



The Understorey

Conservation News, Views and Interviews in the
Dandenongs, Yarra Valley and adjoining areas.

August, 2013

No. 165



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We now have our own website. It features up to date news about events and deadlines for submissions that will not be current for the next edition, and an archive of past editions plus much more.

www.the-understorey.com

Request for Helmeted Honeyeater Supplementary Feeding Volunteers at Yellingbo

Volunteers currently provide supplementary feed to one Helmeted Honeyeater reintroduction site in Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve (YNCR) as a crucial role in the Helmeted Honeyeater Recovery Program. Helmeted Honeyeaters are the only bird endemic to Victoria and the last naturally occurring colony is at Yellingbo. It is the avifaunal emblem of Victoria, a critically endangered subspecies of the Yellow-tufted Honeyeater and is a flagship taxon for the health of swamp and streamside vegetation. Through working to support the Helmeted Honeyeater we also support an endangered vegetation community, the Sedge-rich *Eucalyptus camphora* swamp, that is key to its survival. YNCR also supports many threatened fauna and flora species that co-exist with Helmeted Honeyeaters such as Leadbeater's Possum, Powerful Owl and *Eucalyptus fulgens*.

Two new supplementary feeding sites for Helmeted Honeyeaters, including where the spring release of captive bred birds from Healesville Sanctuary will occur, are being introduced at Yellingbo and new volunteers are needed. Supplementary feeding volunteers work in pairs throughout the year to record observations of birds sighted and supplement the natural food that birds forage for. Are you looking for a volunteering role that takes you out into the bush for approximately 4 hours in the morning? The days are flexible to suit your availability but a regular shift is desirable eg weekly, fortnightly or monthly. Do you have some field skills or are willing to learn? Access to a 4WD vehicle is desirable, but not essential.

To find out more, please email Sue Tardif at euc.regnans@gmail.com for a position description or to express your interest in the role. Induction of new volunteers will commence mid August and be ongoing. This program is coordinated by DEPI's Senior Scientist – Ornithology, Bruce Quin who will be back from leave and ready to welcome you to the team in mid August.

Please feel free to pass this information on to others that you feel may be interested.

The Canberra Indian Myna Action Group has reduced Common Mynas from the third most abundant bird to the twentieth. So keep on trapping – they can be controlled!

Victorian Environment Friends Network 15th Biennial Discovery Weekend

Friday 13th to Sunday 15th September, 2013
at Oasis Camp, 6772 Monbulk Rd, Mt Evelyn
(Melway map 120 D3)

This action-packed Discovery Weekend Includes:

Excursions: to the Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater, Kurth Kiln historical site, Birdland Reserve, and the famous Puffing Billy.

Great speakers: • Prof. Chris Walsh (Melb. Uni.) on innovative stormwater retention.

Also: Presentation of the 2013 Best Friend Awards, group displays, and more!

Spaces are limited, so don't hesitate - fill in the attached registration form and send it in ASAP to avoid disappointment.

Cost is only \$140, including meals and accommodation – a shared cabin with ensuite (lower bunks).

Further information: friendsvic@hotmail.com

Love Forests Exhibition

From 1-7 September, the Wilderness Society Victoria and MyEnvironment are bringing the forests to the city!

Love Forests will connect people with the majesty and value of Victoria's native forests and tell the story of logging and extinction. Using a collection of paintings, photographs, sketches, sculptures, and moving images, we will transform Gallery ONE THREE to reflect the majesty of Victoria's native forests.

Love Forests will be a dramatic story about Victoria's forests, told in creative ways by the people who love, live near, and campaign to protect them. These forests are incredible places — their story deserves to be heard by everyone.

If you or anyone you know would be interested in to the exhibition that would be great. There is a simple application and selection process - contact Ben, 0416 305 004, ben.campbell@wilderness.org.au to find out more info and get the submission form. We encourage submissions of all kinds of work by 15 August. By getting involved you will be helping to protect native forests in Victoria!

The exhibition will be free and open to all. We will be holding a series of special events during the week it is on. We will keep you posted!

The Wilderness Society Victoria Inc
288 Brunswick St, Fitzroy, VIC, 3065

Phone: (03) 9038 0888

Fax: (03) 9038 0800

melbourne@wilderness.org.au



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When: Sunday 1st September 2013

Where: Warburton Rail Trail Reserve Station St, Wesburn Mel. Ref - 288 K3

What to bring: Outdoor gear, gumboots, wet weather gear

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For more information email: yvlandcare@bigpond.com or go to <http://portphillipwesternport.landcarevic.net.au/yvrn/activities>






Karl Williams continues his regular series of dispatches.

HIGH NOON AT THE TECOMA STOCKADE

I hardly need to write about The Tecoma Stockade, so widely covered has it been by the national and even international media (the Guardian has begun reporting it). But where does one begin?

The campaign had been awaiting D-day (for demolition) since the start of May, so when Maccas made their move on July 1, we were ready. Our early morning spotters alerted the campaign via Facebook and our emergency SMS alert went out to 250 people telling them to race down to the site.

Perhaps 40 police, courtesy of the Victorian taxpayers, were waiting for us, along with 20 or so security guards. But a glorious symbol of defiance and encouragement was waving down to us, urging us on – the “roofsters” had managed to slip through the security cordon and occupy the large, sprawling interconnected roofs of the buildings marked for demolition by McDonald’s. Hundreds of protesters have continued to peacefully demonstrate at the site for four weeks now, with the result that virtually no work has begun at the site.

The trade unions have ridden in on their white chargers, placing an effective work ban on the site in support of the community, and a continuous “community peace line” has been maintained at the site entrance.

Unless you’ve been hiding under a rock the last few weeks, you’d be aware of the over-the-top corporate bullying by McDonald’s in the form of a Supreme Court Writ against the “Tecoma Eight” (including your correspondent). In another interim order, the judge made quite reasonable (IMHO) temporary orders limiting access to the site to the eight, but went way beyond that by applying the same restrictions to an unnamed group of people who might have committed trespass or impeded access to the site. When you’re talking about jail terms for contempt of Supreme Court orders, confusion about who is an affected person is not a good basis.

This highly controversial court order has attracted the attention of the legal world, with the result that the exceedingly principled law firm, Maurice Blackburn, has offered its services to the eight, pro bono.

McDonald’s writ seeks damages from the eight of many hundreds of thousands of dollars, which leads one to wonder whether anyone is aware of the shameful “McLibel” case or whether work experience kids have taken over the running of McDonald’s public relations department. Day after day, McDonald’s are shooting themselves in the foot with their heavy-handed legal tactics and clumsy media statements. They’re playing their part in this David vs. Goliath script just fine.

The other day, McDonald’s website went into virtual meltdown as it was swamped by countless criticisms following CEO Catriona Noble’s botched attempt to justify McDonald’s legal intimidation. And with change.org running a petition calling on Ms. Noble to abandon McDonald’s plans for Tecoma that was getting 2000 signatures an hour on the first day, the community is riding a wave of massive media support. This fairy tale might indeed have a happy ending, after all.

(See photo on back cover.)

Development is coming to Victoria’s National Parks.

In a 2012 report of the Victorian Parliament’s Economic Development and Infrastructure Committee, calls were made to open National Parks for exploration and mining. Under section 6 of the *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990* all land that is National Park, Marine National Park, Marine Sanctuary, Wilderness Park or State Park under the *National Parks Act 1975* is ‘not available’ for mining or exploration. These protected areas cover about fourteen percent of Victoria’s total landmass. The report recommended that the Victorian Government consider improving access to crown land for exploration and Mining.

The state government has made a number of attempts to use our National Parks for things other than the conservation of the natural environment. First, there was the failed attempt to return grazing to the Alpine National Park. In April this year, the State Environment Minister released guidelines which allow tourism development, including accommodation and restaurants, in formerly off-limits National Parks. Areas of high environmental value, such as the Port Campbell, Wilson’s Promontory and the Grampians National Parks, are affected by these new rules. These will include the grant of ninety-nine year leases to developers, effectively granting them private ownership of sections of the State’s environmental heritage. And, most recently, the Victorian Environment Assessment Council released a report requested by the State government that recommends the opening up of larger areas of National Parks to mineral prospecting.*

The Federal Government is also unwilling to ensure Victoria’s National Parks are protected from development. It recently turned down an opportunity to include National Parks as a ‘trigger’ condition for federal intervention under the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*. This would have allowed the greater oversight over any development, and allow the federal minister to reject any development.

These developments raise an important question: what actually is the purpose of National Parks? On the one hand, many take for granted the view that National Parks should be areas where biodiversity and the natural environment are protected so they can thrive unharmed by human activity and be enjoyed by people now and in the future. As the above examples show, the current state government does not share this view: it is of the view that National Parks should be used and developed, even in ways that may cause harm to the natural environments within the Park.

No one should be surprised to know that the EDO think that National Parks should be used to conserve the natural environment. We have already done some work to try and protect national parks, particularly in relation to [prospecting](#) and [cattle grazing](#). With your support we can continue to work to keep National Parks for nature conservation.

felicitymillner's blog courtesy of the Environment Defenders Office
(<http://www.edovic.org.au/blogs/felicitymillner>)

*The report recommend against prospecting in the Yarra Ranges National Park

Bred To Be Wild Edition 2 and Special Broken Back Wine Offer By Peter Preuss

In 2006, I wrote a book entitled 'Bred to be Wild' documenting the work of the late Des Hackett.



Des was an old mate of mine and a remarkable man. He spent almost three decades privately perfecting breeding programs for Sugar Gliders and the seriously endangered Leadbeater's Possum. His captive bred gliders were used to re-establish wild populations where they had become locally extinct throughout Victoria, including the Tower Hill Game Reserve. Unfortunately, his Leadbeater's Possum did not enjoy such great results.

In the 1980s, Des provided the Melbourne Zoo, Healesville Sanctuary and the Sydney Zoo with breeding groups of Leadbeater's together with details of how to house and care for the animals to ensure breeding success. Within a few years there were so many Leadbeater's Possum that the zoos faced a dilemma. What were they to do with the 'excess' animals?

Toward the end of his life, Des Hackett made himself quite unpopular as he tenaciously battled with the zoos and wildlife authorities who began exporting Leadbeater's Possums to zoos throughout the world. Having proved that it could be done with gliders, Des desperately wanted to see his Leadbeater's Possum released into the wild within his lifetime. This did not happen.

When Des died in 1997, I 'inherited' a box of his notes documenting his observations of animals like The Gentleman, Mad Nora, Nixon The Barbarian and Tessa... Des was a prolific note taker, all be it often just on scraps of paper after making some significant discovery about the animals in his care.

In that box were also a heap of beautiful photographs and copies of correspondence between Des and Minister after Minister as he fought the bureaucracy

Over several years, I pieced together Des' story like a giant

jigsaw puzzle. I initially intended to document one man's success in helping turn the tide of extinction. However, while there were active breeding programs in zoos throughout the world when I started writing 'Bred to be Wild', there were just two individuals left at Healesville Sanctuary and four at Toronto Zoo (Canada) by the time I finished the first draft in 2005. By the time the first edition went to press in 2006, just one lonely old female remained in Toronto. All the zoos had given up their breeding programs and no Leadbeater's were released into the wild.

Consequently, the Final Chapter of the initial book ended on a very sad note... and things have got a whole heap worse for the Leadbeater's Possum since. With severe bushfires ravaging the Central Highland Forests, together with relentless logging of their remaining habitat, the future for our state emblem looks bleak indeed.

In 2012, Zoos Victoria announced a new breeding program for the Leadbeater's Possum. With all that has happened to the Leadbeater's since the first edition of 'Bred to be Wild', it seems timely for an update. The second edition of 'Bred to be Wild' is exactly the same as the first edition but with a new 'Final Chapter'. This new final chapter features a guest essay from Zoos Victoria explaining the new breeding program and a guest essay from the Friends of the Leadbeater's Possum detailing the current plight of our endangered state emblem.

How to get a copy of 'Bred to be Wild'

For those that have already purchased a copy of 'Bred to be Wild' and/or those that only want a copy of the new Final Chapter, a PDF is available free of charge. Simply email me at peter.preuss@bigpond.com and I will send you a copy that you can print yourself.

In lieu of payment a donation to the Friends of Leadbeater's Possum via direct debit would be appreciated:

Bank: Commonwealth Bank of Australia
Account Name: Friends of the Leadbeater's Possum Inc
BSB: 063 689
Account Number: 10153706

To order hardcopies of the new edition, email me on peter.preuss@bigpond.com and I will send an invoice (\$30 including postage) with the book.

Broken Back Wine Special Offer – free book with each 6 pack ordered

Being a small wine producer and to celebrate the second edition of 'Bred to be Wild', I am releasing my 2012 Broken Back Pinot Noir which I will call 'Bred to be Wild Pinot Noir 2012'. The retail price is \$20 per bottle. Order a 6 pack (\$130 including postage in Victoria) and I'll throw in a free hardcopy of 'Bred to be Wild'. Again, order via email peter.preuss@bigpond.com (if you quote "Friends of Leadbeater's Possum" when ordering, I will also donate \$10 per 6 pack to the Friends of the Leadbeater's Possum).

Donations direct to Friends of Leadbeater's Possum can be made at www.leadbeaters.org.au/donate/

Victoria's forests are beset by problems - and time is running out to provide solutions.

By David Lindenmayer

Mention forest issues in Australia and almost everyone thinks of seemingly endless battles in Tasmania. Yet few people realise that large parts of the Victorian forest estate are in far worse shape than Tasmania's.

This is because of the tiny fraction of remaining old growth, the rapid rate of overcutting of dwindling sawlog resources and the widespread use of antiquated and highly damaging clearfelling methods.

Furthermore, the endangered Leadbeater's possum – one of Victoria's faunal emblems and the only mammal species confined to the state – is at serious risk of imminent extinction.

Victoria's forests are in a parlous state, in part because of poor decisions by successive governments to over-commit resources, particularly since the advent of widespread clearfelling in the 1970s.

In recognition of the situation, on May 16 the agency responsible for overseeing logging in Victoria – VicForests – announced changes. Starting in 2017, it will cut 500 hectares less of forest and reduce sawlog yield by 85,000 cubic metres a year. This is minor tinkering at best when the Victorian forest industry needs major reform to solve many deep-seated problems. These changes must include:

- ‡ Significantly and immediately reducing the rate of logging by up to 75 per cent.

- ‡ Immediately replacing clearfelling with more environmentally sensitive retention harvesting methods – as used in Tasmania and worldwide.

- ‡ Providing exit packages for those transitioning out of a downsized forest industry.

- ‡ Implementing new approaches to conserve the Leadbeater's possum based on 30 years of science and not watered-down government greenwash.

The reality is that major reductions in rates of logging in Victorian forests are decades overdue.

When I was a Victorian government employee in the early 1990s, it was widely recognised by field operations staff even back then that ash forests were being heavily overcut. The widespread axiom was “we are hitting the forest too hard”.

The problem of past overcutting has been deeply exacerbated by the loss of 72,000 hectares of ash forest in the Central Highlands region following the 2009 Black Saturday wildfires, putting even more pressure on an already overcommitted resource. Yet it will be 2017 – eight years after the 2009 fires – before a relatively trivial reduction in timber yield will begin to be implemented.

VicForests claims the need to “balance the social, economic and environmental benefits” of native forests. Yet it is hard to substantiate that any such balance is being achieved. There is now less than 1.15 per cent of ash forest that is old growth.

The Leadbeater's possum is on an extinction trajectory as a consequence of more than 100 years of overcutting, repeated fires that have destroyed 42 per cent of its suitable habitat and heavy post-fire (salvage) logging – especially after the 1939 fires.

These threats to the survival of the possum are being compounded by recent government changes to survey methods and reservation strategies that will result in the habitat of the species being logged and set back the development of much-needed new habitat by at least 120

years.

In fact, these new changes are so retrograde that we reported in the international journal *Science* that the Leadbeater's possum will be one of the world's first deliberate, government-sanctioned extinctions of an endangered species. Many other species have gone extinct worldwide because there was a lack of knowledge about what needed to be done. Not so for the Leadbeater's possum – it is one of the best studied endangered animals on earth and we know precisely what needs to be done to conserve it.

Even VicForests' arguments about supposedly balancing the economic and social benefits of logging do not stand up under scrutiny. The ash sawlog supply may well be exhausted within the next dozen years (leading to the “extinction” of the sawlog industry).

Victorian taxpayers lose money when the forest is logged. That is, Victorians are paying to have their forests cut down by a rapidly shrinking number of forest workers. Problems with losses from taxpayer-subsidised logging are not resolved by logging more forest. Rather, this not only increases economic losses but has other costs. For example, logging significantly reduces water yields – including in the heavily logged Thomson catchment, which supports the largest dam in Melbourne's water supply system. The economic effects of reduced water yields will now be keenly felt because there is a clear price signal on water courtesy of the construction of the desal plant.

Minor tinkering by VicForests is not the solution to the deep-seated environmental, economic and other problems in the state's forests. The time for major changes is long overdue.

Professor David Lindenmayer is an Australian Research Council laureate fellow at the Australian National University. He has worked in the wet forests of Victoria for more than 30 years.

Election Information

Like the move to an early ETS or not, the alternative is downright scary. Should Tony Abbott become the next Prime Minister of Australia, he's already promised to scrap our Clean Energy Finance Corporation and the Independent Climate Change Authority. He's even dropped his support for an emissions trading scheme, calling it “a so-called market in the non-delivery of an invisible substance to no one”.

People need to know exactly what's at stake for climate and renewable energy when they go to the polls this election. The best way to do this is by spreading information, far and wide. We've put together a basic summary of how the parties stack up and what the move to an early ETS looks like. Take a look and share it with your friends:

www.getup.org.au/latest-on-climate

Environment Victoria has launched *envirotracker*, a running snapshot of where the major parties stand on climate and renewable energy, public transport, biodiversity, forests and marine protection, and national environmental laws. See admin@environmentvictoria.org.au

VicForests Review

*Tom Arup, Environment editor
The Age, June 18, 2013*

Victoria's state-owned timber company VicForests has racked up cash losses of \$22 million since it was formed - equating to a loss of \$1.50 for every cubic metre of wood it has logged - an analysis of its public accounts has found.

The review was carried out by the Australian Conservation Foundation's economic unit and concludes the company's cash flow problems and large debt indicate trouble with its core business.

But VicForests rejected the analysis saying it has delivered overall profits since it was created in 2004 and generated billions of dollars in economic activity for the state. The state Auditor-General's Office is currently auditing the management of Victorian forests, including VicForests' operations.

The report was commissioned by the Healesville Environment Watch, which is campaigning against native timber harvesting. The group's chairman, Steve Meacher, said it would be submitted to the Auditor-General to be considered in its review.

The ACF analysis of VicForests financial statements from 2005 to 2012 found the company has current debts of \$26.8 million to the Treasury Corporation of Victoria - the state government's financing body - which charges lower interest rates than the commercial market.

But if VicForests was required to pay commercial rates it would struggle further, the report concludes. It also questions changes in accounting methods that have seen a sharp rise in the value of VicForests assets - such as seeds, regenerating coupes and stored and standing timber - in recent years.

The report looks at the amount of cash that is being generated by VicForests and how much it is spending. But it does not look at the company's overall profits and losses.

The report's author Tristan Knowles said that was because cash flows were a better indicator of the health of a company. He said profit and loss statements were more prone to accounting adjustments.

Mr Knowles said because it was paying lower rates, and could rack up cash losses, VicForests was crowding out plantation timber growers with wood logged in native forests.

But Nathan Trushell, VicForests' director of corporate affairs, rejected the report findings. He said it showed "a limited understanding of VicForests' operations and financial reporting practices and at no point was VicForests contacted to provide the clarification needed".

"Publicly available information has been used to develop recommendations that are unsupported by the scope of the analysis, ignore the realities of the broader timber industry and disregard the current economic climate," he said.

Mr Trushell said VicForests had recorded a net profit of \$11.6 million since being created and increased the value of its current assets by almost \$20 million during this time.

[Yes, Mr Trushell VicForests has recorded a net profit of \$11.6 million over eight years. It has also received grants of \$24.75 million - a net cost to the taxpayer of over \$13 million. And it is the increase in value of VicForests assets that is so questionable. How can a company lose so much money and still increase its assets? - Steve Meacher]



How much do you know of the history of the Round the Bend Conservation Co-operative?

This is just a "snippet"!

When the Kangaroo Ground Round the Bend Co-op was first being established in the 1970's, the land was purchased in 2 parcels, with the first being 80 acres around A track. The second adjoining parcel of 246-acres was a property owned by the Calwell family.

Arthur Calwell (1896-1973) was a man widely regarded as the father of Australian multiculturalism and a prominent member of the Australian Labour Party, entering Federal Parliament in 1940.



He was sympathetic to the notion and ideals of those wishing to establish the Co-op and sold the land to them "at a fair price" plus a share for his daughter Mary Elizabeth, who has been a Co-op member, at site 26 on C Track, since that time.

Mary Elizabeth, a scholar and author in her own right, has recently completed a major achievement. She has written about her father's life and achievements in *I am Bound to be True. The Life and Legacy of Arthur A Calwell* published by Mosaic Press and launched in Carlton in October 2012.

Congratulations Mary Elizabeth!

Expert claims Victorian administration is taking 'calculated actions' that could wipe out threatened Leadbeater's possum

Oliver Milman in Melbourne
guardian.co.uk, Monday 27 May 2013

Australia's leading scientific expert on the endangered Leadbeater's Possum has publicly lambasted the Victorian state government, claiming it is the first ever domestic administration to take "calculated actions" that it knew could wipe out a threatened species.

In a letter published in the respected journal *Science* (attached below), Prof David Lindenmayer, of the Australian National University, states that "government-sanctioned legal logging of the reserve system will significantly increase the chance of extinction of Leadbeater's Possum".

The letter, co-authored by Hugh Possingham, of the University of Queensland, claims that a "substantial watering down" of logging industry regulations has led to a drastic loss of the Leadbeater's Possum's natural habitat.

It is estimated that there are just 1,500 of the tiny possums in pockets of the central highland forests of Victoria, and there are fears they may become extinct within a decade if their habitat is not conserved.

Tony Burke, the federal environment minister, who has been criticised for not intervening to safeguard the possum, told *Guardian Australia* that he was "deeply concerned" about the species and would push for it to be listed as critically endangered, which would ramp up conservation efforts.

"Listing decisions are made after coming to me from the threatened species scientific committee," he said.

"I've taken the unusual step of writing personally to the chair of this committee, Prof Helene Marsh, asking her committee to assess whether the possum is eligible for upgrading to critically endangered."

Despite being Victoria's faunal emblem since 1968, the reclusive marsupial has had a troubled past. It was thought to be extinct following bushfires in 1939, only to be rediscovered by Eric Wilkinson, a 22-year-old Melbourne Museum worker on his first field trip, in 1961.

The Black Saturday bushfires in 2009 wiped out nearly half of its existing habitat, with widespread logging blamed for pushing the species further into danger.

Lindenmayer, who was a long-term adviser to the government before quitting last year, and Possingham place the blame squarely at the feet of the Victorian government, stating: "To the best of our knowledge, and despite state and national threatened species legislation, this is the first time an Australian government has taken calculated actions to substantially reduce the viability of an IUCN-listed endangered species with full knowledge of the likely consequences."

Conservationists allege the state government has unsustainably logged vast tracts of the highlands region, which stretches to the north of Melbourne, using indiscriminate clear felling of trees in areas known to contain the Leadbeater's Possum and other species.

The government has also come under fire for putting forward plans that would allow loggers exemption from the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act, which protects the state's endangered

animals, on a case-by-case basis.

Just 1.15% of old growth forest is left in the highlands region – a shortage that is dire for the Leadbeater's Possum, which, like other animals that require hollows, such as owls, can only live in trees more than 150 years old.

"The Victorian government has made deliberate policy changes that have had a negative impact on the possum," Lindenmayer told *Guardian Australia*. "This isn't some cryptic, unknown creature. We've studied this possum for 30 years. The government is ignoring its own evidence."

"We need radical change in forestry management in the state. We need to get rid of clear felling like the US, Finland and Sweden have. Even Tasmania is ahead of Victoria on this."

"We're at a stage where there are now more orangutans, rhinos and Siberian tigers than there are Leadbeater's Possums, all through mismanagement. We're getting close to crunch time where something needs to be done or we will lose the species."

The timber industry generates \$400m for the economy, employing 25,000 people, according to the website of VicForests, the state-owned logging company. VicForests recently announced it would reduce logging in bushfire-affected areas by 25%, but only from 2017 – a delay which conservationists say could doom the Leadbeater's Possum.

The Victorian minister for agriculture and food security, Peter Walsh, said: "The greatest threat to Leadbeater's Possum is bushfire, not logging activity. Forest harvest is prohibited in areas where there is Leadbeater's habitat."

"VicForests makes significant efforts to identify and protect Leadbeater's Possum habitat when assessing areas available for timber harvesting."

"There is also an extensive reserve system of around 100,000 hectares within the Central Highlands region to protect the Leadbeater's habitat. These reserves were untouched by the 2009 bushfires, and no timber harvesting is permitted in these reserves."

"In Victoria, timber harvesting occurs in 0.08% of Victoria's total 6.6m-hectare public native forest estate annually."

"The forestry manager, VicForests, is certified by the Australian Forestry Standard, which is aligned with the internationally-recognised PEFC. Native forest harvest in Victoria is science-based, sustainable and responsible, and through careful management it will continue to remain viable."

He added: "In 2011, the Victorian government released the Timber Industry Action Plan, which included 34 actions to provide conditions for biodiversity conservation and a sustainable industry."

"The forest industry in Victoria directly supports about 11,000 jobs and makes an important economic contribution to small towns and districts in regional Victoria."

"In addition to our working public forests, Victoria has more than 3m hectares permanently protected in national parks and conservation reserves."

Lindenmayer argues that the economic arguments are not in the logging industry's favour, citing a fall in the price of pulp wood – the primary timber product produced by the forests – and the knock-on costs of ridding Victoria of valuable carbon storage and water catchment greenery.

Richard Flanagan's brilliant piece in the Tasmanian Times on 3 May attacks the Tasmanian forests sell out

<http://tasmaniantimes.com/index.php?weblog/article/i-dont-agree/>

So Julia Gillard has declared that she wants the parties who started the so-called Tasmanian forest peace process "to do everything they can to use their abilities to silence those who haven't gone with the mainstream consensus".

To *silence*.

I lived with the silence of Tasmania for too many years. And now the leaders of The Wilderness Society, Environment Tasmania, the ACF and the Tasmanian Greens have signed up to a deal that seeks to achieve what even Gunns failed in doing: silencing the rage Tasmanians felt with the destruction of their land and the corruption of public life that for a time became its necessary corollary. It is perhaps the greatest own goal in Australian political history.

For these environmentalists have managed to negotiate a deal that extraordinarily manages to resuscitate at vast public subsidy (reportedly \$350 million) the worst aspects of a dead forest industry employing less than a thousand people; lock in social conflict for another decade;

empower in Forestry Tasmania a rogue government agency that sees itself as the real power on the island and which works to undermine governments; and delivered the island to political stagnation by ensuring forestry remains the island's defining political issue.

If this wasn't grotesque enough the Federal Government's National Audit Office's report into the mishandling and misspending of some of the early rounds of this money by Tasmanian government instrumentalities can give the Australian taxpayer every confidence that much of the rest of the \$350 million will be misspent, misdirected and misused. Taxpayers can also be assured that if past government bail-outs of the Tasmanian forest industry are any guide, a not insignificant sum of their money will end up funding political groups and campaigns seeking to promote the self-serving interests of a Soviet style industry by entrenching division and stymying political debate and economic change in Tasmania. Some millions of dollars allocated for 'communications' will no doubt communicate very well just one message about Tasmania's logging industry.



And all this in return for what?

The only environmental outcome that is locked in was one already in place: the 123,000 hectares of World Heritage Area secured by Bob Brown and Christine Milne in negotiations with Tony Burke in February. And this in the face of initial opposition from NGO negotiators who worried it might damage their forest deal process. Nick McKim's claim that there was "legislated protection from logging for over 500,000 hectares", is misleading. There is a moratorium on logging in those high conservation value forests that could fall over at any time, and almost certainly will.

Astonishingly, in a day that will become historic in their own annals, the environmentalists' leaders have

managed to split their own movement in a way that will take many years for it to recover from. The greatest sadness is that it locks Tasmania into a conflict it should have ended.

Beyond that there is only what State Greens leader Nick McKim and Environment Tasmania head Phill Pullinger have called 'pathways' to future environmental outcomes.

Pathways?

What is a pathway? Is it a forest? Is it a job? Well, no, it's nothing really, just a confusion of two words, management babble disguising the truth that everything else is but a promise that may or may not happen later.

The formal protection of areas as reserves and national parks will not begin until October 2014, and then only if conservationists meet conditions that realistically

will never be met.

Of the many disturbing aspects of the deal, perhaps the most grotesque is the already infamous 'durability' clause, under which conservation leaders sitting on a special council with loggers are expected to police and silence conservationists who protest. If they fail to silence their own, the deal is seen to have failed its durability criteria and new reserves promised in the deal do not go ahead and return to the loggers. But of course people will protest and they will be right to protest. The only thing the deal guarantees is the conservation movement at war with itself. Some deal. Some durability. The conservationists' leaders may as well have self-immolated at the foot of Parliament House.

The second condition is that the forestry industry achieve Forestry Stewardship Council accreditation for its logging — something the industry spat on when conservationists urged it several years ago. Given its abysmal record and third world practices along with inevitable community opposition, this seems as likely

as Julia Gillard winning *The Voice*. But the condition locks in those conservation groups that are signatories to the deal to campaigning for the industry's logging practices, no matter how dreadful they are, in order to keep alive the promise of saving the forests.

Compounding these perversities there is the simple matter of power. By October 2014, all observers expect Liberal governments to be in power in both Tasmania and federally. In Tasmania the Liberal Party has been explicit that it will tear up the agreement. What then of the moratorium? Well it ends with those areas being once more logged using taxpayer subsidies.

Many fear that both governments will endorse and subsidise a grotesque new forest industry that logs native forest to fuel forest furnaces—so called biomass electricity generators — that could by government fiat be defined as a renewable energy source.

Such then is the pathway chosen.

It is possible for good people for the best of reasons to sometimes do the worst of things. If the integrity of the leaders of the environmental NGOs and the Tasmanian Greens Party should not be questioned, their judgement certainly can. Full credit though must go to Terry Edwards of the Forest Industries Association of Tasmania, Evan Rolley running the dubious state-subsidised Malay-owned Ta Ann, and Bob Gordon and Bob Annells at Forestry Tasmania. From a position of almost complete defeat they have returned the forestry industry to its pre-eminent position in Tasmanian public life and persuaded the environment movement to destroy itself. With bluster, flattery, bullying, and dogged persistence they have achieved the near impossible.

But if you care about the environment in Australia you will henceforth have to ask whether The Wilderness Society and the Australian Conservation Foundation any longer serve your interests. Will they in the future question and campaign against corporate power or will they side with it as they have in Tasmania, recently trooping off to Japan to promote the Malay forest veneer company Ta Ann's products? Will they stand up to governments or will they be seduced by their attentions, believing the flattering lie that their way is the way of environmental politics in the future?

While nationally the Greens Party under Christine Milne has been resolute in defending the environment and Tasmania's forests, Tasmanian environmentalists would be right to ask if the Tasmanian parliamentary Greens (other than Kim Booth who showed courage in voting against the bill and his party) any longer particularly represent their interest or aspirations. At the forthcoming state election there would be many reasons for environmentalists to not vote Green and very few to support them. In their determination to achieve respectability, they seem to have become simply the third aspect of a conservative Tasmanian polity with no ideas or vision for the future. Could it be, that for Nick McKim, the decision to support the package proves his Meg Lees moment?

Julia Gillard's celebration of the peace deal and her call for silencing came on May Day, the day that celebrates all those who went against the 'mainstream consensus' that workers shouldn't be paid a living wage, that workers shouldn't be treated with respect and dignity. Democracy is about many things, but silence and silencing are the death of democracy.

The forest peace deal was born in ignominy, with Gunns seeking to set up a native-forest-for-pulp-mill swap, a fact denied by environmental leaders at the time but acknowledged by Premier Lara Giddings in parliament. It continued in secrecy and was oiled with evasions, and concludes as a tragedy for Tasmania. Somehow, the conservationist leaders—instead of using the commercial death of the logging industry, changing social values, and new ideas of a renaissance Tasmania to help build a different, better and united society — have condemned us all to endlessly repeat the sadness of recent decades.

I am writing this for all the people who for the last thirty years have stood up again and again against the Tasmanian 'mainstream consensus'— who stood up for the land they loved and for an idea of a better Tasmania. They have watched, ever more distraught, as their battle has culminated in the last three years of secret deal making that has sold their sacrifices and beliefs down the drain.

At the end the only certainty and hope I have is this: I never signed up to the forest deal, not then and certainly not now. I don't give a damn for durability clauses and special councils of loggers and conservation police. And I didn't agree to be silenced, not by Paul Lennon, not by Gunns, and I won't be now by The Wilderness Society and the ACF.

And in all this, I know I am very far from alone.

Richard Flanagan

Editor's note: *The federal Greens under Christine Milne and former leader Bob Brown do not support the agreement either. ACF was invited to respond to this article but it had not been received by the deadline*



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Disciplined and on-message, wind farm opponents are a force to be reckoned with

There's a longstanding critique of the environmental movement which argues that somewhere along the road between the fight against the Franklin Dam and the fight for a carbon price everything changed. Environment campaigners cleaned up. Suited up. Lost their soul. Protesters at yesterday's anti-wind...

Will J Grant

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Disclosure Statement

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It's easy to make fun, but anti-wind power protestors are quite serious. Will Grant

There's a longstanding critique of the environmental movement which argues that somewhere along the road between the fight against the Franklin Dam and the fight for a carbon price everything changed. Environment campaigners cleaned up. Suited up. Lost their soul.

Protesters at yesterday's anti-wind turbine rally in Canberra appeared to have followed a similar path. I went along to the Stop These Things [anti-wind turbine rally](#) (Stop These Things is an excellent, excellent name by the way) as someone interested in both the role of science in the anti-wind turbine movement, and as someone interested in the dynamics of protest politics more generally. But these academic motivations mask the fact that I also like to quietly troll my political opponents, and this looked like an occasion for a little mischievous fun.

I'll admit it: I am in favour of wind turbines – subject to appropriate planning and environmental control – and I hoped that those against them would unveil a litany of strange opinions and bizarre connections.

What struck me was a rally that was, in essence, a disciplined repetition of modern greens politics.

Not opposed to renewables, but... Will Grant

Where I and the assembled media looked for signs screaming “Ditch the Witch”, “Green Genocide” and “9/11 was an Inside Job”, every sign and t-shirt I saw was remarkable in its discipline, remarkably politically correct. Not one sign attacked Julia Gillard. Not one talked of grand conspiracies. Not one denied the scientific consensus on climate change.

Instead I saw “Wind turbines forced us to leave our homes” and “Yes solar ... No wind farms”, and community based arguments such as “Collector says no to wind farms”. There were some antagonistic examples (“Stop the spin” and “sWINDle”) but even these were relatively innocuous. Certainly, the protestors pointed to a constellation of problems – health effects, impacts on birds, lack of reference to native title, high supposed costs and low supposed power generation – but none strayed from a tightly permitted pattern.

Among the speakers, a similar pattern was repeated. None – even the arch climate change fool Alan Jones – brought up or denied the

science on climate change.

There were some slips and odd moments – Alan Jones trotted out a neat little parable about how the Soviets used to send the people to the gulags, but now we send the gulags to the people; the Citizens' Electoral Council sought, once again, to convince me that the Pentaverate were using wind turbines to depopulate rural Australia. But in the main, people were – to use the modern marketers' term so clearly in evidence in the planning – remarkably on message.

Much of the reporting of the rally has talked of it as a failure. The Herald Sun [reported](#) that “Alan Jones has lost a battle of the ‘wind wars’... failing to draw large crowds”, The Weekly Times Now [called it](#) a “flop”. The Age [leapt on](#) Alan Jones' acceptance that “There aren't a lot of people here”. Photos have gone around comparing the rally with a pro renewables rally held at roughly the same time, showing a 10:1 difference in attendance.

Grossly intermittent. Will Grant

[Click to enlarge](#)

I'm not so sanguine.

We can assess these duelling rallies by attendance, by media coverage, by the passion of the attendees. Such measures are vaguely useful, but they miss out on what has happened here.

This rally showed skilled political organisation, connected directly with key on-the-ground communities. You could describe Stop These Things as an astroturf organisation guided by skilled political operators in the Institute for Public Affairs, in turn connected with a wider array of anti-environmental industries. Many [others](#) have done so, and I don't particularly care to add to that discussion here. (Indeed, critiques like this are often used in precisely the wrong way: to damn the group in their potential supporters' eyes, rather than change our own behaviour. The potential supporters of Stop These Things couldn't care less about the IPA.)

What I do want to say is that those in favour of renewables should recognise groups like Stop These Things for the skilled – and dangerous – political operators they are.

In essence, the anti-wind turbine movement already has the near ineluctable force of nimbyism on its side: I don't want them near me because they make me sick/ruin my sleep/kill birds I like/ruin my view/trample the lands of my ancestors/make me pee funny/make my neighbour rich. (Scientific friends, please note that I am making no argument about the veracity of these claims, except to say that those who believe such things certainly do believe such things). Stop These Things is now adding a layer of networking, guidance, strategic support and, potentially, funding.

You could call this nimbyism 2.0 ... Or you could just call this just another strand of modern environmental political activism.

Here's the thing: unless those in favour of wind turbines recognise and deal with this threat, networks like Stop These Things will add significantly – and perhaps ruinously – to the risk profile of every potential wind farm development. This is, quite interestingly, exactly the strategy of diametrically opposed groups like 350.org, who have sought to undermine the fossil fuel industries by casting them as a [risky long term investment](#). City people rallying in favour of wind power simply isn't going to affect that calculation at all.

While the Stop These Things rally networked slowly under the shadow of Parliament House, the rival pro-renewables rally ran with the Twitter hashtag #actonfacts. I'm with them in spirit, but this is a deeply flawed approach. Why?

Here's a fact: we don't act on facts. None of us do. Not Richard Dawkins, not Christopher Hitchens, not me, not you, not Meryl Dorey and not the activists in Stop These Things.

If we want to support the uptake of renewable energy, then we're going to have to do a hell of a lot better than simply demanding that people do what the scientists tell them.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

August 2013

7	Manningham Council Seminar - Yarra Riverkeepers Association 'The Yarra River - Community Advocacy' - Warrandyte	9840 9326
14	Manningham Council Field Trip - Led by Melbourne Water's Rob Dabal	9840 9326
15	Healesville Environment Watch - Meeting	5962 1224
17	Friends of Ferny Creek – working bee	9755 1402
18	Monbulk Landcare - working bee	9756 6977
24	Friends of Glenfern Valley Bushlands - working bee	0411 111 830
25	Friends of Hazel Vale Valley Tecoma – working bee	0401 325 156
25	Friends of Wanderslore - working bee	5941 8672
29	Manningham Council Talk - Professor David DeKrester 'Climate Justice and Me' - Doncaster	9840 9326

September 2013

1-7	The Wilderness and MyEnvironment Exhibition 'Love Forests'	0416 305 004
1	Yarra Valley Landcare - Speed Planting at Wesburn	yvlandcare@bigpond.com
5	Yarra Ranges Council - Transition Towns meeting, Lilydale	1300 368 333
13-15	Victorian Environment Friends Network meeting, Mount Evelyn	friendsvic@hotmail.com
15	Friends of Picnic Hill - working bee	0439 614 270
15	Monbulk Landcare - working bee	9756 6977
21	Friends of Ferny Creek – working bee	9755 1402
22	Field Naturalists Club - Excursion led by Leon Kosterman, Warrandyte	0427 055 071
22	Friends of Hazel Vale Valley Tecoma – working bee	0401 325 156
22	Friends of Wanderslore - working bee	5941 8672
28	Friends of Glenfern Valley Bushlands - working bee	0411 111 830

Candlebark Community Nursery Every day except Friday and Saturday between 9am and 3.30pm, Sundays between 10am and 2pm. More details: 9727 0594/0448 011 604

Chandler Hill Parkcare Group every Tuesday and every fourth Sunday, 10am – noon, weeding in Dandenong Ranges National Park. Phone 9762 8227 for details.

Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater nursery activity days every Tuesday and Thursday 10 am – noon. More details: 5964 8341. For Revegetation days phone 9720 4062

Knox Environment Society Community Nursery Open Sundays and Thursdays 10am – 4pm. Ferntree Gully Recreation Reserve (Mel 74 A5) email: info@kes.org.au website: www.kes.org.au

Southern Dandenongs Community Nursery Tuesday - Friday 9am -4pm; Sunday morning, 9 am – noon. Activities include setting up germination trays or cuttings, pricking out seedlings, weeding or sorting of stock etc. Volunteers can learn about propagating indigenous plants and their unique importance to our local environment. More details: 9754 6962; website: <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~sdcn/>

The Understorey is a non-profit conservation newsletter for the Dandenongs, Yarra Valley and adjoining areas.

Letters and articles always welcome.

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Karl and Andrea Rooftopping at the McDonald's site in Tecoma

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The views expressed by authors are their own and not necessarily those of The Understorey.

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