

Contents

Brown Mountain - the battle is on	1
Jill's jottings Forests Forever Easter Camp	2
Brown Mountain cont.	3
Brown Mountain, Planet Rapers Award, Old growth trees are old soaks.	4
New Tax Act changes threaten forests.	5
Swan shooting and the Gippsland Lakes.	6
Burning the bush questioned, Fire retardant effects, Quoll discovered.	7
Victoria- the charcoal state.	8
New science on Green Carbon, State of the Env. report.	9
Gippsland water stories, EG mill stories.	10
EPA audits - rainforest still logged. Don Burke sells out again, Plastic bags.	11
Shorts	12
Vegetarians and climate change, Carbon market could favour logging	13
Woodchip mill on the rocks, VicForests on the dole	14
Greens on Brown Mt, New clearing controls.	15
Paper mill for sale.	16



Brown Mountain

the fight is on!

The immense trees that have sheltered and raised hundreds of generations of owls and gliding possums are now being hacked down by VicForests. The understorey of tree ferns and waratahs, twining silkpod and musk daisy bush is being crushed into the mud by 40 tonne dozers. Victoria's Brumby government is allowing their logging department to destroy these ancient treasures - home to threatened species like the Powerful and Sooty Owls, the Long-footed Potoroo and the secretive Spot-tailed Quoll. This is the forest that was promised for protection in 2006 by the State Labor Government. So why is it being destroyed now?



Flawed maps and broken promises

In 2006, the then Premier, Steve Bracks, made a promise to "protect all significant stands of old growth currently available for logging". This, with several other areas called *icon forests* amounted to about 41,000 ha. However, he also promised there would be no impact on the logging industry - an impossible undertaking.

A few days before the 2006 election, the Environment Minister's office (then John Thwaites) did a quick and dirty job of throwing the old growth maps together. It was so badly mapped it included cow paddocks, logged forest and burnt regeneration. In the two years since this promise was given, hundreds of hectares of Old Growth Forest have been logged while conservation groups have tried to engage a stubborn government to reassess the maps. Cow paddocks were safely protected, but magnificent old growth was crashing to the ground.

The government has delayed so long, it's tempting to say their delays are deliberate. After all, the longer the delay, the less old growth to preserve, the logging industry stays off their backs and they get the opportunity to announce the whole farce again at the next election.

Fiction writers employed while old growth logged

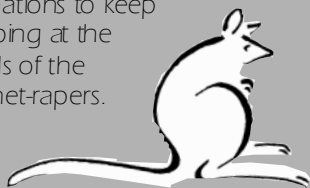
Post election, the Labor government engaged a couple of logging industry supporters to write a report on how the industry in East Gippsland would manage if these forests were protected. Pete Steedman was an old ALP hack and Graham Gooding was the former head of the Victorian Association of Forest Industries. The result was a great piece of fiction and spin that only the logging industry can create. For instance, despite the fact that the dedining industry provides less than 2% of the region's employment, their

Continued on page 3 ...

The Potoroo Review

This is the newsletter of Environment East Gippsland, Australia's longest running forest campaign group. We bring you the facts about forests and the environment that rarely make it to the mainstream media.

We never worry about biting the bureaucracy's hand as it never feeds us. That means we rely totally on membership and donations to keep nipping at the heels of the planet-rapers.



Membership - \$20 or \$15 conc. (includes newsletter).

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Vic 3888. ph/fax 5154 0145
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www.eastgippsland.net.au

Coordinator - Jill Redwood

Tax deductible donations can be sent to us at the above address made out to EEG or via Paypal on our website Receipts will be issued promptly.

The Potoroo is an endangered 'mini kangaroo' which survives in East Gippsland's forests. It eats fungus, so digs a lot of dirt, and like us, is often threatened by loggers.

Articles which appear in the *Potoroo* are the opinions of the authors' and not necessarily those of EEG.

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If members or supporters would like to be kept in the loop, please let us know your email address and we can inform you when there's big news to share or help needed. On average, you get an email maybe once a week so you don't get swamped. Email me at eeg@eastgippsland.net.au

e-Potoroo

Please let me know if you'd prefer to get your Potoroo as a PDF file on email - and 2 weeks earlier. Email me at eeg@eastgippsland.net.au.

Membership renewals via PayPal

Thanks to our web-boss Joe, we now have a PayPal button on our website for easy payment of memberships, renewals, donations and Forests Forever registrations.

Spring-Summer mix

Thanks for being patient with this issue. I did warn last time that I might have to skip an issue due to the mounting workload. Now here's the Spring/Summer issue combined for some hearty holiday reading.

Jill

HEY - DON'T FORGET THIS GREAT EASTER EVENT



explore
rivers, forests & old growth

learn
how forests are vital in climate calming

tour
with expert botanists

spend Easter in the heart of East Gippsland's forests

forests forever ecology camp



Easter
April 10-13
2009

Activities

Choose from a range of walks and drive/walk tours exploring streams, rainforests and old growth, organic farm tour, evening botanical entertainment, and more.

For information & bookings

contact Benedict (03) 9486 5229
Robyn on (03) 5157 9388
or email eeg@eastgippsland.net.au

Book early—numbers are limited

Bring

camping gear, friends, food and transport. (no pets please)

Costs

\$60 for adults (\$35 concession)
\$20 a day (\$15 concession)
teenagers half price, under 12s free.

*Organised by Environment East Gippsland and The Wilderness Society.
All proceeds go to help the campaign to save these forests.*

camp
with like-minded people

survey
wildlife & threatened old growth

be inspired
to save our forests

continued from front page ...

document claimed it was 50% or more. Fearful of a union backlash, the government did nothing - no reassessment of maps, no protection, no tourist walks, no pay-outs; just more dearfelling of old growth forests.



Old Growth Walk for visitors

The maps also left out the very area that was promised for the visitors' walk. In the 2006 policy document *Victoria's National Parks and Biodiversity*, Mr Bracks stated he would "Invest \$1.3 million to create ... the Great Short Walks of East Gippsland". This was to include the "Old Growth Walk - Goongerah" (Goongerah is the nearest settlement to Brown Mountain). It was a clear election promise. The policy was released before the election, to attract environmentally conscious voters.

In the late 1990s, a member of EEG had discovered a magnificent stand of old growth forest on Brown Mountain and called it the *Valley of the Giants*. Since then hundreds of visitors have experienced these grand trees, which have names like Almo, Lofty, Unde George, Steadfast and Big Foot. The track was tagged and has become a well known but unofficial walk that is easy to access on a gentle slope and with the Brown Mountain Creek rainforest running through the centre.

We have taken two parties of DSE and Parks officials in there in order to negotiate this area becoming formally recognised as a walk. But now half of it has been hacked down by VicForests.

VicForests ignores government policy

VicForests was created in August 2004 to ensure logging public forests was profitable. Despite millions in handouts, it hasn't happened. The unruly band of old-school loggers within VicForests could see that Brown Mountain might be protected before they could get to its real estate, so in early 2007, they planned for the last stands of unprotected old growth to be wiped out.

EEG duly sent our formal objection to VicForests, as part of the sham called 'public consultation'.

VicForests duly told us that it was all perfectly legal

and to bugger off. Then they later told the Minister's office they didn't know this coupe was contentious or a planned walk!

In late October 2008, VicForests sent the loggers in to start wiping these carbon, water and wildlife rich forests (not to mention our old growth walk) off the face of the planet.

Then to rub salt into the wound, VicForests named the logging coupe "The Walk", to show the world that they knew exactly what they were doing, and the government knew, and nobody cared; another example of the goading, fibbing, white-collar-criminal cowboy nature of this organisation.

These trees would have been mature when Shakespeare was writing his plays. The tree ferns that shelter beneath them could be twice as old, surviving hundreds of years of storms, snow, drought and the occasional fire. They were obliterated from the



Then to rub salt into the wound, VicForests named the logging coupe "The Walk", to show the world that they knew exactly what they were doing ...

landscape in four weeks by a team of five men - as part of an "approved logging operation". Work for five blokes for four weeks. Gone forever.

The great irony is that in 1995, when John Brumby was in opposition, he made a very stirring speech at a forest rally in Melbourne.

... that's what we'll do when we're in government - no more export woodchipping, an industry in the future based on plantations and the proper protection of our high conservation value forests.

Is this government so easily cowed by a bunch of cold-blooded, gluttonous, woodchip servants that run VicForests? Or is it the weedy might of the loggers union that scares them?

Please - write letters to Gavin Jennings and John Brumby expressing your outrage. Enough old growth

forest has been destroyed and converted to pulpwood farms in East Gippsland over the past 40 years. Far too much of what little remains has been butchered into oblivion since their 2006 promise.

The logging of this most significant stand of old growth on Brown Mountain is the ultimate statement of contempt for the public's deep concern and love for our ancient native forests.

Hon John Brumby
Premier of Victoria
1 Treasury Place
Melbourne, Vic 3002
john.brumby@parliament.vic.gov.au

Hon Gavin Jennings
Minister for Environment,
Level 22
50 Lonsdale St
Melbourne, Vic 3002
Gavin.Jennings@parliament.vic.gov.au

Jill



photo - Jill Redwood

Want to see Mr Brumby's speech? Take a journey through the old growth? Meet the wildlife and get outraged by their killing? Go to YouTube on the internet and tap in the search terms Brown Mountain, John Brumby and East Gippsland. There should be three or four short clips you can watch.

The 'planet-rapers' award

It was a hard decision but the two winners are... ta-daaaah ...

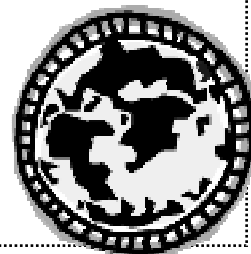
Forestry Tasmania scores first prize for not only chopping down carbon-rich forests, but coming up with the clever idea of sending them half way around the world on energy-burning ships to then burn the wood in Japan for power generation (to run

the paper mills to turn more forests into packaging for consumer goods).

Second prize goes to the NSW Japanese-owned export woodchip mill at Eden for their proposal to generate power by burning woodchip 'waste'. That's the 'waste' from the 'waste' from cutting down forests. Not to be shipped half way around the globe but they would be using it to power the blades of the mill to create more woodchips from

more 'forest waste' so that they can use the waste from the waste to burn and make electricity to power the blades to chip up more waste ... and any power left over they plan to sell it on as 'green power'.

Jill



Old Growth sucks CO2

Contrary to the longstanding view that ageing forests are carbon neutral or even pollute more than they absorb, new evidence shows that forests that reach peak maturity do not stop soaking up and storing carbon.

A team of scientists have recently searched literature and databases for forest carbon-flux estimates. In the 11/8/08 edition of *Nature*, their paper shows that forests that are between 15 and 800 years of age continue to capture and store carbon. In the past foresters and governments have conveniently claimed that mature forests emit as much carbon as they absorb.

"The currently available data consistently indicate that carbon accumulation continues in forests that are centuries old."

In fact, young forests, rather than old-growth forests, are very often sources of CO₂ because the creation of young forests (whether naturally or by humans) frequently follows disturbance to the previous

vegetation. This results in a decomposition rate of coarse woody debris, litter and soil organic matter that exceeds the carbon capture and storage ability of the regrowth.

www.abc.net.au/science/articles/2008/09/11/2361938.htm?site=science&topic=latest

Jill

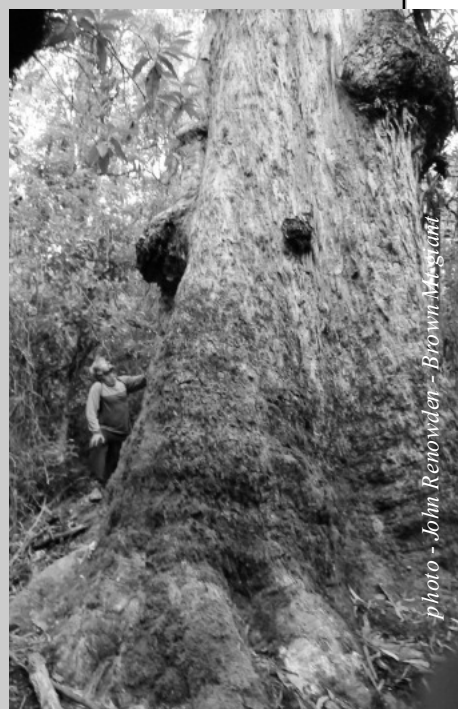


photo - John Renowder - Brown Mt. Summit

Tax attack on forests - a hard Act to swallow

The government is setting up the bizarre situation where plantations are targeted for carbon storage and native forests for logging. Changes to the Tax Act, together with emissions trading, will threaten native forests even more than they currently are. In November, the Federal Labor government and the Liberals banded together to defend these changes.

What are the changes?

Plantation companies, carbon sink investors or coal industry interests can now buy up large tracts of farm land for tree growing to score carbon credits. They will be able to claim the price of the land as a 100% tax write off in the first year. This will be a huge incentive to buy up big as the land will be very cheap for them.

Isn't it good to plant trees?

It's even better to leave native forests standing and let them absorb more carbon as they regrow to maturity.

But, under the government's carbon accounting system, native forests are not credited as carbon stores but plantations established after 1990 are. (BOX?) That means plantations will be left standing while native forests are cut down. It needs to be the other way around because we need permanent carbon storage, which is what you get in self-regenerating, resilient natural ecosystems. The only kind of replanting that should attract incentives is re-establishment of permanent native vegetation.

What are the down sides to this?

There is nothing in the new changes that enforce growers to leave trees standing as carbon sinks. These poorly considered changes encourage investors to buy

farm land cheaply, plant trees and claim carbon credits. Then when food production becomes more lucrative, cut down the trees, release the carbon and grow pasture or crops again. Currently, they would not incur a penalty for cutting down the trees and emitting the carbon. It's a win-win investment.

Also:

- Instead of reducing their emissions, large polluters can instead buy land and plant a crop of trees. Tax payers will subsidise the polluters' cheap mitigation costs. Energy efficiency and renewables get no similar incentives or tax breaks.
- There is no guarantee that these tree crops will have a positive impact long term (more vulnerable to disease, fire and corporate fluctuations).
- Besides the disruption to rural communities, plantations grown in the wrong places will soak up scarce water, drying out catchments. This will be free water for them at a huge cost to others.
- Just as food prices are going up, loss of agricultural land will further increase prices.
- Existing plantation growers (who have already received tax deductions as MIS schemes), can choose whether to grow wood or carbon. Even at a relatively low prices of \$10-15 a tonne for CO₂, carbon looks more lucrative.

The result is that plantations will fill the gap between now and untested plans of pumping coal pollution underground (geosequestration) in 15-20 years time. How neat - Australia can meet its 2020 targets while letting fossil fuel polluters off the hook again.

Christine Milne / Jill

They all grow back ...
by 2500.



Greens MPs give invoice for \$181 million to Eden Chipmill

In early September, Greens MPs from Victoria, ACT and NSW visited the Eden woodchip mill to hand the manager an invoice for the cost of carbon pollution from logging East Gippsland and Southeast forests. The bill comes to \$181 million for one year!

The cost was based on a conservative estimate of \$10 per tonne for carbon dioxide under an Emissions Trading Scheme. But using Sir Nicholas Stern's recommended cost of \$107 per tonne the bill would rise to \$1.9 billion.

Greens MPs Sue Pennicuik (Victoria), Lee Rhiannon (NSW) and Deb Foskey (ACT) toured the Eden Chipmill with the managers.

Jill / Greens media release 3.9.08



Black Swan culling

put spotlight on

dying Gippsland Lakes

Over Autumn/Winter 08, farmers were given permits to shoot dozens of native Black Swans who were moving from the Gippsland Lakes' onto farm paddocks to graze. Why? Because the Lakes have become so sick and contaminated that much of the area is dying, including the Swan's food, the water grasses.

The issuing of permits to shoot hungry swans was a lazy response to a deeply serious problem. The Baimsdale Department of Sustainability and Environment's wildlife officer didn't think beyond a packet of bullets.

About 100 Black Swans were shot up to July, but more hungry swans kept moving onto farmland. EEG and the Gippsland Environment Group became very vocal; there was a huge public outcry; the media took DSE by the throat and the Swans were given a reprieve in a matter of weeks. *A rare win!*

The swan killing story generated much media attention and urgent meetings were held in Melbourne and locally. The positive spin-off was that the condition of the Lakes soon became the spotlight of concern. The government wanted neither issue scrutinised.

After this short campaign, the state government amended the *Wildlife Act 1975* to allow farmers to control wildlife by using non-lethal methods. Wildlife officers can now issue authorisation to "disturb" wildlife rather than "destroy".

While this was going on, one creative farmer tensioned fencing wire across his paddock at intervals making it difficult for swans to land and take off. It worked well.

Congratulations to everyone who sent messages of outrage to the Minister's office and DSE in Baimsdale. Newspapers, ABC radio, 3AW, Crikey and even YouTube all picked up on it.

Gippsland Lakes take centre stage

The 400 square kilometre Gippsland Lakes are a listed Ramsar wetland - meaning they are internationally significant and support rare migratory birds. They are Victoria's version of SA's Coorong. The Coorong Lakes at the mouth of the Murray River in SA are also Ramsar listed and have suffered from exploitation, pollutants and lack of fresh water to the point of being near dead.

The catchment of our Gippsland Lakes stretches from Warragul in the west to Nowa Nowa in the east and up to the Alps in the north. This huge once-forested catchment has been extensively cleared, farmed, logged and has many industries and towns along its rivers. The Latrobe Valley has the biggest thirst for freshwater. The Thompson Dam has also had an impact on flows since it was built in the 70s.

Blame the fires

The Gippsland Coastal Board and Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) refuse to do decent testing for contaminants or to reign in agricultural run-off. Of course, the logging industry is even more of a sacred cow and hardly rates a mention in management plans. The Lakes have been in a sorry state for decades but these authorities are blaming the recent bushfires and floods for dumping nutrients into the Lakes. This would have some impact but when put into an already ailing ecological system could be the tipping point.

Freshwater algal blooms have been an annual problem since the 80s when nutrient input increased, affecting aquatic life and scaring off tourists. In 2007, a new saltwater algal bloom spread through Lake Victoria forming a light barrier. Not long after, all mussels, barnacles, sandworm and sea grass died, removing a large part of the food chain.

Barnacles not bureaucrats

There is no quick fix for this problem. Denying the problem or blaming the fires makes life easier for bureaucrats but not barnacles. There needs to be proper management of the entire catchment. This includes reigning in the most damaging catchment impact - clearfell logging and associated roading. It means the chemical and pharmaceutical inputs from dairy farm run-off has to be identified and dealt with, and the heavy industrial use of water from rivers in the west needs to be put under a spotlight.

continued next page ...



The flaming obvious ...



Journalist and writer, James Woodford, recently wrote of his concerns about the level of pyromania within our land management agencies and the lack of science behind the hype for more burning.

The annual sensationalist stories predicting a horrendous bushfire season ahead are about to begin. Fearful unprepared farmers and townies alike will blame the DSE for not burning enough bush. The media will use this hype to fill in slow news days.

But does anyone stop to ask two crucial questions: do 'hazard reduction burns' really do anything to save homes or the forest, and what's the cost to native plants and animals and their habitat?

A recent paper on this by Michael Clarke, an associate professor in the Department of Zoology at LaTrobe University, shows we don't know.

But we do know that a lot of precious wild places are set on fire, understorey destroyed and altered,

soils dried out and wildlife scorched and killed, mostly for political purposes rather than to stop fires in summer.

Clarke says that land agencies like the DSE need to be confident their fire prevention methods work. And we need to be sure they don't lead to irreversible damage to native wildlife and habitat.

He argues we need to show some humility, and writes,

"The capacity of management agencies to control widespread wildfires ignited by multiple lightning strikes in drought conditions on days of extreme fire danger is going to be similar to their capacity to control cyclones."

In other words, sometimes we can do zip.

We need to know whether deliberate burning can be done without adding extra survival stresses on our wildlife, already battling to cope with climate change.

Clarke says the massive burn-offs must be scrutinised much more closely and a more sophisticated discussion be held about burning and how best we should deal with climate-induced fire.

Ecological data about burns should be collected routinely but aren't. The few small sample plots being looked at only look at plants, not soil life, invertebrates or larger birds and animals. Without it, management burns are flying scientifically blind and are a threat to wildlife.

"Much prescribed burning is to create a false sense of security rather than to reduce fire risks, and the effect on wildlife is virtually unknown."

James Woodford
September 8, 2008
(summarised by Jill)
www.smh.com.au/news/opinion/the-dangers-of-fighting-fire-with-fire/2008/09/07/

Continued from 'Dying Lakes - previous page...

Fire retardant adds to the load on the Lakes

Just recently, there has been some uncovering of the make-up of the fire retardant Phoschek, of which hundreds or thousands of tonnes was dumped in the catchments during the fires. The more the problems are compounded, the more the authorities announce another study, publish another glossy report, make soothing statements and do nothing.

A packed public meeting was held in November organised by Habitat Network East Gippsland. Five experts spoke on the condition of the Lakes and this has embarrassed local authorities.

Let's hope the swans didn't die in vain - and that they have started a ball rolling that will hopefully get some action happening for the Lakes.

Jill

"With all due respect, I do not think ... this was the biggest bushfire in 100 years ... I think it's the biggest back-burn in living memory"

Quote from Charles Slade, Channel Nine reporter in the Federal enquiry into the 2003 fires. 28.7.03

"40-60% of the '03 and '06 wildfires were due to backburns carried out by the DSE"

Protected source.

We'd love to have the government deny this by providing maps of their back-burns and subsequent areas burnt.

Spot-tailed Quoll spotted

In August, a rare Spot-tailed Quoll was sighted at Eagle Point near the Mitchell River Silt Jetties. They were thought extinct in the East Gippsland Red Gum plains areas and along the coast. Most of these endangered large marsupial carnivores are now identified in the upper Snowy River area and occasionally in the tall wet inland forests, but even these are becoming more rare despite increased efforts to find them.

Bairnsdale Advertiser 29.8.08/DSE/Jill



Victoria - the charcoal state

Blindly supporting blindly burning

Here's another example of the government being at odds with itself. Two recent reports contradicted each other. In early December, at the same time the Environment Commissioner, Dr Ian McPhail, released his damning State of the Environment report for Victoria, the Brumby Government supported the other bushfire report and a *trebling of burns across our forests*.

The State Government now spends \$100 million on fire fighting, up from \$30 million in 1999. Little of this goes to ecologists and biologists, but there's no shortage of funds for spin doctors to abuse the term 'ecological burns' in their propaganda.

Brumby will now spend another \$10 million so DSE can '*work with the community to develop and implement large scale, planned burning*'. Hey - hang on - didn't they hear? Not all communities or landholders want these burns.

The Environment and Natural Resources Committee (ENRC) was co-chaired by East Gippsland's Craig Ingram and started in March '07. John Pandazopoulos and Craig Ingram were in charge of the committee.

Despite many submissions highlighting the negative impacts of large scale burns, the report chose to cite '*several submissions (that) acknowledged that burning is a powerful tool...*'.

Environment Minister, Gavin Jennings has asked DSE to 'develop a plan to continue the expansion of large scale, mosaic burns and *monitor their effectiveness*'. What?! - they still don't know how effective they are?

Although he also said '*There is a need to begin to move away from hectare-based targets and start thinking about reduction of fuel loads across the board, understanding community sensitivity to planned burning and better mirroring nature through the effective use of fire as a land management tool.*' Well for starters, nature never burnt 1/20th of the bush every year.

With climate change making summers more extreme, and previous burns proving useless in these extreme conditions - the one thing that can be guaranteed if the blitz-burn plan is adopted is that certain forest types will be changed to tinder-box dry ecosystems.

The highlighted box in Chapter 2 of the report's Executive Summary pretty well sums up the redneck element within this enquiry. To paraphrase it - "if anyone is opposed to torching the bush more often, then they need to change their attitude and unite with us lot. It's really good for the environment you know."

The Government's formal response is to the Inquiry is available at <http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/enrc>

Jill

Fire science vs political science

Science is clearly not a part of the Brumby government's justification to triple burns across the state to almost 400,000 ha, or 1/20th of public land a year.

Despite the ENRC inquiry quoting scientific papers, Jenny Barnett from the VNPA, discovered that these papers didn't back up calls for increased burning at all. They in fact cite computer simulations from the US and Tasmania's Button-grass Plains. They also misquote fire scientists to suit their own agenda.

An article by Dr Michael Clarke from Latrobe University in Wildlife Research (Vol. 35 Issue 5) says that plant survival does not mean animals also survive. Increased predation and loss of food and shelter could make animals locally extinct. He also suggests that land managers should never assume that burning an over abundant older age class will create a younger age class. Climatic effects can impact on regeneration causing a gap in age class.

Dr Clarke agrees that there needs to be research beyond just plants, to include fungi, invertebrates, reptiles, amphibians, birds and mammals. Managing the forest without this information is like farming without knowledge of the soil or weather.

VNPA's Parkwatch Sept '08/Jill

SoE - on burning ...

These comments from the recent **State of the Environment (SoE) report** -

- Inappropriate fire regimes (too much or too little fire) threaten the persistence and condition of some species and ecosystems.

- Uncertainty exists over optimal levels of planned burning in Victoria for ecological benefits and protection from wildfire.
- Human sources of ignition account for at least 70% of fires on public land in Victoria.

The following states pretty clearly that the fire managers still have little clue as to the ecological impacts of their burning plans.

Recommendations

"The Victorian Government should expand research on ecological burning to develop an ecologically based program of planned burning that accounts for the regeneration requirements of plant communities and the habitat needs of fauna. Funding should also be allocated for the extension of Tolerable Fire Interval analysis to all Victorian Bioregions".



Big news on Green carbon

Wild untouched forests store three times more

carbon dioxide than previously estimated and three times more than plantation forests.

A world-first study of "green carbon" by scientists from the Australian National University (ANU) looked at natural forests' role in climate change. They say our forests have been underestimated as a solution against global warming.

Despite this massive difference in carbon storage, current world bodies looking at climate change (IPCC and Kyoto Protocol) don't distinguish between plantations and untouched forests; a forest's ability to store CO₂ is only based on plantation forest estimates.

A co-author of the report, Professor Brendan Mackey, estimates that around 9.3 billion tonnes of carbon can be stored in the 14.5 million hectares of eucalypt forests in southeast Australia *if* they are left undisturbed. The largest stocks of carbon are found in the tall wet eucalypt forests of Victoria and Tasmania where the biomass of forests supporting *trees up to 80 metres tall can contain more than 1200 tonnes of carbon per hectare! This is up to 10 times more carbon per hectare than previously realised.*

Natural forests store more carbon and for much longer. Plantations are grown to be cut down every 12 - 30

years. Natural forests are also much more resilient to climate change and disturbances than planted tree crops.

The carbon stored in forests includes the thick understorey, the rich soil carbon, the wildlife and the trees. This store of biomass is about three times the amount in the atmosphere.

About a third of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere today is from past forest clearing and 18% of annual global emissions is from continued forest clearing.

The report says that when a logged forest regrows, it stores about 60% of what the original forest would have, so stopping further logging of southeast Australia's eucalypt forests is the equivalent of preventing emissions of 460 million tonnes of carbon dioxide a year for the next 100 years.

Allowing logged forests to regrow to their natural carbon storage capacity will avoid emissions of 136 million tonnes of carbon dioxide a year for the next 100 years. This is about 25% of Australia's total emissions in 2005.

ANU/Reuters 5.8.08 / Jill

Green carbon is the term for the carbon in natural forests, brown carbon is found in cropped forests or plantations, grey carbon in fossil fuels and blue carbon is the term used for the CO₂ stored in the oceans.

Oh the state we're in!

Victorian State of the Environment Report released on the 5th December by Sustainability Commissioner, Dr Ian McPhail, delivered many whacks to the Brumby Government. Here are some extracts ...

The Government should:

- * Consider stopping logging in catchment areas to increase stream flows.
- * Logging for timber products should occur in plantations, leaving natural forests to be conserved.
- * Prioritise spending to enhance vegetation and biodiversity management on private land.
- * Rename environmental flows to "essential baseflows" to awaken Victorians to their importance.
- * Introduce tougher targets for carbon emissions like a 25%

reduction by 2020.

- * Use a climate change "test" as part of all major policy and spending decisions.
- * Shift transport dollars to public transport, walking and bike rider friendly planning.

Quotes from the report ...

If everyone lived liked Victorians, almost four planets would be needed.
Victoria is Australia's most deared and most densely populated state. The Victorian Government should restate the role of natural forests in climate change mitigation in light of recent findings that undisturbed forests are more efficient in carbon sequestration than harvested forests.
More than half of our land has already been deared and we are

continuing to lose native vegetation at a rate of some 4000ha a year. [We need to] act with urgency to increase environmental water reserves.

The environment should be a higher priority at all levels of planning. Waiting for carbon capture and storage is not enough, we need to take steps now.

The Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 is failing to meet its stated objectives.

Victoria's faith is invested in an unproven technology ... risks emissions continuing to rise for some time.

Jill/SoE/The Age/Herald Sun





Gippsland water and climate

Coast to be inundated

It's now official - the Gippsland coast faces the double whammy of

sea level rise and coastal subsidence.

In July, the Gippsland Coastal Board released a report detailing these problems, saying the coast is highly erodible, making it very vulnerable to sea level rise and storm surges. This could damage estuaries, rivers, bays and inlets, erode dunes and cause fresh water ecosystems to collapse. The other problem is the decades of oil and gas extraction causing subsidence of inland areas and underground aquifers being impacted.

Not only will the coastal environment be inundated but so will real estate. The Gippsland Coastal Board asked the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) to review the Shire's approval of a subdivision. The VCAT ruling rejected a proposal for a new housing development in South Gippsland because of the threat of storms and rising sea levels. This is the first ruling of its kind with possible implications for developments right around Australia's coast.

But South Gippsland Council is more worried that the ruling will see property values drop, rather than being worried that chunks of the community will drop - into the ocean.

The Board's report warned that buildings will be inundated within 50 years and about 85% of the Gippsland coast is at risk. How curious - as it had recently approved the new upgrades and expansion of the Santos industrial gas plant on a mobile sand dune in the Snowy River's estuary at the edge of the southern ocean! It's magic how money can help these developments stay float.

ABC, 5.8.08 / Jill

Desal plant

Another curious approval is that of the low lying desalination plant proposed for Wonthaggi. If it ever happens, it will supply Melbourne with 330 gigalitres of water a year and cost \$3.1 billion (pre-blowout estimate). The plant will emit 945,000 tonnes CO₂ a year, equal to putting another quarter of a million cars on the roads.

The discharge back into the sea will not only be super salty but will also contain various toxic additions such as anti-fouling agents like iron and aluminum chloride, as well as chlorine used to flush the pipes. The inlet pipe will exclude larger marine life but could end up sucking in and destroying important populations of sea creatures at their egg and larval stages.

If, in a good year, Melbourne doesn't need to take the water, we still have to pay for it under the contract negotiated. The water would be processed and then pumped back into the ocean.

Megan Clinton VNPA Feb '08 / Jill

The Gippsland White Elephant?

The Gippsland Water Factory is being built to treat and recycle water for industrial use at a cost of \$200 million. About 70% of the water to be recycled is planned to come from PaperlinX pulp and paper factory and be reused by them as well. But AP's PaperlinX has had its water rates frozen for five years, meaning ... the good citizens of Gippsland will be paying for the company's water recycling and use. But it gets worse...

Now that PaperlinX is looking financially unviable and can't find a buyer, will the average water customer be paying for a white elephant? The state will pay \$50 million, leaving domestic water users to cover the rest through a 100% increase in their charges over the next five years. The Feds had given \$150 million for Ballarat's new water infrastructure but ex-Nationals MP Peter McGauran wasn't able to get a cent from them for this one.

Greens media release / Jill

Brodrigg mill crash

The Brodrigg Mill that was trading as Lakes Hardwood and Sawmilling just east of Orbost, has gone down apparently owing \$3.2M. This mill had the receivers in not that long ago under another owner. Readers might remember the office and all bookwork burnt down during winter in the middle of the night during the worst rain event for years. Police thought it was a tad suspicious. The receivers are in again with more security this time you'd hope. The workers are left with over \$350,000 owed in super and other entitlements

ABC 8.12.08

Humphries does a Squealie

Bob Humphries (the old woodchip war-lord) pulled his annual stunt last August of threatening to sack his workforce, which would bring the entire town of Cann River to its knees, unless he gets more or cheaper logs. The town has a population of about 300 and Bob employs nine of them. Still, he seems to always get blanket media and then gets his way. After two weeks of carry on, his saw benches were back screaming through logs like nothing had happened.

Jill / ABC news / The Age 24.8.08

Foresters still get confused - rainforest or gum tree?

The fifth EPA audit of logging has been released recently and shows that DSE/VicForests is still incapable of ensuring full compliance with the Code of Practice.

The report checked logging done at 41 logging coupes during the 2006/7 financial year and its findings include:

- More than 10% of coupes had fires that escaped outside the logging area.
- One of the escaped fires burnt part of a Potoroo conservation reserve buffer.
- Nearly half of the coupes (four out of nine) with areas of rainforest, did not have rainforest correctly identified (at two of these coupes, VicForests failed to find any rainforest).

The EPA is still finding problems in areas such as landing rehabilitation, stream protection and road construction. These have turned up in each of their previous reports.

When the EPA began these audits, they decided that a coupe with a score of 85% or less had not reached an acceptable level of compliance. Under this definition, around one in eight coupes are not compliant – a totally unacceptable result.

The fact that the same types of problems turn up year after year in these reports makes it pretty clear that DSE/VicForests pay little attention to

what the EPA says and have not done enough to stop Code breaches.

For example, in four of the last five audits, the EPA found that DSE/VicForests were not identifying areas of rainforest correctly. Since the audits started, the EPA has checked 28 coupes containing rainforest, but DSE/VicForests failed to correctly identify all the rainforest in 9 of these i.e. about a third had incorrect identifications! Rainforest protection, it appears, is now being run like a lottery.

DSE's complacency has already resulted in destruction of and damage to rainforest, and it is totally unacceptable that DSE/VicForest is STILL not correctly following procedures for rainforest identification.

Dean Haywood



Oh Donny boy!

Don Burke supports the biggest drought inducing, climate changing, extinction enhancing, environmental brutes in Australia. And just as Gunns has done to Tassie, Burke has done to his own credibility - viciously trashed it.

More than a gardener, Don Burke is chairman of the Australian Environment Foundation, a lookalike false green group that's really an industry front. It was set up by the right-wing think tank, the Institute of

Public Affairs. This sham environmental group supports GE, logging, nuclear power and is full of climate change deniers.

This branded Judas was enlisted by Gunns to sing its praises. Very curious as their plans for a pulp mill is turning more sour by the day. They can't borrow and can't find a partner in crime. To add to their woes, Gunns recently purchased a Jarrah sawmill at Yarloop in WA which will shut down in December '08 because it's uneconomic.

Maybe Burke should stick to his own backyard.

Jill / *The Australian* 11.10.08 / ABC 10.10.08

Is Brumby in bed with the packaging industry too?

A trial on retailers charging 10c for plastic bags has been carried out in Victoria. Surprise, surprise, there was an 80% drop in plastic bag use. Yet still our state politicians won't do anything. SA is making it illegal to hand out free plastic bags. Coles Bay in Tassie turned it into a tourist attraction.

Details on page 11 here: www.ephc.gov.au/pdf/Plastic_Bags/KPMG_Final_Report_on_Plastic_Bags

Gippslanders' wasteful habits
Gippslanders throw out an average 236 tonnes of food a week or 12,272 tonnes a year! East Gippslanders threw out 42.8 tonnes of that. The other shires were Baw Baw, Latrobe, Bass Coast and South Gippsland. The audit commissioned by the Gippsland Regional Waste Management Group showed that food waste made up about 1/3rd of the weight of all bin rubbish.
East Gip News 8.10.08

Shorts



World's tallest hardwood tree

With the help of a new instrument (laser range finder) that uses light beams to precisely measure distance, a 101 metre tall Eucalyptus regnans has been discovered in Tasmania's Arve Valley.

The MCG towers are 85 metres, but these trees almost defy earthly physics to pump water up to their top leaves. They named the tree Centurion.

Hobart Mercury
11.10.08

Local Councils oppose logging in catchments

The Municipalities Association of Victoria, representing the interests of 79 councils, passed a motion in October '08 to oppose any further logging in water catchments. The representatives were mainly from regional councils. Thanks to Samantha Dunn and Mayor Tim Heenan's great work on this one.

Aussie bio-fuels

CSIRO is looking into bio-fuels to power Australian vehicles. It says that even if we all stopped eating, grain-based bio-fuels would only provide half of the ethanol and even less biodiesel that would be needed to fuel all our vehicles. It says palm oil is also no good because it destroys Orangutan habitat. CSIRO is now looking at various algal species that could grow in sewage ponds and could provide feedstock for biofuels.

Weekly Times 23.7.08

Great GE decision in EG

After months of work by locals, farmers and the Organic Agriculture Association, in early October the East Gippsland Shire voted to have our shire declared GE free! Recently the Bass and South Gippsland Shire Councils also decided to go GE free. Baw Baw and Wellington are still in the process of deciding.

The vote was close, with 4:3 in favor of the GE ban. Thanks to Councillor Jane Rowe who worked hard to have her motion carried.

Jill/ East Gippsland Council

Moggies help pillage the oceans

Gourmet meals dished up to pampered cats are threatening world fish supplies. Deakin University researchers show an estimated 2.48 million tonnes of forage fish, like sardines, herrings and anchovies, are used each year by the global cat food industry. Almost 34,000 tonnes of the valuable and disappearing ocean food is imported into Australia each year. Each cat in Australia eats 13.7 kg of fish a year, while humans on average consume about 11 kg of fish and seafood each.

Dr Giovanni Turchini said giving good fish to a pet satisfies the personal hedonistic needs of the owner, not the nutritional need of the cat. Cats should be happy to eat the offal from a trout.

The Age 26.8.08

Russian Tariffs effect Aussie forests

The main pulp/paper producing region in Europe is Scandinavia, and up to a third of the raw wood used to make paper there has come from Russia. Since 2006, Russia has increased the export tax on its raw log exports to €15 per cubic meter from €2.50. But on January 1st, this tax is set to rise to €50, equal to about \$300 per ton of pulp or paper produced. Such an increase will further add to the US logging industry's cost advantage (and possibly Australia's).

North America Paper and Forest Products - Citi - 27.7.08

Ontario protects its forest

In July, the Ontario government agreed to protect 55 million acres of boreal forest, an area of forest that is almost the size of the United Kingdom.

Care2 via David H

Bye-bye oil

In the 1950s, oil producers discovered about 50 barrels of oil for every one barrel invested in drilling and pumping. Today that figure is only about five for one. Sometime soon, that figure will be one for one. Despite the price, it wouldn't be logical to look for new oil because it would consume more energy than it would recover.

Jay Hansen via Nature and Society May '08



Vegetarians cool the planet



agriculture are more than six times the world average. New Zealand, Ireland and Australia all produce more than 100 kilograms of beef per person per year. The world average is less than

We know it's often been scoffed at but it's true! Even Garnaut reckons so.

The final report of the Garnaut Climate Change Review states in off-putting technical language that

livestock emissions from enteric fermentation releasing methane play a large role in the emissions profile of the agriculture sector. About 34 % of the agricultural emissions of OECD countries is due to livestock emissions.

Or in plain language:

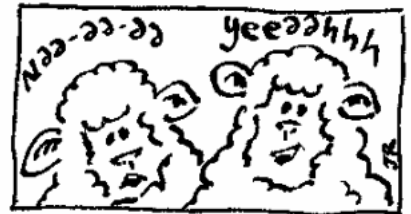
Cow and sheep farts account for about a third of developed countries GHG emissions from farming .

But in Australia it's 66%. And Australia's per capita emissions from

9 kilograms and the OECD average about 22 kilograms. We grow more farting livestock here so have more methane emissions than crops or chooks would.

Questioning our meat-eating habits is almost as taboo as the topic of population. Challenging people's eating habits and the farming economy is difficult to discuss. But like so many other parts of our lifestyles, they'll need substantial change if we want to get serious about environmental impacts and climate change.

Jill / Sue Pennicuik, MLC / Garnaut Climate Change Review, pp 162-165



Looking for an easy way to reduce your carbon footprint? Forget the MIS tree planting rorts. a recent University of Chicago study found that a vegan diet would save one and half tonnes of CO2 a year ...compared to a hybrid car that saves just one tonne. Take on a vegan diet and it'll save the cost of both meat and buying a new car.

New carbon markets could speed forest destruction

Besides the new changes to the Tax Act, proposed carbon markets would further encourage forest destruction. The logging interests are trying to stitch it all up.

This sounds arse-about but read on. "Native forests, the less efficient resource for forestry industry competitiveness, are tagged for wood production with lost opportunities for the job they do best – carbon storage. Whereas plantations, the less efficient and less reliable resource for carbon storage, are tagged for carbon storage with lost opportunities for the job they do best – wood supply".

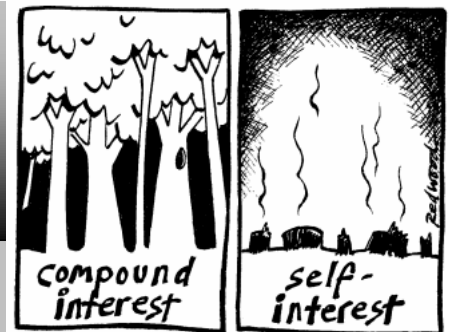
Dr Judith Ajani ANU economist

This means forests are best at storing much more carbon than plantations - plantations are best at making much more wood than native forests but store less carbon. However, the carbon market will profit plantation owners more if they leave their trees standing, while

forests will be more profitable for chopping down. Why? Forests are too difficult to measure, so the government says, and Kyoto doesn't recognise logging forests as an emission (!).

The research by ANU Forest Economist Dr Judith Ajani and Mathematician Dr Peter Wood was presented in their joint submission to the Commonwealth Government's Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. The submission says that in a plantation, logs account for just half of the carbon, so even at low carbon prices of \$10 per tonne, hardwood plantation owners are likely to make more profit growing trees to store carbon than cutting them down for timber.

This would devastate wood processing across Australia. Plantations supply 80% of Australia's wood and provide most timber jobs. Large areas of maturing plantations are also set to feed



Australia's hardwood chip export markets.

If logging shifts from plantations back to native forests, greenhouse emissions will increase. This is because **native forests are three times more carbon dense than plantations** and the proportion of useable wood is lower.

The researchers recommend that plantations be excluded from the emissions trading scheme and call on the Government to undertake an urgent inquiry into the value of native vegetation in climate change mitigation following the recently released report by ANU scientists. (see *Big News on Green Carbon* - page 9).

ANU media release 3.9.08/ Jill/ *Green Carbon: The Role of Natural Forests in Carbon Storage*

Joyous news

After all the gloom we have to report on here's a little something to warm our hearts and bring us hope...

The insatiable monster that consumes most of East Gippsland's forests is the Eden woodchip mill. Without that, logging would stop. Could it possibly be on the way out?

Apparently the global economic downturn is affecting the chipmill and some shipments have been cancelled (there is the odd silver

lining to this economic crisis storm cloud). Paper is very sensitive to economic fluctuations and the current downturn is hitting it hard. By Feb - March '09 they could be in real strife if the financial world is still in free fall. We wonder if Nippon Paper (owners in Japan) told this mill that change is in the air.

Remember, dozens of chipmills and pulpmills are dosing down in North and South America and Europe. One more here in Australia would

hardly be noticed in the big picture. April 1st is the start of the Japanese financial year, the date on which significant corporate changes usually take effect.

The mill managers are desperately lobbying governments for approval to burn native forests as renewable energy. No way in the world will any self-preserving government allow that insanity! Even Mr 5% Rudd.

Bega ABC 21.11.08/
Harriett@Chipstop/ Jill

Government protected welfare cheats

OK - it goes like this - VicForests haven't made a cracker since they started operations in 2004. This last year they put \$127 million through their books and the expenses were \$132 million = \$5M loss. But they were given a \$5.7M handout to cut down ash forests in the fire areas (not all this ash was burnt from several accounts). So they daimed they made a half million profit.

Good cooks

VicForests is a total basket case and have relied on cooking their books since their inception. If it were a private company they'd have been in the hands of receivers long ago. It's only because the government keeps throwing our money at them to knock down public forests that allows them to pretend they're profitable.

Since VicForests made the case to 'salvage' ash forests, half of the state's woodchips have come from these beautiful tall mountain ash forests as supposed 'fire salvage'. And the ratio is 1:8 sawlog to pulplogs coming from these areas despite the high quality trees being cut down. They are smashed on site to generate quick woodchip sales.

In an interview with the head of VicForests in Gippsland, Barry Vaughan made some comments worth bottling.

The best of which is:

That we've inherited an asset which is not inherently profitable and continued land use decisions makes it more and more [of a] challenge to actually break even or make a modest profit, so we are not inheriting an asset which is inherently profitable. ABC radio, 10.11.08

He also admitted they were 20,000 ha behind on getting clearfelled forest areas to regrow again. That means conversion to plantation type stands of species by aerially sowing with one or two tree species. He tried to explain they used 'biological targets not an area target' to determine regrowth success. This makes no sense but it is VicForests talking. Barry Vaughan also told the Gippsland audience that they aerially sow a selection of species including non-merchantable species. That one IS a pure fat-laden porkie!

It was admitted that in the past DSE and treasury gave VicForests additional funds. As well there is an agreement about standing trees that would normally be paid for - they would be free - about \$3million worth.

Then there's bushfire funds to offset the cost of taking all that burnt and unburnt ash.

When asked if bushfires could be relied on to fund their operations in the future he said that VicForests shouldn't just be seen as a business, they also keep tracks open and give some blokes work. But when questioned about the main purpose of VicForests - to make a profit - Barry Vaughan had to admit they didn't.

So why Mr Premier Brumby and Mr Treasurer Lenders, is this conniving, welfare dependent institution allowed to continue? Maybe write to the treasurer and ask him. His address is: Hon John Lenders, Treasurer, Level 4, 1 Treasury Place, East Melbourne 3002 etc
John.lenders@parliament.vic.gov.au



Greens bring Brown Mt into Parliament

Sue Pennicuik Greens MP, asked Environment Minister Gavin Jennings in Parliament on 12th November - could he confirm that the current logging of Brown Mountain's old growth forest is in contravention to the Labor Party's 2006 commitment to protect the last significant stands of Victoria's old-growth forests currently available for logging?

He said it was controversial but perfectly OK to log stands of old growth. Then said that it
"...certainly will not be inconsistent with my intention, which is to deliver beyond the 33,500 hectares of old-growth forests that it was indicated would be added to the reserve system. It is my intention during my tenure as minister responsible for the environment to beat that number and actually have a higher number of areas of old-growth forest incorporated into the reserve system. That is something I am very happy to be measured by at the end of the term."
 But he said that Brown Mountain's old growth had never been allocated for protection so could be logged. Then went on to say:



Out of Brown Mountain Mr Brumby.

Business people used their mobile phones (being waved overhead) to call Mr Brumby in a Grass-roots-in-suits action on the steps of Parliament House in November and December.

"I stand by the commitment of the government to increase the reserve system significantly beyond the 33 500 hectares that we identified for old-growth protection in the future, and I will be measured by that and will be accountable to the Parliament and the people on that matter."

Sounds interesting but how many times have this lot lied and then shrugged their shoulders. How many times do we let our hopes get dashed. But one worth constantly reminding Mr Jennings of all the same.

Jill

Are you wondering why there have been so many lush verdant tree ferns sliced in half along some of our most scenic stretches of roads, like the Bonang?

Clearing for the safe and efficient functioning of public roads is now exempt from clearing regulations or offsets. All that has to happen is for DSE to give the nod; no Code, no offsets, no accountability.

Another exemption from clearing controls is for fire fighting access tracks up to 6 metres wide. The government and DSE could see there was a problem having to find offsets for the hundreds of kilometres of permanently cleared forest. Solution? ... change the law.

If a landowner is clearing for weeds or pest animals (not defined), they can knock over 1 ha of bushland or forest each five years.

The new laws mean that roadside and railway-side native vegetation can be destroyed without a permit. Victorian Greens MP Greg Barber, attempted to revoke the amendments in Parliament and described

this as "one department ticking off the work of the other", with no public involvement and no appeal rights, that bypass local shires and communities. Mr Barber concluded that "If the Greens, The Nationals, the Labor Party people and the various Independents on [Bendigo] council could all support each other in opposing tree clearing on a roadside ... you have to wonder what the hell is wrong with all you people [in

CLEARING CONTROLS CHOPPED



Parliament]". The government, opposition and DLP all voted together against the Greens motion to oppose the new exemptions.

On a slight up side to this new twist in the law, dead trees over 40cm diameter at

breast height, can't be cleared. And no firewood collection is allowed on properties under 10ha. These are small consolations compared to the vast swathes of clearing now allowed for fire tracks and roadside clearing without any offsets.

Karen Alexander VNPA / Jill / The Greens

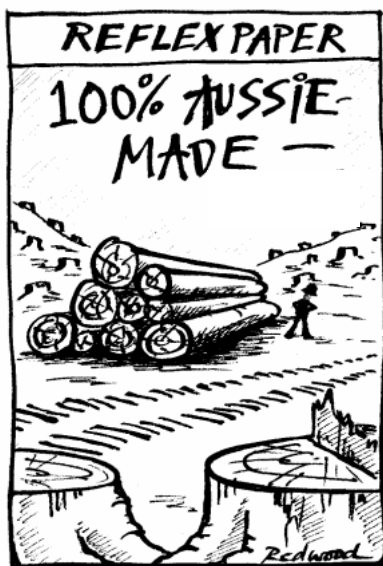
Gippsland's paper mill FOR SALE

After a \$300 million upgrade, Australian Paper's (AP) Maryvale pulp and paper mill is on the market. Reflex copy paper is their most well known brand and is the reason the Central Highlands and Strzelecki forests have been logged and destroyed for decades. PaperlinX has recently put its mills up for sale, realising it's not such a great profit maker any more. But it's \$50M short in its bid to raise \$200M from investors to help cover its debts. PaperlinX shares have subsequently plunged 39 cents, or 22%, to a record low \$1.36.

Robert Eastman, pulp and paper industry analyst said the sale is currently on hold and international bidders are keeping an eye on it. He agreed there was definitely a downturn in the pulp and paper industry right around the world. Selling paper isn't the company's core strength. He agreed the new

5% target for CO2 reduction could add some 'liabilities'.

ABC radio
16.12.08 /
Pro-print
Australasia
8.10.08 / Jill



Blogger on the cast iron balcony

All across Victoria, people are getting replies to their letters asking for logging in Brown Mountain to be stopped.

From the website "Blogger on the Cast Iron Balcony"...

November 24th, 2008. In reply to a letter of concern re Brown Mountain logging...

Dear Ms Balcony

Timber harvesting in Brown Mountain

'Timber harvesting'. Do you like the cuteness of it?

The specific responsibility for the matter raised in your correspondence rests with the Minister for Environment & Climate Change, Mr Gavin Jennings MLC.

Yes, but your name does appear right next to his on this page of the inappropriately named Department of Sustainability and Environment site. I just thought as minister for water, it might be good to jog your memory about how the Victorian government is logging its own water catchment areas and how with the environment things do tend to have an impact on other things.

Accordingly, I have forwarded a copy of your correspondence to Minister Jennings' office for consideration.

Don't worry about it, I've already sent him one. If you could just remind him that "Minister for Environment and Climate change" doesn't mean actually fostering climate change, that'd be ace.

Thank you for taking the time to write to me.

Thank you for taking the time for your flak catchers to handball it to Gavin Jennings' flak catchers. We await his reply with keen anticipation.

"Unlike the Wall Street meltdown, there is no bailout for the climate crisis," Greens leader Bob Brown

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