

MARINE AND COASTAL CONSERVATION

# PARKWATCH



MARCH 2008 No.232 \$7.00

*People caring for nature*

THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE VICTORIAN NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION



**SPECIAL FEATURE: Protecting our seas and shores**

- ALSO • Red Gum protection closer • Nature is good for you!
- Last chance for East Gippsland's old growth forests... and more.

# Last chance for East Gippsland's old-growth forests

John Renowden is a secondary school teacher of maths and science and a VNPA Councillor who has been active for over 25 years in efforts to protect East Gippsland's forests.



East Gippsland's giants. Surely these trees, which were growing long before Europeans came to these shores, have a heritage value far above the few dollars they fall for.

**T**HIS IS A CRITICAL TIME FOR THE future of East Gippsland's remaining old-growth forests.

The most diverse temperate forests in the world, they support cool and warm-temperate rainforest, pristine rivers, waterfalls and rare wildlife. East Gippsland is the last stronghold of a number of threatened and endangered species such as the Spot-tailed Quoll. Long-footed Potaroo and the large forest owls.

But, above all, they are forests of stunning beauty and grandeur. Giant trees in these forests started life 200 years before Europeans arrived in Australia.

The VNPA played a major role in securing some forested national parks in East Gippsland when the area was reviewed by the Land Conservation Council in the 1980s. However, large areas of old-growth forest were not

included in reserves and have been systematically clearfelled since that time, mostly for woodchips.

It is a travesty of common sense to allow the continuous felling of these forests for low-grade products such as woodchips. The woodchipping industry's environmental toll includes destruction of old growth and associated wildlife, reduction of the quantity and quality of water produced, siltation of streams, increased susceptibility to fire, and a massive release of carbon into the atmosphere.

Extensive roading also fragments wildlife populations and allows weeds and feral animals to spread into once pristine environments.

## Transforming old-growth forests into tree crops

As part of forest management, a drastic system of

'regeneration' is practised. Logging debris is ignited from a helicopter to encircle the clear-felled forest. This makes for an intensely hot burn designed to create an inwards wind storm that quickly engulfs the coupe from the outside. Animals that survived the clearfelling are unable to escape and are incinerated.

Huge plumes of smoke rise above East Gippsland's forests each autumn. Victoria-wide, about 9,000 hectares of forests are logged annually, releasing almost a million tonnes of carbon into the atmosphere. Due to the total disturbance to soil and vegetation, logging can release up to 10 times more carbon than wildfires.

These fires are designed to remove all impediments to young tree growth so that they can be replanted with commercially desirable species. The ensuing single-aged tree crops are thinned out within 20-30 years. The majority of wood taken is exported as woodchips. The transformation from a bio-diverse forest into a plantation is complete.

The effects of widespread forestry operations on threatened wildlife are dire. Recent studies indicate that the forest-dependent Spot-tailed Quoll is in alarming decline in Victoria.

## DSE's role in managing these forests

Just three of the many issues that should be independently investigated:

- Every forestry policy document produced by Victorian State Governments over the last 20 years has stated unequivocally that native forests are to be cut sustainably. Yet DSE has sanctioned the continuous overcutting and conversion of these forests. Why has this been allowed?
- When the East Gippsland Regional Forest Agreement was signed in 1997, DSE was obliged to develop and monitor sustainability indicators, which it has never done.
- DSE was also to be responsible for conducting 5-year reviews with public input to monitor progress under the RFA. Ten years have passed and DSE has not conducted one review. Why are they not accountable?

## Government commitment

The State Labor Government gave a clear commitment, before the last election, that it would immediately protect 33,500 ha of "... the last significant stands of Victoria's old-growth forest currently available for logging..." and incorporate a further 7,500 ha in national parks. This has included some good stands of old growth but also many areas of previously logged forest or areas that were not suitable for logging anyway. Magnificent catchments of ancient forests are still being felled.

The Government acknowledged widespread community opposition to the woodchipping of old-growth forests but certain iconic forests such as the Valley of the Giants near Brown Mountain and many of the remaining stands of majestic eucalypts

along Yalmy Road remain available for clearfelling.

Prior to the election conservation groups presented detailed maps to the Government so it could 'extinction-proof' our forests, but only about 5% of the area recommended was successfully committed to be protected.

## Who said this?

"It's about the direction for Victoria and Australia in the future. An end to native forest export woodchips, the proper protection of our high conservation value forest areas, and an industry



which is based in the future on plantations. That's what we want. That's where the jobs are. And that's what we'll do when we're in Government."

Answer: John Brumby as Opposition Leader in 1995, at a forest rally in Treasury Gardens. You can view the video of his talk by going to the VNPA's website: [www.vnpa.org.au](http://www.vnpa.org.au)

## What you can do

John Brumby is now Premier, and he clearly understands the key issues. **Please email or write to him** and ask his Government to meet its 2006 election commitments and immediately protect significant stands of East Gippsland old-growth forest from logging.

Write to John Brumby, Premier of Victoria, 10 Parliament Place, East Melbourne 3002; telephone 9651 5000; fax 9651 5054; or email [john.brumby@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:john.brumby@parliament.vic.gov.au)

East Gippsland's towering wet forests have largely been replaced with younger, drier forests.

PHOTOS: JOHN RENOWDEN

# Victoria's coastal threats

## Pests and diseases



**Pile of Northern Pacific Seastars**  
PHOTO FROM TIM ALLEN

As ecosystems become more stressed due to overfishing and pollution, they become more susceptible to disease and pest invasion. Recently a deadly exotic abalone virus has been sweeping along the west coast of Victoria. It originated at an aquaculture farm and now threatens two marine national parks.

As abalone die they will be replaced by ocean wastelands caused by sea urchins and may take many years to return. Within Victorian waters 99 exotic marine pests are found, including the Northern Pacific Seastar, Fanworm, broccoli weed and many more.

## Channel Deepening project



**Plume from trial dredge**  
PHOTO: PETER FEAR

Port Phillip Bay's Channel Deepening project was supposed to have crucial economic benefits but appears to be floundering as project costs continue to blow out and the evidence for long-term damage builds.

The dredging will release huge and often highly toxic plumes into the bay, polluting beaches and killing marine life. At the Port Phillip Heads, spectacular reefs covered in colourful sponges and anemones and teeming with fish will either be dug up or crushed by falling rocks, leaving it looking like a construction site.

## Sewage outfalls



**Ocean outfall**  
PHOTO: CLEAN OCEAN FOUNDATION

Ocean outfalls are some of the main polluters in the Victorian marine and coastal environments. Often raw sewage is pumped out to sea with obvious implications—anything that is flushed down a toilet could end up littering the beach.

In Victoria, there are 13 ocean outfall pipes dumping billions of litres of wastewater into the sea every day.

Just one of these pipes, at Gunnamatta beach on Mornington Peninsula, pours out 400 million litres a day. Many outfalls are near high-density tourist beaches. There are outfall pipes at Phillip Island, Lorne, Werribee, Black Rock, Anglesea, Apollo Bay and Warrnambool.

## Coastal development

Victorians are in danger of loving their coast to death. Around 80% of Victoria's population lives within 50 km of the coast. A lack of planning regulations in coastal Victoria is resulting in coastal development springing up in highly sensitive ecosystems.

Recent proposals such as the Portarlington, Apollo Bay and Port Campbell developments are not appropriate. At Apollo Bay the proposed development will be on a river flood plain estuary likely to be flooded frequently as a consequence of climate change.

- **High Spatial Growth Capacity:** Large scale residential growth can be accommodated
- **Moderate Spatial Growth Capacity:** Some growth potential beyond existing urban zoned land



## Port of Hastings expansion



**Bottlenose Dolphin**  
PHOTO: DAVID BRENAN BEAPICS

Plans to expand Western Port's commercial shipping activities will greatly damage its wetland ecosystems, which are home to thousands of birds and invertebrates. This highly sensitive bay should never have been used for commercial activity and any further development will threaten already stressed seagrass meadows.

Western Port has a unique tidal system that acts like a washing machine. Any oil pollution, sediment from dredging or released marine pests would quickly spread around the bay, adversely affecting fragile marine ecosystems and a Ramsar listed wetland.

## Desalination



**Proposed site for Desalination Plant**  
PHOTO: CHRIS HEISLER

Desalination plants consume substantial amounts of energy. The proposed Victorian one will spew out the equivalent greenhouse emission of 240,000 cars as well as pumping large volumes of descaling and antifouling chemicals into the sea.

The most severe biological impact is on marine species when the plant's 4 metre inlet pipe sucks in 33 million litres hourly of water containing marine plankton, larvae and small fish. The impact of removing these small creatures or larval stages will be substantial and cumulative over time.

## Bastion Point development



**Bastion Point**  
PHOTO: GARY PROCTOR

Bastion Point is at Mallacoota, an icon on Victoria's Wilderness Coast. Its natural estuary and lake system are renowned for their unspoilt beauty. A wilderness coastline stretches in either direction as far as the eye can see.

The spectacular point is now threatened by the development of an inappropriate ocean access boat ramp that will blast 40 metres of unique reef, build a car park over threatened habits and have 24 hour lighting impacting on many nocturnal animals.