



Victorian Association of Forest Industries Submission Senate Inquiry into Australia's National Parks, Conservation Reserves & Marine Protected Areas

Terms of Reference

The Senate has referred the following matter to the Committee for inquiry and report by 30 November 2006:

The funding and resources available to meet the objectives of Australian's national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas, with particular reference to:

- a) the values and objectives of Australia's national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas;
- b) whether governments are providing sufficient resources to meet those objectives and their management requirements;
- c) any threats to the objectives and management of our national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas;
- d) the responsibilities of government with regard to the creation and management of national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas, with particular reference to long-term plans; and
- e) the record of governments with regard to the creation and management of national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas.

The Committee invites **written submissions** from interested individuals and organisations, preferably in electronic form sent by email, to ecita.sen@aph.gov.au. The email must include full postal address and contact details.

INTRODUCTION

Note: This submission is supportive of NAFI's submission and should be read in that context.

The Victorian Association of Forest Industries (VAFI) is the peak industry body for the native hardwood processing industry in Victoria. VAFI's Vision 2025 is for Healthy Forests, and Healthy Forest Industries. (for details refer to the VAFI 2005 Sustainability Report, copy attached).

To achieve this vision, VAFI works towards its goals and objectives by:

- Industry leadership, credibility & recognition around sustainable forest issues and change as well as economic certainty
- Whole of Supply Chain Presence, Co-operation and Innovation
- Community Understanding & Support: Working with Diverse Organisations & Voices
- Environmental Services and Management & Credentials
- Building the Case for Sustainable Forest Industries across Native Forestry, Plantations, Farm Forestry.

VAFI's specific goal is to have robust and sustainable¹ forest industries in Victoria with the objectives:

- To work with the state government to develop policies supportive of robust and sustainable forest industries in Victoria, economically and socially viable, long term.
- Victoria's forest industries to be world's best managed, ecologically sustainable and recognised as such.
- To work with the Federal government and others to introduce polices to restrict imports of illegally and unsustainably harvested timber.
- To have recognised native hardwood timber, sustainably harvested, used and regrown, as one of the most environmentally friendly materials we can use. Eg Trees store carbon as they grow and wood based products continue to store that carbon.

Sustainability is Key

Sustainability is key to all elements of this Vision 2025. Sustainability is key for all of us, locally and globally. The 21st Century challenge is how we are to feed, clothe and shelter 10b plus people, equitably and respectfully, while we make sure the planet and its systems are healthy and wealthy for our great grandchildren?

Definition of Sustainable Development

VAFI's definition of sustainability is based on an extended version of the Brundland definition of sustainable development.²

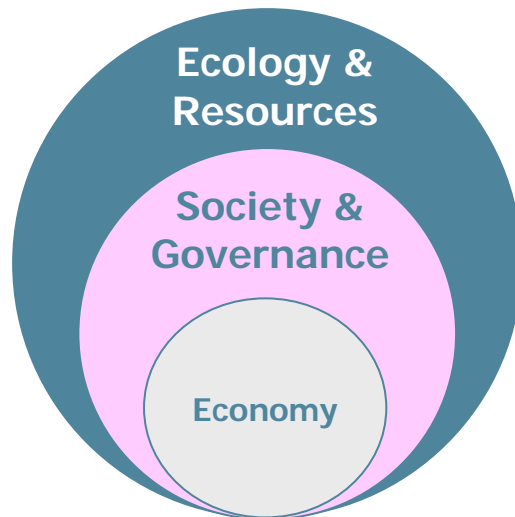
¹ VAFI 2005 Sustainability Report (attached)

² (World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) Our Common Future. Oxford University Press, Geneva, Switzerland.

“...development (ie economic, environmental, social development) that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs...

...Sustainable development is not a fixed state of harmony, but rather a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are made consistent with future as well present needs”.

Consequently, we accept that society’s economies and the way we govern ourselves are dependent on the ecology and resources of the planet.



Triple Bottom Line Plus One

Arising from this definition is the need to develop a practical approach to how we can apply the principles of sustainability. VAFI has adopted the approach developed by the Global Sustainability Institute @RMIT University. This includes the dimensions of the environment, social & cultural, economic and governance.

CORE RESERVES

VAFI recognises the need for a core of representative reserves, land and marine based. We believe however, that the history, status and current conditions of those reserves must be understood, monitored and evaluated. We believe this should be for their particular local, ecological values and the larger more global ecological needs.

These values must then be placed in the context of all the other dimensions of sustainability (environment, economic, social and cultural governance), again not only for their local values but also for their contribution to the larger systems for each of these dimensions.

With some 90% of the 6.6 million hectares of public land effectively excluded from timber production, the current land base of National Parks and reserves in Victoria should be more than adequate to

protect a wide range of environmental values, particularly in the forest types relevant to commercial forestry which are well represented in the reserve system.³

Any inadequacy in biodiversity protection will be due to insufficient funding or inappropriate management within those reserves – it will not be due to an inadequate land base.⁴

Integrated land Use

VAFI believes there must be greater attention to the overall integration of reserves and other productive land uses, especially production forestry. The division between reserves and production areas does not account for the influence of one system on the other, interaction of species, needs, availability of infrastructure etc.

- Example 1: There is currently very little understanding of the relationship between the ecologies of reserve systems and those of production forests at various stages of regeneration.
- Example 2: A sustainable native forest timber industry enhances the State's ability to protect private property, regional communities and forest assets from fire, both environmental and commercial (such as old growth, catchments and timber stands), as well as maintaining good forest stewardship in general across all forests – both within parks, reserves and production forests.^{5 6}

In addition to the above points, VAFI wishes to table the following issues and concerns for further research and consideration by government and other relevant authorities.

- **Biodiversity Protection**

Are national parks and reserves protecting biodiversity, ecosystems locally and globally as they are meant to?

There appears to be little monitoring/evaluation of the biodiversity/ecosystem benefits from reserves. There appears to be minimal standards of management and performance that give us all confidence that reserves are the best way of protecting or enhancing biodiversity/ecosystems or that the reserves we have in place now are achieving what they were established to achieve.

Where production is the basis of land use, eg forestry, there are strict codes, audits with opportunities for third party certification and community demands for accountability and transparency. The institutionalised scrutiny and public/media attention is intense on the 10% of Victoria's 6.6 million hectares of public forests that are legally available and suitable for timber production⁷. In some cases this public attention is based on misconceptions⁸. No similar scrutiny is applied to the reserved areas which make up the bulk of the forest estate. This lack of focussed

³While forest Ecological Vegetation Communities (EVCs) relevant to commercial forestry are well represented in the reserve system, some other non forest EVCs are not, for example native grassland.

⁴For example: The main threat to endangered species such as Long Footed Potoroo (LFP) would appear to be foxes. Fox control requires on-going funding and it is only recently that there has started to be a coordinated effort (eg Southern Ark project) in East Gippsland reserves that were formed in the 80's. In contrast there has been considerable attention on limiting harvesting in State Forests despite findings that LFP appear to readily cope with disturbance from harvesting.

⁵A critique by VicForests of The Age opinion article: "A possum stares extinction in the face" February 2006

⁶Timber production in native forests and fire management, A VAFI 2006 Discussion Paper

⁷Continuous Improvement in the Protection of Environmental Values in Public Native Forests in Victoria since the 1960's – A 2005 discussion paper commissioned by VAFI (attached)

⁸As above - critique of The Age opinion article prepared and circulated by VicForests

attention, such as through regular monitoring and reporting, is placing the reserve system at greater risk. This is despite the biodiversity in these reserved areas being clearly at great risk from inadequate or inappropriate management. As discussed later in this submission, inadequate management of fire is one of these main threats.

- **Resource Funding**

There is much discussion that resources, funding and skills are in no way adequate to manage reserves. With populations intruding everywhere around the planet, it is hard to consider that wilderness values can be maintained almost anywhere. With such human/settlement pressure it is imperative that adequate management, infrastructure and skills must be made available if reserves are to succeed in their purpose. There is much anecdotal evidence about weeds and poor often passive management, such as insufficient ecological burning⁹.

There is little attention to the assessment of the long term resourcing needs to maintain reserve values. Neither is there adequate monitoring and evaluation of the outcomes against the objectives outlined during and after the establishment of these reserves. It is hard to judge the extent of this inadequacy and the impacts so far. However it is a fact that 1.3 million hectares of Victoria's forest was burnt by fires in 2003 – an area twice the entire area available for harvesting in State forests in Victoria. More adequate resources and fuel reduction burning would have reduced this impact.

- **Fire Management**

Fire management is much debated, especially in relation to reserves. Recent bushfires in Victoria were reported as under control with no loss of life or assets. There was little media reporting of the loss of ecosystems/biodiversity assets in National Parks.

The greatest threat to old growth forest in East Gippsland is fire. The risk of fire killing old growth is likely to be greater if the timber industry is phased out of native forests in the area. If fires can be controlled, it is likely that the area of old growth type forest will greatly expand over the next 50 to 100 years.¹⁰ Surely we need to look very closely, spend more resources and time working out the best fire management strategies as Australia becomes hotter and drier with climate change.

- **Benchmarking Other Systems**

There are many and diverse systems of the definition and management of reserve systems around the planet. VAFI believes it would be useful to have a very serious look at the state of the national parks management elsewhere, especially how it is integrated with production based land uses such as forestry.

⁹For example: A 2002 report by the Fire Ecology Group of Parks Victoria states that the lack of adequate ecological burning was threatening biodiversity values in many areas. *“The clear finding from this study is that across the majority of public land area in Victoria, the main fire-threat to biodiversity conservation is the absence of fire rather than too frequent fire.....A significant shift in the use fire as an ecological management tool is needed in our public land management. The current ad hoc and sporadic ecological burning programs implemented by the Department of Natural Resources and Environment and Parks Victoria need to be significantly upgraded to address the large imbalance in age distribution of most vegetation types across the State.”*

¹⁰ In East Gippsland 800,000 ha of the 1 million hectares of forest is excluded from harvesting, much of it being mature forest that could develop old growth characteristic within 50 to 100 years. Approximately 224,000 ha of forests have been classified as old growth of which over 80% is excluded from harvesting.

- **Contributions of Forest Industries**

Finally, VAFI believes there has been very little consideration given to the contribution that production forestry can cater to all the dimensions of sustainability, including the ecological values. Incredibly demanding evaluations, forestry codes, audits and standards apply. As well the industry funds local infrastructure, skills and personnel that is often missing in reserve systems.

It has been the contention of industry that affordable, sustainable good forest stewardship on a regional basis is enhanced by the on-going presence of a commercial forestry sector within a landscape where there is a mixture of reserved and commercial forests. Benefits include:

- the critical mass benefits of professional forest management in a region
- provision of a road infrastructure – for access for tourism, fire control, and management (e.g. Southern Ark project aims to control foxes which are the major threat to animals such as Quolls and Long Footed Potoroos where regular road access is required)
- associated R&D into natural sciences that flows from a commercial presence
- enhanced fire control capacity – with wildfire being by far the biggest future threat to water catchments and old growth (80% of which is in reserves)

“Commercial forestry helps to fund the ‘critical mass’ of trained professionals and skilled machinery operators that can quickly be deployed to fight fires – people who know the area and are likely to be working in the area near the fires. They work with equipment needed to fight fires (like bulldozers) or with fire itself (such as regeneration burning and fuel reduction burning) in their day-to-day responsibilities.

This means they are familiar with fire control when blow up conditions occur. They are an on-tap resource that is only paid for when deployed, and as such its ongoing maintenance and upgrade is not a constant drain on the public purse.

Funding from log sales also maintains an extensive roading network, which is essential to gain rapid access to fight fires.

A sustainable native forest timber industry enhances the State’s ability to protect private property, regional communities and forest assets, both environmental and commercial (such as old growth, catchments and timber stands), as well as maintaining good forest stewardship in general across all forests – both within parks, reserves and production forests.”

Source: VicForests¹¹

- Forest Industry based social and economic contribution to local community leadership and expertise; fire prevention and fighting, equipment, skills, schools, employment, clubs & charities.
- The potential to develop integrated, sustainable land use and resource management that allows the valuing of carbon, water, biodiversity and related values as well as production forestry.

¹¹ A critique by VicForests of The Age opinion article: “A possum stares extinction in the face” February 2006

- **Considerations prior to the creation of additional reserves**

While VAFI supports the need for continuous improvement in forestry, there is unlikely to be justification on environmental grounds for a further net loss in timber production activities within natural public forests. VAFI is confident that a proper Triple Bottom Line assessment would support this contention (including factoring in the environmental credentials of alternative products)¹².

Past land use studies that have resulted in additions to reserves and losses in timber supplies have failed to take into account the full triple bottom line implications. For example, the reductions in supply of quality hardwood sawlogs is linked to the increase in imported hardwoods from illegal logging – which now is equivalent to some 900,000 m³ of sawlogs per year (the approximate equivalent of Tasmania and Victoria’s sawlog production from public native forests¹³).

The continuous improvement in timber production management in State Forests has been substantial and on-going¹⁴. In contrast once Parks and Reserves are created there has been a tendency to consider that the task of forest protection has been completed. Prior to considering any further additions to the reserve system, a thorough examination of the existing reserve system should occur¹⁵.

- **VAFI**

VAFI is interested to pursue benchmarking our reserve system and how it relates to production forestry elsewhere and would welcome the efforts of the Senate Inquiry to do likewise.

Integrated sustainable land and resource management has to become a cultural principle in all these endeavours. There is no other way to satisfy all the dimensions of sustainability so our great grandchildren can live good lives on a healthy planet with healthy economies and societies.

¹² The Environmental Impact of Building Materials: Victorian Native Forest Timbers – VAFI Report (attached)

¹³ An analysis of the log equivalent of Australian imports from illegal logging, February 2006 (Derived from *Overview of Illegal Logging prepared for the Australian Government, Departments of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, by Jaakko Poyry Consulting, September 2005*)

¹⁴ Continuous Improvement in The Protection of Environmental Values in Public Native Forests in Victoria since the 1960’s – A 2005 Discussion paper by G. Gooding commissioned by VAFI (attached)

¹⁵ For example there have been various reserves created for specific purposes such as Education and in the decades(s) since these were reserved, the areas have in many cases had little use for that purpose.

Attachments:

1. The Environmental Impact of Building Materials: Victorian Native Forest Timbers. A Discussion Paper by VAFI January 2006.
2. Continuous Improvement in The Protection of Environmental Values in Public Native Forests in Victoria since the 1960's – A 2005 Discussion paper prepared for VAFI by G. Gooding.
3. Socio-economics of the Forest & Forest Products Industry in Victoria, A report prepared for VAFI by J. N. Cameron, November 2005
4. VAFI 2005 Sustainability Report
5. Timber production in native forests and fire management, A VAFI 2006 Discussion Paper
6. A critique of The Age opinion article prepared and circulated by VicForests: “A possum stares extinction in the face” February 2006
7. An analysis of the log equivalent of Australian imports from illegal logging, February 2006 (Derived from *Overview of Illegal Logging prepared for the Australian Government, Departments of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, by Jaakko Poyry Consulting, September 2005*)
8. Victorian Timber Industry – Plantations: A Hardwood Industry Perspective, August 2005. A report prepared for VAFI by Hamish Crawford, Cailum Pty Ltd.