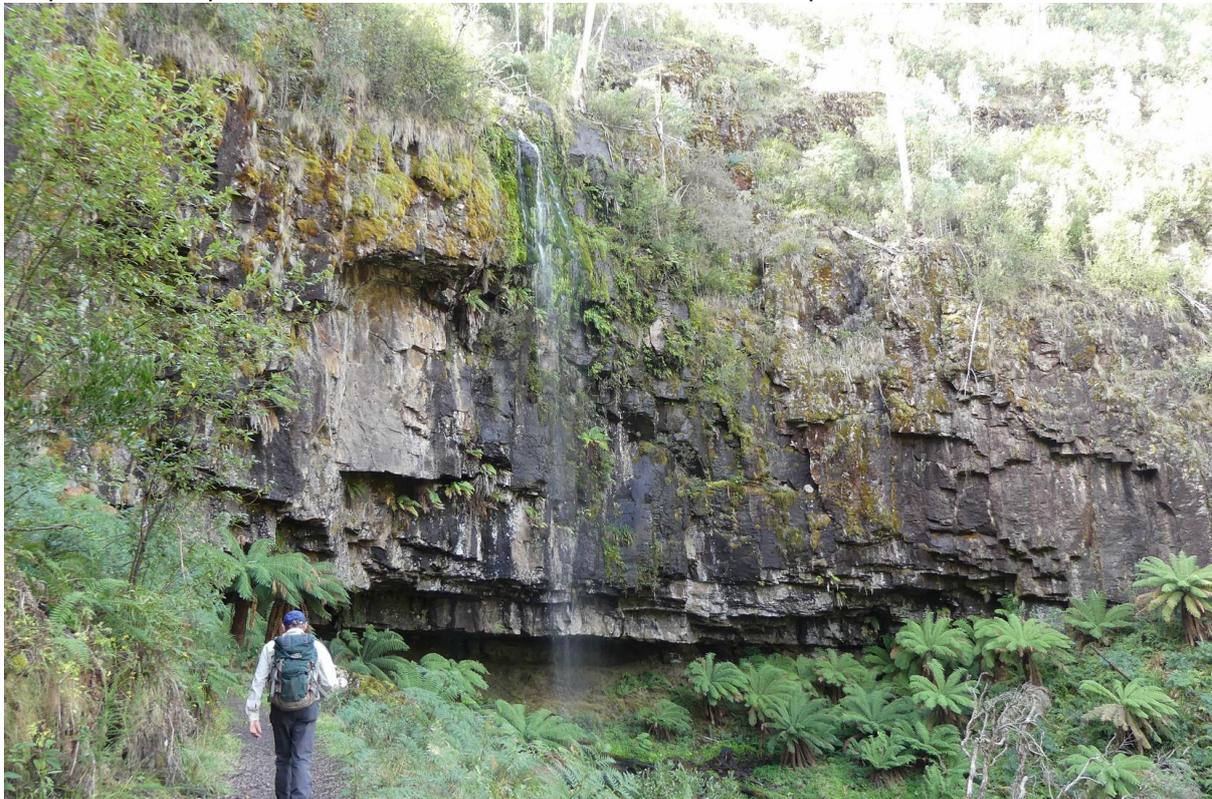
2 and 3. The area is of very high natural value and Logging would destroy established recreation paths and a major natural scenic attraction.

These natural attractions and recreation paths include the following.

Bindaree Falls

By far the most significant attraction accessed along the Circuit Road outside the Mount Stirling Resort are the Bindaree Falls.

Just over 10% of the water catchment for these stunning falls were scheduled to be logged within coupe 386-504-0001 (Bindaree). This coupe, now postponed to a later logging period has a gross area of 47.51 hectares and the water catchment of the Bindaree falls are about 420 hectares. The coupe is located approximately 1km up stream from the falls, along "Falls Creek". About 1km of the coupe's boundary is Falls Creek, with tributaries located on the coupe's north, east and south.



Epic Trail mountain bike route and Bus Huts Loop walking track

The "Epic Trail" is the flagship mountain biking attraction of the area showcased on the Mt Buller Mt Stirling Resort Management's "Bike Buller" website. This ride starts at Mount Buller, heads through the Mount Stirling area and on to "Razorback Spur" and "The Pinnacle". The first coupe encountered is just 10m from the trail on the Razorback Spur, this coupe is 400-501-1008 which is also set to directly clear much of the forest along the "Bus Huts Loop Trail". This coupe has been named by VicForests "Bus Loop". The second coupe to be encountered along the trail is 389-507-0002 and has been named "Epic" by VicForests. This coupe is scheduled to directly clear forest along the Epic Trail

near The Pinnacle. The logging plan will render this area unusable for mountain bike riders, walkers and other tourists.



The Circuit Road drive and winter ski trail.

Along Circuit Road, just 1.5km north of the “Telephone Box Junction” entrance to the Mount Stirling Resort, and just 500m from the “King Saddle” parking and picnic area, is the first planned logging coupe abutting the northern boundary of the Mount Stirling Resort. This planned coupe is 401-501-0004 (King Saddle West). The forest within this coupe sits between two previously clear fell logged coupes along the resort boundary that were completed in 2001-02 and 2005-06 respectively Three additional coupes another 1.5km east along Circuit Road are also on the Mount Stirling Resort’s northern border, these are 401-501-0003 (King Saddle East), 401-502-0002 (Motlock) and 401-503-0001 (Black Landing). Indeed the 401-501-0003 (King Saddle East) coupe is so close to the resort that it’s scheduled coupe extent actually overlaps the Mount Stirling Alpine Resort by approximately 2.5 hectares.

4. Victoria does not have an accountable body to manage logging in the area and has no agreed way to monitor the impact of logging activities to reduce impacts in this area.

A recent independent enquiry ordered by the environment minister, Lily D'Ambrosio, after the Department of Environment, Land, Water failed to manage Vic Forests in regard to illegal logging in East Gippsland by VicForests found that

"..... the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning is "neither an effective nor respected regulator" and the state's logging regime is "dated, complex, convoluted – indeed labyrinthine – and difficult to use...." PAGE 56 of the report.

An established management regime exists in the adjacent Alpine National Park.

The current land manager has high levels of expertise and the boundary extension would be a small additional increment to be managed.

There is a view held by many parties including The Victorian National Parks Association and Friends of Mt Stirling that the Stirling Alpine Link area to be managed as a national park by linking it to the Alpine National Park and handing its management to Parks Victoria