



Report: Western Forests & Woodlands at Risk

An investigation by the Victorian National Parks Association into new logging plans for Victoria's western forests and woodlands reveals they would be ecologically damaging and take place in areas known to harbour more than 20 threatened native animals and 14 threatened native plants.

VicForests' new Timber Utilisation Plan 2017 is the first to be published since the state-owned logging agency controversially took over management of logging in western Victoria on the eve of the 2014 state election.

Much of the timber to be harvested is for low-value uses including commercial firewood, poles, posts and some sawlogs.

Stretching west from the Hume Highway to the South Australian border and north to Gunbower on the Murray River, the proposed logging plans cover a huge percentage of the most cleared and fragmented parts of Victoria, and more than six forest management areas.

Our report, *Western Forests & Woodlands at Risk*, analyses the new Timber Utilisation Plan, focusing on the impacts of proposed logging coupes on threatened species, endangered, vulnerable and depleted vegetation types and land tenure.

It looks at relevant planning and management codes of practice outlined in the Code of Practice for Timber Harvesting and other state policies and regulations, and raises questions about the ongoing role of the commercially-focused, state-owned enterprise VicForests in the most cleared parts of the Victoria.

KEY FINDINGS

- Proposed commercial logging by VicForests of around 60 state forests and woodlands in some of Victoria's most cleared landscapes in the west of the state will be ecologically damaging.
- Across western Victorian forests 70% of the area targeted for logging contains native vegetation types that are either endangered (19%) vulnerable (11%) or depleted (40%). In the Horsham Forest Management Area 54% of the vegetation is endangered.
- Threatened species have been found either within or near 33% of planned logging coupes. In some forest management areas, including the Portland Forest



Management Area, that figure leaps to 67%. These forests and woodlands should be protected from logging.

- The VicForests draft Timber Utilisation Plan (TUP), published on February 2017, is inconsistent with state government policy and the Code of Practice for Timber Harvesting.
- The Andrews Government should ensure no logging of merchantable timber commences in western Victoria while the currently seriously flawed VicForests Timber Utilisation Plan 2017 is withdrawn and reviewed with a comprehensive ecological assessment, management detail and satisfactory community consultation, before any logging proceeds, if it proceeds at all.
- The plan currently proposes potentially 'unlawful' logging in some Forest Parks, a type of conservation reserve.
- Some areas in the Central West such as the Wombat, Wellsford and Mt Cole state forests and the Pyrenees ranges listed for logging are also subject to a recently announced Investigation by the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC), and should be removed from logging schedules while this investigation is completed.

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Horsham FMA

Area: 13,250 ha

No of Coupes: 115

- Coupes with rare, threatened or depleted vegetation types (EVC): 81%-100%
- Coupes with threatened species within or adjacent: 49%
- Places: Twenty six state forest areas and two other reserve types including Cherrypool State Forest, Connewirricoo State Forest, Glenisla State Forest, Woolpooper State Forest, Kalingur State Forest.

Mid Murray FMA

Area: 1885 ha

No of Coupes: 22

- Coupes with rare, threatened or depleted vegetation types (EVC): 100%
- Coupes with threatened species within or adjacent: 59%
- Places: Four state forests including Benwell State Forest, Gunbower State Forest.

Bendigo FMA

Area: 8616 ha

No of Coupes: 120

- Coupes with rare, threatened or depleted vegetation types (EVC): 93%-100%
- Coupes with threatened species within or adjacent: 27%
- Places: Fourteen state forests including Wellsford State Forest, Bealiba-Barp State Forest, Redcastle-Greytown State Forest, St Arnaud & Pyrenees state forests.

Midlands FMA

Area: 5533 ha

No of Coupes: 134

- Coupes with rare, threatened or depleted vegetation types (EVC): 86%-76%
- Coupes with threatened species within or adjacent: 22%
- Places: Nine state forests and three other reserve types including the Wombat State Forest, Mt Cole State Forest, Mt Lonarch/Berumgomer State Forest, Beerimpmo State Forest.

Portland FMA

Area: 2616 ha

No of Coupes: 27

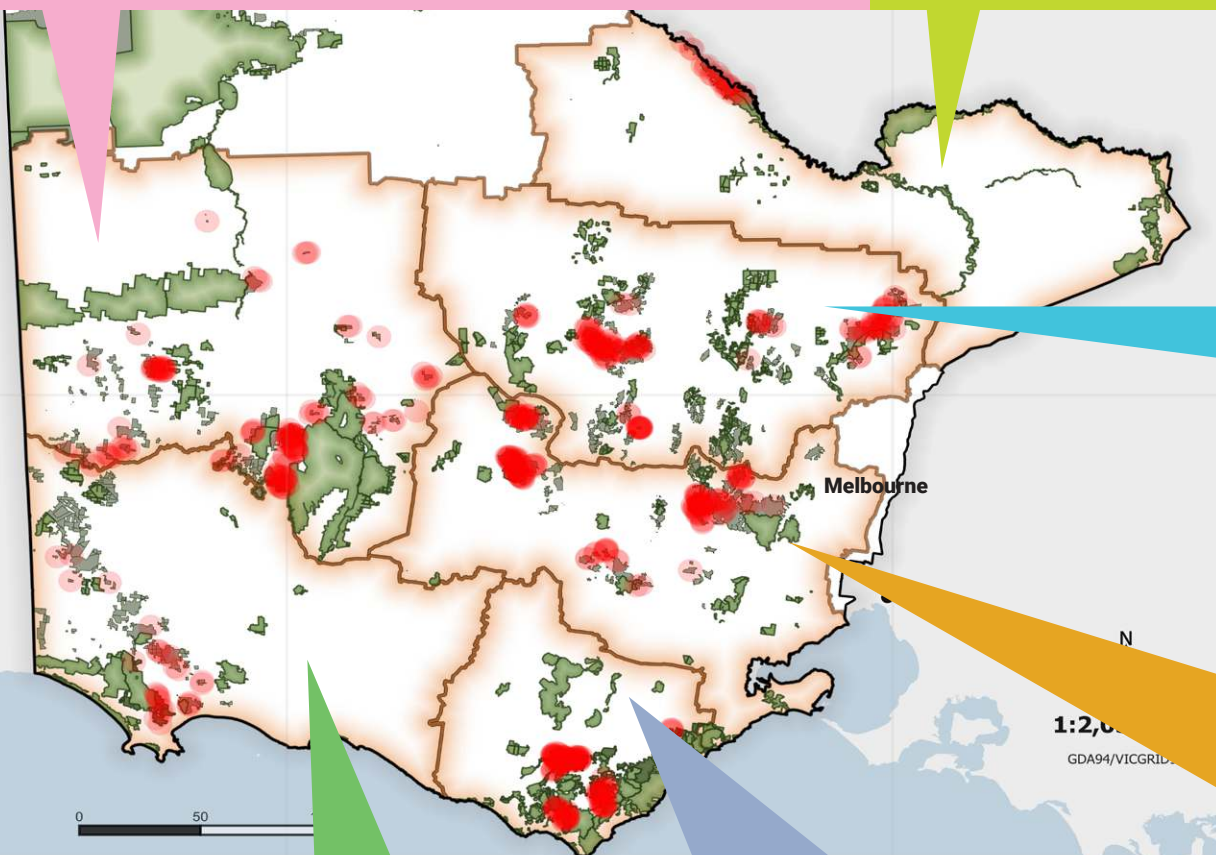
- Coupes with rare, threatened or depleted vegetation types (EVC): 52%-48%
- Coupes with threatened species within or adjacent: 67%
- Places: Eight state forests and two other reserve types including Cobboboonee Forest Park, Annya State Forest, Homerton State Forest.

Otway FMA

Area: 9179 ha

No of Coupes: 115

- Coupes with rare, threatened or depleted vegetation types (EVC): 84%-33%
- Coupes with threatened species within or adjacent: 23%
- Places: Otway Forest Park.



Indicative location of Timber Utilisation Plan coupes in Western Victoria. Note not to scale.

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More than 20 threatened native animals and 14 threatened native plants were found in or closely adjacent to a third of all proposed logging areas. These species include the grey goshawk, regent honeyeater, little egret, swift parrots, powerful owls, brush-tailed phascogales, long-nosed potoroos and south-eastern red-tailed black cockatoos.

Photos: Brush-tailed phascogale, Chris Tzaros; red-tailed black cockatoo, Bob McPherson; swift parrot, Chris Tzaros; powerful owl chick, Lyn and Geoff Easton

OTHER ISSUES IDENTIFIED

- In very cleared bioregions such as the Wimmera and Dundas Tablelands in the Horsham and Portland Forest Management Areas the Code of Practice for Timber Harvesting planning codes seems to have been ignored.
- More than 20 threatened native animals and 14 threatened native plants were found in or closely adjacent to a third of all proposed logging areas. These include the grey goshawk, regent honeyeater,

little egret, swift parrots, powerful owls, brush-tailed phascogales, long-nosed potoroos and south-eastern red-tailed black cockatoos.

- The report also looked at the potential implication for specific threatened species such as the nationally endangered south-eastern red-tailed black cockatoo. It identified 11 coupes as containing records of this bird in both the Horsham and Portland forest management areas.

MEDIA BACKGROUNDER