

Major Party Detailed Policy Assessment

Protect Forests & Biodiversity

Environment groups are seeking a clear commitment to establish a permanent forest conservation estate which protects old growth, water supply catchments and habitat for threatened wildlife.

What are environment groups seeking ?

Environment groups were seeking commitments around three key areas:

- a) Establish a permanent old growth forest estate in Eastern Victoria
- b) Protect forest habitat for key rare and endangered species
- c) Protect key habitats in South West Victoria and redgum forests

This commitment includes the following key detailed elements:

- a) **A Permanent old growth Forest Estate:** Establishing a permanent old growth estate, which will protect more than 400,000 ha of old growth forests in Eastern Victoria, through a combination of National Parks, conservation reserves and adequate regulation (prescription).
- b) **Protecting Precious Habitat:** Protection and connection of habitat for National and State threatened species including the State faunal emblem the Leadbeaters Possum, through:
 - a. Placing an immediate moratorium on logging areas identified by the Victorian Forest Alliance pending the outcome of a VEAC investigation into their conservation values and protection needs;
 - b. VEAC investigation should specifically identify and protect habitat needs for the Spotted-tailed Quoll, Leadbeaters Possum, Smokey Mouse, Long-footed Potoroo, Barred Galaxias, Baw Baw Frog, Spotted Tree Frog, Giant Burrowing Frog, Powerful Owl, Masked Owl, Sooty Owl, and the Orbost Spiny Crayfish.
- c) **Red Gum forest wetlands of the Murray River:** Immediate industry adjustment measures are required to reduce logging pressures on already stressed Red Gum wetlands along the Murray, along with a clear commitment to creating new Red Gum national parks including joint Aboriginal management where appropriate.
- d) **Protecting the forests of far South-western Victoria-** In the south-west, the Cobboboonee State Forest should be immediately added to the Lower Glenelg National Park and existing Special Protection and Special Management Zones throughout the Portland and Horsham Forest Management Regions should be converted to national parks, state parks and conservation reserves to protect the habitat of threatened wildlife. A thorough examination of remaining public land forests and woodlands areas is also needed, to recommend new national parks and conservation reserves for critical habitat of the Red-tailed Black-cockatoo and other threatened species.
- e) **Securing the health of Victoria's bushlands and wildlife:** A "net gain" in the extent and health of the State's native vegetation must be delivered immediately. Adequate funding to improve the health of our national parks is crucial, along with a real commitment to increasing nature conservation investment State-wide. Strong governance arrangements for the new white paper on land health and biodiversity will be crucial to the delivery of this.

Political Parties Policies so far

ALP

Labor has made no commitment to protect the old growth forests, water catchments and endangered wildlife habitat of eastern Victoria, or move commodity production (especially woodchipping) into plantations.

Labor has recently moved to protect 8000 hectares of the 'Cores and Links' in the Strzelecki Ranges in South Gippsland.

On the Friday the 17 of November the ALP released its Victoria's National Parks and Biodiversity Policy for the election which included a commitment to protect 33,500 hectares of state forest to the National Park.

- *Labor will immediately protect the Goolengook Block and the last significant stands of Victoria's old growth forests currently available for logging under the National Parks Act*
- *Labor will create the Great Victorian Alpine National Park by adding a 5,000 hectare section of State Forest, currently available for logging, to link the Errinundra National Park to the Snowy River and Alpine National Parks and bid for World Heritage Listing.*
- *Immediately add over 2,500 hectares of icon State Forest areas currently available for timber harvesting to the National Parks and reserve system in East Gippsland*
- *Labor will create a new 27,000 ha Cobboboonee National Park and Forest Park outside Portland to preserve the valuable Cobboboonee Forest and ensure it is managed for the best mix of conservation and recreational uses*
- *Create new Red Gum National and Forest Parks if recommended by VEAC and Ensure that resources will be provided to support the creation of any new Parks and explore indigenous joint management arrangements.*

Labor had committed to undertake a biodiversity white paper in its Sustainability Action Statement. *Labor will develop a Biodiversity Whitepaper that will be a comprehensive approach to sustaining biodiversity across Victoria in the medium to long term and committed to establishing a 'independent Biodiversity Taskforce' and robust community, stakeholder and industry consultation.*

Liberal

Liberals released their policy on Sunday 19 of November and essentially matched labours proposal for old growth forests, through there was no specific mention of the need for immediate protection.

Protect and create new national parks:

A Liberal Government will protect our current parks and reserves and add to strength and size of national park and reserve network. A liberal Government will protect additional areas of mature forest and rainforest along with threatened species habitat by retiring 10,000 cubic metres of annual resource over the next three years; including Goolengook and State Forests in East Gippsland and linking the Errinundra, Snowy and Alpine National Parks.

We will also ask the Victorian Environment Assessment Council to investigate the capacity to link and protect important areas of forest. This would include an examination of corridors for fauna movement and significant vegetation and

A Liberal Government also committed in its Forest Policy to:

Undertake a wide ranging scientific study into the health of all of Victoria's forests, both private and public lands. This study will take into account the effects of tourism, fire management, water catchments and hydrological sustainability, the age of the forests and prognosis for self renewal and the effects of climate change on flora and fauna. The inquiry will be scientifically based and will call on the most modern forest science and forest management techniques available world-wide. Importantly, further research is needed to identify the effects of intervention management through logging and replanting, and the long-term prospects of forests under non-intervention management practices.

Liberals have a very broad commitment with only one specific site identified for further protection Hattah-Nowingi. Liberal Policy states: *Preserve environmentally significant land and endangered flora and fauna from degradation and A Liberal Government will refer the Hattah-Nowingi site to the Victorian Environment Assessment Council for further investigation and recommendation on site protection.*

Comment: The proposed VEAC process at least partially speaks to environment group's policy objective for key threatened forest species. Rough calculations suggest that 10,000 cubic meters of logs equate to between 40,000 – 50,000 ha of forest protected but it depends on how the calculations are done. Liberal Party has provided no maps or specific hectares.

The Liberal Party mostly matched Labor on the Forests of the South West though the language was a significantly looser for the Cobboboonee and Redgums. There was no explicit commitment for Redgums from the Liberal party.

6. Recognise the creation of a further national park in south west Victoria to be known as the Cobboboonee National Park which will adjoin the Glenelg National Park Cobboboonee State Forest is 27,000 ha of forest near Portland under Department of Sustainability and Environment management. (emphasis added)

7. Await the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) recommendations to be announced regarding the River Red Gum Forests Investigation

While the Liberal environment policy outlines some positives a closer look at the Liberal Party Forest policy highlights some significant negative proposals which undermine the Liberal Forest package such as legislating RFAs, no new protected areas without management plans (which could take years) logging on private land strategy. See attached detailed review of Liberal Forest Policy (attachment I)

Greens

The Greens have committed to;

- 1. protect Victoria's remaining native forests (including all remaining old growth forests, water supply catchments and rare and threatened wildlife habitat), and to end commodity production including industrial scale native forest woodchipping in native forests;*
- 2. nomination of Victoria's (and NSW's) alpine and connected forest for World Heritage listing;*
- 3. utilize existing plantations to meet domestic needs. Develop skills based manufacturing jobs in the plantation sector. Expand forest based tourism.*

Greens Forest policy state that 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, Lerderderg 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.

In the Greens Biodiversity Policy:

River Red Gum Forest Wetlands

- ✂️ Commit to creating new national parks and protected areas, following recommendations of the Victorian Environment Assessment Council's (VEAC) River Red Gum Forests Investigation.
- ✂️ Commit to hand-back to the Yorta Yorta Nation and joint management of a new Barmah-Millewa National Park, and pursue Indigenous joint management of other new River Murray National Parks, along with close involvement of indigenous people in management of other public lands in the region.
- ✂️ Introduce immediate protective measures for declared Living Murray "significant ecological assets", in line with achieving ecological outcomes. This should include measures to significantly scale back logging and grazing of the Barmah and Gunbower forests, for the duration of the VEAC investigation.

South-west Victoria's Forests and Woodlands

Create a 'Karak National Park' protecting already identified Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo habitat, and add the Cobboboonee State Forest to Victoria's protected areas system as an addition to Lower Glenelg National Park. Instruct and resource VEAC to conduct an investigation into public land use and conservation in south-west Victoria, with a view to establishing a full and adequate protected area system in the region. This should be aimed at ensuring the long term survival of flora, fauna and ecological processes in the region ensuring connectivity of habitat and resilience in the face of climatic change. The study area should include at least the Portland and Horsham Forest Management Areas (FMAs). During the VEAC investigation, place all Portland FMA forests in interim conservation management with no sawlogs, woodchips, thinnings, posts or poles to be taken.

People Power

" legislate to protect old growth forests, water supply catchments and vital habitat for threatened and endangered fauna; and create new national parks and protected areas
and

"... instruct and resource Victorian Environment Assessment Council (VEAC) to conduct a

state-wide review of public land use” “ ...conduct a gap analysis to determine marine communities that are not currently protected in marine national parks and sanctuaries”.

People Power have made no specific mention of South West Forests or Redgum forests.

The Nationals

The National Party is committed to more security and longer license right for native forest for the logging industry, no reductions in logging old growth forests, water catchments and rare and threatened wildlife habitat and net addition in hectares to the Victoria National Park estate.

Their policy commits to;

“Provide greater resource security for the timber industry by: extending timber allocation orders to 20 years; increasing the timber release plan from 5 to 10 years; ensuring there is no further net loss in resource availability.

The Nationals believe there are community benefits and management synergies from allowing multiple use of public lands. We support:

- *Grazing on appropriate public land including high country and Red Gum forest grazing which have important community values and contribute to responsible management of alpine land.*
- *Responsible utilisation of timber resources on public land recognising that forestry is generally compatible with conservation objectives.*

Family First

Family First in its Timber Industry policy supports Victoria’s timber industry and support the current allocation of old growth forest to the timber industry and support the current regional forest agreements. Family First also state that the *“...will not call for further cuts from those outlined in the Our Forests Our Future document”.*

No explicit policy on biodiversity protection for forest habitats.

Detailed Review of Vic Liberal Forest Policy

Released on Saturday November 18, 2006, by Shadow Minister for Racing & Forestry David Koch.

Positives:

Increase to Protected Areas.

- Retire 10,000 cubic metres of annual resource of mature forest and rainforest; including Goolengook and also other State Forests that will link the Errinundra to Snowy River and Alpine National Parks, completing the creation of National Parks in eastern Victoria.

10,000 m³ equates an area of;

*In EG 5,000 ha /annum logged delivers 140,000m³ of sawlog/annum,
Average yield of 28 m³/ha.*

*Therefore 10,000m³/annum of sawlog reduction would approximate to an area of 357ha / annum. EG MMS forest rotation is at 120 to 150 years, therefore multiplied by 357/annum implies a total area withdrawn of **42,000 to 53,500 ha.***

- Protect additional areas of mature forest and rainforest along with threatened species habitat by retiring 10,000 cubic metres of annual resource over the next three years; including Goolengook and State Forests in East Gippsland and linking the Errinundra, Snowy and Alpine National Parks

Transition to alternative timber:

- Encourage the planting of high quality sawlog and firewood plantations on private land
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- Introduce a four-year plantation incentive scheme to encourage the growing of genetically proven hardwood timber species on private land. Under the scheme, on areas with a minimum of 10 hectares, growers will be paid \$1000 per hectare to plant approved species that would produce high quality saw logs. Funding provision for a maximum planting of 2000 hectares a year will be made available.
- Invest \$2 million over four years in providing advice to farmers and people living on rural land to develop plantation production, and achieve best practice management in planting, harvesting and marketing skills.

- Foster the growth of firewood plantation production in identified post code areas with funding subsidies of \$600 per hectare; capped at 1,000 hectares per annum.

Negatives:

Increase to Protected Areas.

- Achieve this additional protection by phasing in the further protected areas as alternative resources are identified, provided that there is demonstrable industry support
- Ensure additional reserves are not created until management plans are in place
- Await the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) recommendations to be announced regarding the River Red Gum Forests Investigation

Private Land Logging.

- **No strategy for native forest on private land** – Labor has no position on the 350,000 hectares of native forest on private land in eastern Victoria, of which up to 50 per cent could be made available as a sustainable industry resource for hardwood sawlog production or, north of the divide, available for firewood.

Native Timber Resource security:

- Provide support in maintaining a viable forestry industry in Victoria that offers sustainable timber allocations on long-term contracts using best management practice.

Comment: *No legislated guarantee here. VicForests itself already has the capacity to provide timber under commercial contract for up to 15 years. The Victorian State government currently has long term supply agreements – which it refuses to review despite industry proposals for transition.*

- “The Victorian forestry industry has seen a dramatic reduction in resource allocation over recent years, falling from over 900,000 cubic metres to 576,000 cubic metres annually. This ongoing annual allocation of 576,000 cubic metres was identified as part of the industry-wide review recommendations detailed in the *Our Forests, Our Future* strategy of 2002. This year, only 450,000 cubic metres will be made available at the completion of the current sales process, a further 22 per cent decrease. But to remain viable, the industry needs at least 540,000 cubic metres. “
- Retire 10,000 cubic metres of resource in protected areas provided there are no net job loss and is deliverable with no net loss of resource

- Review the process by which native forest resources are allocated to provide greater contract tenure for a period of not less than 10 years.
- Establish a four-stage process for resource allocation of native forests that reflects industry stability, resource quality, value adding proposals and environmental, economic and social viability for regional communities recognising that as 80 per cent of all native forest resource available is of lesser sawlog quality, being predominantly C, D and E grades,.
- Direct VicForests to manage the balance of the current licence allocation under this four-stage process. To complete the process will require VicForests to establish a Forestry Resource Allocation Advisory Committee, made up of representatives from VicForests, Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (DIIRD), Treasury, an independent expert competent in commerce and an independent industry expert (former industry leader).
- Uphold and legislate the core principles as outlined in the five Victorian Regional Forest Agreements.

Certification:

- Ensure world standard sustainable forest management principles are adopted throughout the industry on both public and private land
- Adopt world standard Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) procedures as part of VicForests pricing, allocation and log assessment grading in native forest sawlog contracts.
- Introduce, as part of SFM, forest certification in consultation with licensees, industry and consumers. VicForests will be certified under this process and adhere to the international certification requirements of the Program for the Endorsement of Forest Certification Schemes (PEFC) chain of custody standards, which will also assist with the control of illegal harvesting in overseas countries. All timber and timber product imports will be required to meet these standards.