

Victorian Forests: The Green Way Forward

A forest transition strategy to protect our
forests and create jobs

IN BRIEF

Australian Greens Victoria

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The need to resolve Australia's forests debate in favour of both forest protection and sustainable jobs has led the Greens to critically examine the Victorian forestry industry and develop an outline for a process of transformation to alter the dynamics of the industry. The purpose of this document is to set out the Greens' vision for a way forward, which resolves the ongoing divisive forest debate in Victoria by providing positive social, environmental and economic outcomes. This will involve moving from large-scale commodity extraction from native forests to ecologically and socially sustainable mixed species plantations.

OUR VISION

Australia to become a world leader and globally responsible citizen

We need to celebrate our internationally significant forests and actively promote their value in maintaining our water, soil, air and biodiversity. Protecting and properly managing our forests will help maintain a healthy environment and build a vibrant economy in regional areas that includes a valued and secure wood products industry.

This path encompasses:

Forest Protection and Promotion

Secure protection for Victoria's remaining native forests, some of which are of World Heritage importance and include globally rare ecosystems and unique biodiversity. These values will be promoted to expand our tourism and recreation industries.

High Value Use of Native Forests

The current high volume, low value industrial logging regime will be replaced by higher value uses, such as eco-tourism, using significantly smaller areas of native forest. All export woodchipping and industrial scale native forest woodchipping will cease.

Jobs Rich Plantation Processing

Existing plantations will be used to meet all our domestic needs and to produce a range of value-added products. The large volumes of purpose-grown wood that are now available will be used to foster significant jobs and wealth creation without more plantings, thus placing wood production on an environmentally, socially and economically sustainable footing. Low value commodity production such as woodchips, pallets, palings, posts and commercial firewood collection from native forests will end. Mixed species sawlog plantations will be promoted as the basis of value-added products in favour of woodchip plantations.

Worker Support and Healthy, Secure Communities

A robust and secure economic footing for local communities will provide high levels of employment. We will move subsidies historically provided to native forestry industries into supporting individuals and businesses that make the change to skills-based manufacturing and design and into supporting more rural apprenticeships.

Agricultural livelihoods and water supplies will be secured by protecting native forests, by limiting new water-hungry plantations and by reviewing tax breaks for plantation investment companies.

Ending forest conflicts will renew investor confidence.

“We can create more jobs and wealth from Victorian native forests and plantation resources whilst protecting our magnificent high conservation value forests.”

This Forest Transition Strategy demonstrates how...

This strategy is based on detailed research that shows how restructure of Victoria's wood products industry can be a win for all. We can create local skills-based manufacturing jobs, provide a bright future for the specialty timbers industry, and end massive native forest woodchip exports that send jobs and native forests offshore.

Our forest tourism industry is still under-developed and these globally significant forests have the potential to create tourism jobs if properly promoted. This will only happen when we have secure new reserves, biodiversity protection, and the long-running conflict is ended.

There will be no net job losses in rural areas, with jobs being created in treatment and processing of plantation and specialty timber resources, in eco-tourism and in other industries.

Forest Protection and Promotion

Protect High Conservation Value Forests

The Greens are committed to the preservation of Victoria's high conservation value forests and all areas of important biodiversity for all generations.

High conservation value forests include old growth forests (as defined by the Woodgate definition) and forest habitat that supports rare or threatened flora and fauna species.

West of the Hume Highway, the transition from logging and woodchipping native forest to using plantations is nearly complete, due to political pressure brought to bear by local and peak conservation groups and the Greens.

“We have listened to the community and we will now act on behalf of future generations to save the Otways”

Premier Steve Bracks, The Age, 6 November 2002

All native forest logging in this region will cease when the Otways transition completes in 2008.

East of the Hume Highway, ongoing industrial scale clear felling and woodchipping is resulting in the destruction of valuable native forests and their biodiversity. Our remaining high conservation value forests in this region must be protected.

New Reserves

New reserves on public land would include the following:

- All areas of cool temperate rainforest
- Goolengook and Yalmy forests added to Errinundra and Snowy National Parks with effective and substantial corridors linking existing parks and reserves in East Gippsland - from coastal to alpine regions.
- A new national park covering the Wombat forest and catchments of the Coliban, Campaspe, Lerderberg and Loddon Rivers.
- The Strzelecki Ranges 'Cores and Links proposal' (on public "privately leased" land) which includes Gunya Gunya, Jack River, College Creek and Upper Merriman Creek and the link between the cores and the Tarra-Bulga National Park, and the creation of a new National Park in the Strzelecki Ranges.
- Central Highlands forests – the Upper Bunyip and the transect between the Yarra Ranges and Eildon National Parks, including Federation Range, Torbreck Range, Royston Range and the Blue Range.
- The Baw Baw Plateau and surrounds.
- Valuable areas within the Tambo forests.
- The Cobboboonee Forest added to the Lower Glenelg National Park in far South West Victoria, and the creation of threatened species habitat and landscape link to the Little Desert National Park.
- The Wellsford Forest added to the Greater Bendigo National Park.
- The remaining State Forest in the headwaters of the Aire River, and the remainder of the Aire State Forest added to the Great Otway National Park.

Forest habitat of the following most threatened species will be protected with National Park status:

- Spotted Tree Frog and Baw Baw Frog
- Spot-tailed Quoll and Long-footed Potoroo
- Sooty, Powerful, Masked, and Barking Owls and Red-tailed Black Cockatoo
- Leadbeaters Possum, Yellow Bellied Glider
- Galaxias, Orbost Spiny Crayfish and Strzelecki Burrowing Crayfish

The status of each of these threatened species and the habitat they require to survive has been confirmed by scientific research. The effects of predicted climate change and associated species movement – through both latitude and altitude – must be taken into account with linking corridors maximised.

Protect Water Catchments

All native forests in urban and town water catchments will be permanently protected from logging and woodchipping. Catchments to be protected immediately would include the following:

- Melbourne, including Thompson River, Armstrong, McMahons Creek, Cement Creek and Starvation catchments.
- The Gellibrand Special Water Supply area supplying Warrnambool, Gellibrand and several other towns.
- Marysville, Upper Taggerty and Upper Goulburn catchments
- Daylesford and Trentham
- Gippsland, including the Moondara, Mitchell and other catchments servicing Bairnsdale, Rosedale and Orbost. Several of these catchments also feed the Gippsland Lakes system.

World Heritage Listing

The Greens support the immediate nomination of Victoria and NSW's alpine and connected forests for World Heritage listing.

Land Stewardship and Biodiversity Group

The Land Stewardship and Biodiversity Group of the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) has responsibility within Government for key environmental areas including national parks, coastal and alpine regions, forests, Landcare, catchment management and public land management. It also provides governance, research and information management support to a number of important bodies including Parks Victoria and Catchment Management Authorities.

The Bracks government has cut over 70 jobs from this group. These jobs must be restored and more created to ensure that forests and biodiversity are properly managed within Victoria.

Tourism

Tourism already accounts for almost 10 percent of the economic activity in some forested areas (higher in some towns). Logging and woodchipping employs less than 2% of the current workforce in East Gippsland and is in direct conflict with tourism.

Under the Forest Transition Strategy:

- Australia lives up to its image of a clean, green natural destination.
- New globally significant reserves on public land are widely promoted, enhancing and growing the already active eco-tourism market.
- There is confidence to invest in exciting new attractions, such as the successful the Otway Fly Treetop Walk.
- There is greater opportunity to experience Victoria's wild places in a friendly and welcoming atmosphere.
- New projects and promotional material will be generated for all forested regions of the state – in East Gippsland, the Central Highlands, the Strzeleckis, the Otways, and in the Cobboboonee to Little Desert Landscape Link in the far South West.
- Private plantation managers can promote their commitment to Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification by the protection of high conservation lands across their estates.

Climate Change

Enormous amounts of carbon are naturally stored in forests in trees and other plants, as well as in the forest soil. Mature forests, made up of a mix of various aged trees as well as dead and decaying matter can be carbon neutral above ground. In the soil however, the gradual buildup of slowly decaying organic material will continue to accumulate carbon thereby acting as a sink.

Protecting our forests from logging and post-logging burning will prevent the release of their absorbed carbon back into the atmosphere as heat-trapping 'greenhouse' gases which cause climate change. Climate change is one of the biggest threats to biodiversity. Connected forests also provide corridors to allow species to migrate, adapt and survive to the expected impacts of climate change.

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carbon_dioxide_sink#Forests

Plantation Timber and Wood Products Industry

Forest protection will decrease available native forest for logging, particularly mature forests, but there will be much more wood for processing in the future. How?

Victoria has massive volumes of wood available as mature hardwood and softwood plantations. Within ten years more than 3 million tonnes of plantation timber per annum will be available in Victoria. The current take from native forests is over 1 million tonnes a year for both woodchips and sawn timber. In addition, pine timber is taking the place of most hardwood applications.

What will the transition involve?

High Value Use of Native Forests

Native Forest Woodchipping will End

Industrial scale clear felling and woodchipping of native forests will end.

- The Nippon woodchip mill in Eden and the Midway woodchip mill in Geelong will no longer consume timber from Victorian native forests.
- The **Forests (Wood Pulp Agreement) Act 1996**, which guarantees one company between 350,000 and 500,000 cubic metres of wood every year for 30 years, delivering miniscule royalties to the Victoria people, would be renegotiated.
- Burning native forests for power will be banned by legislation.

More Efficient Use of Wood During the Transition to Plantations

Some specialty timber transition zones (STZs) will be created outside reserves in the least sensitive areas of native forest until specialty timber plantations are able to supply demand. Flora and fauna research must confirm that threatened species habitat and biodiversity values are not compromised.

- Victoria's prized woods for furniture, interior design and crafts will be allowed to grow to maturity.
- Single trees can be cut for timbers to be processed into fine feature items, paneling or other high value products. This will be strictly regulated to protect the ecological integrity of the forest.
- Jobs now at risk will be maintained by offering apprenticeships, assistance for small-scale businesses, transfer of existing skills and machinery into plantation industry and tourism infrastructure jobs. Honey production will be assured.
- Value added processing within Victoria will be supported and optimised.
- Species identification and grading will be improved to ensure trees are allocated to best use.
- Tenders must be linked to demonstrated high value downstream product and jobs.
- During the phase out of logging native forests (STZs), royalties will be increased to the true commercial value, and current government subsidies and assistance will be removed or redirected.
- Logging road charges will be increased to cover the true construction and maintenance costs. Comprehensive environmental impact studies will be conducted before new roads are constructed.

All transition arrangements will terminate by 2009 at the latest, and earlier where possible.

Proper Management of Transitional Logging Operations and Certification of Forests and Plantations

To ensure the proper management of transitional logging operations and that certification of forests and plantations is appropriate:

- All logging, on both public and private land, will be strictly controlled through a greatly strengthened **Code of Forest Practices** and associated legislative instruments, which will include financial penalties for breaches and rights for third parties to sue for breaches.
- The **Safety on Public Land Act 2004** will be repealed because its sole objective is to exclude the public from native forests to prevent public scrutiny of logging operations.
- The **Australian Forestry Standard (AFS)**, developed by the logging industry, is not a legitimate certification regime for Victoria's forests or plantation estate as it lacks environmental and social provisions. Companies branding their products with the AFS logo will be roundly condemned by The Greens as seeking to mislead the public.
- **Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)** certification checks compliance with the internationally agreed FSC Principles of Responsible Forest Management. This is currently appropriate for plantations only. The Greens will support an investigation into the appropriateness of FSC certification for native forests **only after** protection needs for all old growth, rainforest, water catchments and endangered species habitats are met.

Jobs-Rich Plantation Processing

Over 1000 jobs will be created in plantation industries in Victoria over the next few years.

Labour demands are substantially increased by the development of log processing industries. In north-east Victoria, the total number of direct jobs in softwood log processing is three times greater than the number in plantation management and replanting, harvesting and log carting.

Plantations have a long production cycle and annual log production does not fluctuate with seasonal conditions. Plantations can therefore provide regional areas with a degree of income stability when production in other agricultural activities is depressed by drought.

Source: Forestry in the Agricultural Landscape. A Review of the Science of Plantation Forestry in Victoria. Turner, Wareing, Flinn and Lambert, The State of Victoria, Department of Primary Industries, April 2004

Improved Plantation Management

The plantation estate is increasingly important to the future of Victoria's wood products industry. However, there is no need to establish more industrial scale broad acre plantations as investment companies have established more pulpwood plantations than are required for current and future projected use. More pulpwood plantations will damage small communities, the environment and create an overly competitive environment where plantation products might be sold for less than their value.

Management of existing plantations will be reformed and based on the Forest Stewardship Council principles that specify the maintenance of natural ecological system functions within the plantation estate.

All existing plantations and any new plantations proposed must take into account the following:

- Potential permanent water yield reduction (appropriately located small-scale farm-based sawlog plantations are less likely to have this effect).
- The use of broad-scale pesticides that have adverse effects on local communities and water supplies. All aerial spraying and chemicals that are hormone-disruptive or pre-carcinogens will be banned to protect homes, waterways and aquifers.
- Landscape and biodiversity impacts.
- Adverse social effects due to loss of social infrastructure and regional incomes through the acquisition of rural land.
- A rapid transition to mixed species plantations
- Wider waterway buffers to maintain water quality, flow and soil stability.
- Adherence to FSC principles must be strictly measured and enforced.

Comprehensive **regional environmental impact statements** must be prepared before more plantations are established. Victorian State Planning Provisions must also be strengthened.

In summary, plantations will be managed and located to maximise biodiversity and minimise adverse environmental and social impacts.

Wood Supply Substitution and High Value Products

Wood supply substitution using plantation resources and the **creation of high value products** are the key means to achieve a shift to an environmentally friendly wood products industry. This will require:

- A shift to the milling of more plantation logs.
- Ending low value commodity production (woodchips, pallets, palings, posts, firewood etc) from native forests, with production moving to a combination of:
 - Victoria's extensive plantation estate (noting that 1 million cubic metres of plantation sawlogs will be available by 2020, enough to entirely replace the current take of native forest sawlogs)
 - alternative products, such as recycled plastic pallets, concrete sleepers and environmentally friendly firewood options, salvaged urban timber and recycled timber.
- Improving plantation and farm forestry management to maximise production of sawlogs and veneers.
- A shift to making veneers and engineered timber products such as MDF (medium density fibreboard), LVL (laminated veneer lumber) and ESL (elongated strand lumber) will optimise jobs, investment, and efficient resource use, replacing the need for hardwood beams.
- Strategic funding allocation to encourage investment in producing high value goods in global demand, such as hardwood flooring from plantations to Asia.

A pulp mill based on native forests is not in the best interests of Victoria's strategic direction. It would continue the 'quarry' mentality of using native forests for low-value high-volume resources. This is the opposite of producing limited volumes of high quality goods for the world's top niche markets – and it creates fewer jobs and requires more wood and investment.

Worker Support and Sustainable Communities

Looking After Forestry Workers

Presently logging industry employees are losing jobs through changes not related to conservation, such as increased mechanisation, consumer preference for pine timber and increased woodchipping. They need more help. The Greens are committed to supporting workers through the industry transition. Assistance will include:

- Vocational training, wage subsidies, relocation costs and income support or redundancy payments.
- Retraining to work in other related parts of the industry will be a primary focus.
- Retraining and employment in a variety of tourism-related vocations will also be provided.
- Industry Development Assistance will also be provided.
- Genuinely sustainable new jobs will be created in the timber industry with skills and experience to be transferred to the plantation sector where significantly higher volumes of sawlog and pulpwood will soon be available. There is already great demand for workers in Western Victorian plantations.
- Grants will be made available for hardwood mills to retool so they can process softwood sawlogs.

“We invite both the Labor and Liberal parties to join us in a bipartisan approach to achieving forest protection, ending the conflict and building sustainable rural economies for the future”

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MORE INFORMATION

If your community group would like more information on the Victorian Greens' Forest Transition Strategy, please call the Victorian Greens Office on (03) 9602 1141 or e-mail us on office@vic.greens.org.au, to arrange for a briefing from a Victorian Greens representative.

www.vic.greens.org.au