

Submission to 2021 Code of Practice for Timber Production consultation.

Dear members of the Department,

I would like to make a submission regarding the revision of the Code of Practice for Timber Production.

[Who are you? What stories do you have of connecting with the forests?]

I grew up exploring Rubicon State forest. The biodiversity and wildlife of the area coloured my childhood with wonder and joy. After moving to Melbourne to study, I returned home to find that the place I loved most, which had been so inspiring and significant during my formative years, had been ravaged by clear-fell logging. Whole mountain ranges have been decimated and forever changed. It broke my heart and made me passionately want to protect what's left of the Rubicon.

[Why is it important to you to protect forests?]

First of all, I want to express my extreme dissatisfaction with this consultation process and the lack of engagement with environment groups, leading forest ecologists, and the wider community before this draft – which has been under development for nearly two years – was put up for comment. 28 days is not enough time for the general public to understand and analyse what your government has dubbed a “major overhaul” of public policy, which has grave ramifications for threatened species, entire ecosystems, and the social and economic welfare of all Victorians. I make this submission only to highlight the gross inadequacy of this consultation process and I sincerely hope I am granted an opportunity to more meaningfully engage. Please understand that by outlining the preliminary concerns below I don't intend to imply that you can now ‘tick the box’ and claim that you have consulted the public. You have categorically failed to do so in good faith, by refusing environment groups’ two requests to extend consultation (I argue the consultation was insufficient on the following grounds: 1. Failure to publish the report of the 2019 review of the code; 2. Major deregulatory initiative given only 28 days consultation; 3. No itemisation of the proposed changes; no tracked version to enable stakeholders to view changes; 4. No RIS despite major deregulatory initiative).

Floods and fires are devastating people's lives around the globe right now because of climate change, but the government is still allowing the destruction of ash forests, which store more carbon than any other studied forest ecosystem in the world, on an incomprehensible scale. Your department states the proposed changes are mostly corrections and amendments, but I argue that the changes amount to a major, alarming deregulation of logging that would accelerate climate and biodiversity decline. It also appears clear that some of the proposed amendments relate to current community legal challenges, which is an attack on the public's right to hold the government to account.

I personally support an immediate transition out of native forest logging, however these changes are even inconsistent with the ALP's promised transition date of 2030. I'm concerned they will facilitate an escalation of logging before the 2024 industry wind-down. At this rate, we won't have any forests left to transition out of by 2030, especially in my home of Murrindindi Shire. Escalating logging before the transition is not the only way – or an ethical way – to provide workers in the industry security. Investing in local, ecological agroforestry projects, supporting guaranteed fire management or ecosystem restoration jobs, or redirecting public funds from this [heavily subsidised industry](#) for support packages, are just some of the ways you could stand by workers, without trashing our precious forests that are worth so much more still standing.

I support the submissions made by conservation groups Rubicon Forest Protection Group, Kinglake Friends of the Forest, Goongerah Environment Centre, Friends of the Leadbeater's Possum, Rubicon-Snobs Ck Recreation Reserve Inc., Wildlife of the Central Highlands, Victorian National Parks Association, Environment East Gippsland, Friends of Mallacoota, B.E.A.M, Gippsland Environment Group Inc., Environment Victoria and The Wilderness Society and echo their call for an extension of public comment and a revised, much more rigorous consultation process.

I also support the [Sovereigns on Forests](#) statement, issued to ministers in 2019. First Nations custodians have given no free, prior and informed consent for logging on their country. The rightful, traditional custodians of this land should be making self-determined decisions about its management. Any treaty process is tokenistic while you're still destroying First Nations country by clear-fell logging.

Preliminary summation of some problematic elements of the proposed changes:

- Removal of whole clauses which hold VicForests responsible for long-term planning and management of forests – moving from binding protections to aspirational protections.
- No additional protections for forests or wildlife after the bushfires, nor any changes which address the damning federal court findings and failure to act on multiple breaches reported by community groups.
- Special Protection Zones have been replaced by "exclusion areas" which appear to be significantly weaker than protections offered by SPZs.
- No proper protection of mapped & unmapped old growth forest, insufficient protection of big trees.
- Removal of obligation for VicForests to have regard to biodiversity, water and climate change, landscape sensitivity and cultural heritage in developing its TRP (through the removal of CI 2.1.1.1).
- Disabling the precautionary principle by requiring it to be interpreted in accordance with an outdated court judgement. Specifying that timber harvesters (rather than the regulator alone) can make the call about the risk of irreversible damage is also unacceptable.
- Weakening the regulatory framework in the face of climate change and [increased fire risk](#), before the review of the impact and implications of the 2019-20 fires (Major Event Review) is complete.
- Disregarding the impact of huge mega coupes on biodiversity through the failure to offer a definition of 'retained vegetation' (this is how whole ranges in the Rubicon have been annihilated).
- Failure to require coupe plans to be published in full prior to logging. Your government says this review is to provide clarity and accountability – how is this consistent with that aim?
- Non-enforceable, non-transparent, non-accountable Zoning Accountability Framework.
- Lack of protection of tourism and scenic protection values (including removal of CI 5.3.1.5).
- No provision for the immediate protection areas (IPAs) which were promised in the Forestry Plan.

I request the government lay out a clear rationale for these regulatory changes and properly consider the impact of landscape scale fire before making changes to the code. I urge you, as the department for the environment, to step up to protect our forests, so that they can protect us from climate impacts like mega fires and water insecurity.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincere regards,

XXXX.