



## Minister D'Ambrosio: Five Actions NOW

"The Rubicon Forest Protection Group today issues a Five Action Challenge to the State Government", Ken Deacon, Convenor of the Rubicon Forest Protection Group said today.

In the light of the vast areas of wildlife habitat incinerated in this summer's bushfires, all native forest logging should wind down as soon as possible and cease far sooner than 2030", Mr Deacon said.

"But meanwhile the Government must protect the ash forests of the Central Highlands NOW", Mr Deacon said.

[VicForests defies request from DELWP to defer logging in Snobs Creek valley. RFPG calls for sanctions](#)

[RFPG calls for new Sooty Owl Management Areas in Rubicon Forest](#)

[Fix the Code! The RFPG calls for Government commitment to root and branch revision of the Code of Forest Practice](#)

[Code of Forest Practice permits tourism potential of the Central Highlands forests to be trashed under the current TRP](#)

[RFPG calls upon the State Government to list the mountain ash and alpine ash communities of the Central Highlands under Victoria's Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act](#)

VicForests defies request from DELWP to defer logging in Snobs Creek valley. RFPG calls for sanctions.

"VicForests must be held accountable for its reckless disregard of DELWP request to defer logging in Snobs Creek valley", Mr Deacon said. "In their determination to log this precious area, logging personnel recently resorted to intimidating one of our members by blockading her vehicle on Snobs Creek Road in what was a frightening and possibly criminal act"

"As the last relatively unspoilt valley on the Cerberean Plateau, the Snobs Creek valley is critical habitat for Leadbeaters Possum with many detections in the area."

"The RFPG calls on Minister D'Ambrosio to impose a substantial penalty on VicForests for its defiance of a perfectly reasonable request from DELWP, and to immediately cease logging of these and all remaining coupes in the Snobs Creek Valley" Mr Deacon said.

## Background

The current Timber Release Plan (TRP) includes provision for the logging of many coupes in the iconic Snobs Creek Valley in the Rubicon State Forest. Forest policy officials in DELWP have determined that the zoning of Snobs Creek is inconsistent with government policy regarding the width of buffers on both sides of the creek and steps were under way to recommend the relevant zoning be amended. DELWP asked VicForests to avoid logging in the relevant coupes pending decision and action regarding the rezoning.

However, notwithstanding this request, VicForests proceeded with the logging of Shackle and Snobs 13. As a result the parts of the coupes which were slated for rezoning have now been almost fully logged.

(Government policy regarding the need for wider buffers on both sides of Snobs Creek was formalised in the Government's acceptance of the Land Conservation Council's 1995 recommendations in its Melbourne Area 2 Review.)

Snobs Creek supplies the Snobs Creek Hatchery with pure clear mountain waters – except when the stream is turbid because of erosion from logging in its catchment. The Hatchery is an iconic and long standing tourist attraction with a huge following among recreational fishers.

## RFPG calls for new Sooty Owl Management Area in Rubicon Forest

“RFPG calls for the immediate protection of sooty owl habitat at the northern end of the Blue Range” Ken Deacon added. “The current TRP foreshadows the logging of several coupes in this area which include critically important habitat for the sooty owl”, he said.

“Messmate Ridge south of Mt Bullfight, where there have been a number of sooty owl detections – currently the subject of a case in Victoria's Supreme Court - should also be protected,” Mr Deacon said

Massive areas of owl habitat were destroyed in the 2009 fires, and with further areas destroyed in eastern Victoria in this year's fires.

|  |
|--|
| Minister D'Ambrosio must issue a revised Sooty Owl Management Plan for the Central Highlands as soon as possible and instruct VicForests to desist from logging coupes in known habitats while decision and action are underway. |
|--|

## Background

Like other large forest owls, the sooty owl requires extensive areas of forest with hollow trees that provide nest sites and support substantial populations of prey (especially possums and gliders). They are very sensitive to the effects of logging and are among the most difficult fauna to conserve in forests used for timber production.

In 1998 the Central Highlands Forest Management Plan had a target of 100 Sooty Owl Management Areas, but this was cut to 65 when the Sooty Owl was listed under the Victorian Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 (here). Many of these SOMAs were destroyed

in the 2009 fires but there has been no systematic assessment of how many SOMAs in the Central Highlands are still suitable owl habitat.

Many more SOMAs were destroyed in East Gippsland and North Eastern Victoria in this year's fires.

## RFPG calls for Government commitment to root and branch revision of the Code of Forest Practice

"Every day that logging continues, governed by a deeply flawed Code of Forest Practice, the Forest continues to suffer irreparable damage", Ken Deacon said. "The RFPG has repeatedly pointed to weaknesses in the 2014 Code of Practice for Timber Production (here)" Mr Deacon said.

"Its shortcomings include absurdly narrow protective buffers, inadequate protection of retained trees in regeneration burns, and an outdated schedule intended to protect tourist routes, and many loopholes that make it impossible to properly enforce key provisions."

"RFPG calls on the Minister to proceed with the long-promised review of the Code including personnel, timelines and terms of reference".

### Background

Following the Independent Review of Timber Harvesting in 2018 the Minister announced a review of the Code. This was initially proposed to be conducted in two stages but in 2019 it was announced that the review would be conducted in one stage. However, there has been no further announcement regarding the Code review.

## Code of Forest Practice permits tourism potential of the Central Highlands forests to be trashed under the current TRP

"Government policy calling for balanced use of state forests is being flouted" Ken Deacon said. This can be seen in the coupes currently being logged in the Snobs Creek Valley, in the recently logged area next to the Rubicon Valley Historic Area, and in the vast area being logged and soon-to-be-logged near Mt Torbreck, and in the coupe on the Blue Range known as Chitty Chitty Bang Bang (285-502-0001).

"This coupe is clearly visible from the Goulburn Valley Highway and from the summit of The Cathedral and from most of the Cathedral Range Ridge. Government policy provides that significant scenic and tourist vistas be protected from visual degradation consequent upon logging. However, DELWP has taken the view that the coupe's current Special Management Zone designation would be sufficient to provide for the protection of specific features."

"However, since the whole coupe is visible from parts of the Goulburn Valley Highway and from particular vantage points along the Cathedral Range, RFPG rejects the idea that the coupe can be logged without seriously damaging the scenic value of the west flank of the Blue Range. "

As well as taking serious action to protect its biodiversity, the RFPG urges the Minister for the Environment to properly recognise and protect the tourist and scenic values of the Rubicon State Forest.

The tourist potential of the Rubicon State Forest including Mt Torbreck, the Rubicon Valley Historic Area, and the Royston, Rubicon, Taponga and Torbreck River and Snobs Creek Valleys is simply stunning. The same incredible opportunities exist in the Toolangi State Forest, which is even more accessible. But only if logging of the ash forests ceases immediately.

The Rubicon Forest Protection Group is mindful of the many jobs, especially regional jobs, that depend on logging Victorian native forests, however many worthwhile jobs could be created by investing in non-exploitative uses of the Forest, especially tourism. The ash forests of the Central Highlands could with a modest investment, become tourist meccas, and not just for Victorians, but for international visitors as well.

### RFPG calls upon the State Government to list the mountain ash and alpine ash communities of the Central Highlands as threatened under Victoria's Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act

"The Andrews Government looks set to preside over the final elimination of the remaining ecological integrity of the Rubicon State Forest, and indeed of all the ash forests of the Central Highlands", Ken Deacon said.

"The ash forest ecosystems of the Central Highlands are now seriously degraded by unsustainable logging, particularly over the years since the 2009 fires, and are gravely threatened by climate change and future fires. With this summer's fires in East Gippsland and North Eastern Victoria and in NSW further jeopardising the survival of the alpine ash community, there is now a very real and substantial risk that they may not survive as ash forest ecosystems, with appalling consequences for the flora and fauna which these ecosystems comprise." Mr Deacon said.

"The RFPG calls on the State Government to recognise the existential risks facing the mountain ash ecosystems of the Central Highlands and act to protect their ecological integrity; in the first instance by listing these ecosystems as threatened in accordance with the FFG Act."

### Contacts

Ken Deacon, RFPG Convenor, (03) 5773 2471, 0497 858 454, [rvhorseriding@virtual.net.au](mailto:rvhorseriding@virtual.net.au)

Nick Legge, RFPG Principal researcher, 0403 035 224, [nlegge@bigpond.net.au](mailto:nlegge@bigpond.net.au)