Sisters of Mercy
46 The Parade
YEA VICTORIA 3717

12th December, 2012

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment
and Communications
PO BOX 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THREATENED SPECIES AND ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES' PROTECTION IN AUSTRALIA

Before 2009 bushfires I was a person who liked to walk the forests occasionally, however I didn't really deeply connect with the fauna and flora, nor did I fully appreciate the intrinsic value of them. It took a bush fire and being placed into a life-threatening situation to wake up to the plight of the human and natural world that is going through radical irreversible changes at this time.

I came from Sydney in 2009 to work at the Centre for Ecology and Spirituality situated in Glenburn Victoria. Our religion is Nature and our Law is Natural Law. At the heart of our work is the dedication to the promotion of sound spirituality that recognizes the spiritual wholeness that pervades all of creation, matter, fauna and flora of Earth. Subsequently this leads to a practical spirituality of mutuality with Earth. Participants, local and from around the world have shared experiences which demonstrates that such immersions at Glenburn allowed them to appreciate the sense of the sacred at every point. We are located at the edge of the Toolangi State Forest in Central Victoria. It is one of our classrooms, so to speak. This forest has and continues to be under threat from logging, due to the State Government's ongoing economical stance regarding this region.

In 2011, I was actively involved in trying to protect the Sylvia Creek Coupe, now currently before the Court of Appeal. From a personal point of view and in order to highlight the impact, I enclose some notes I made regarding the 2011 protests which places more of an emphasis on the personal/spiritual and emotional cost of the reporting rather than the scientific data, for your consideration..
(Attachment 1)

I will leave the factual details of this case and all other factual issues regarding Toolangi Forests to those who have lead the campaign, namely MyEnvironment Group, (Sarah Rees, Adam Meaney, Steve Meacher, Bernie Mace, Don Butcher). I strongly support their personal representations being brought to the Senate Committee. Their many years in the field and first hand accounts will enrich the evidence being brought forward at this time. Similarly, at this juncture, I would also request that the work of Professor David Lindenmayer and his team be given serious consideration and that he be one of the key people brought forward to address the inquiry.

The rapid trajectory the extinction of the Leadbeater Possum and old growth forest within this region is unbearably painful for me. In an attempt to avert it, I have met ongoing opposition and continue to receive the message from members of Government and their agencies, especially those who have a vested financial interest in the continuing harvesting generalized statements that pay lip service to the evidence which is before them. For me responses have demonstrated a badly articulated notion around sustainability. (See attachments. letter from DSE 16th November, 2011 in response to my letter of 9th July, 2011 and 9th August, 2011) (Attachments 2,3,4)

The position of the Victorian Ballieu Government regarding logging, anywhere in this state was reinforced on ABC radio by Mr Ballieu on 9th August, 2011…quote

Peter from Bundoora*: Why is the wood chipping in the Warbarton rangers going ahead again at a nominal rate of payment and those magnificent forests premier they are worth more than woodchips there are eco services and benefits are priceless, can you answer that please.*

Mr Ballieu*: Well I make this point in the timber industry the coupes have been identified. Logging takes place logging there has been on a reduced basis..the timber industry has been struggling with changes over the last 10 years, we haven't made any changes to those coupes since we have come to office and the product is used for a variety of purpose whether it is for scantling, whether it is for furniture or for otherwise and that will proceed. We will certainly continue to support the timber industry it is not taking in anything hasn't already been identified as appropriate and contracted to that extent.*

The system that is currently enforced to register endangered species and take care of them is fundamentally flawed. As recently written by Tim Flannery [1]we now know that listed species is scattered, partial and out of date. Listed species require an action management plan. No plan, no obligation or accountability to save the species. The listing process and subsequent implementation of action plans is fraught with problems. Listings only usually occur as a result of people in the field passionate about observing, discovering and protecting species,

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[1] Flannery, T, Quarterly Essay After the Future Australia's New Extinction Crisis No 48, 2012

taking action. This has fed loopholes that allow current logging and determinate practices to weaken the protection that ALL species rightly deserve.

We are weak on the ground. No government appears to be prepared to sink monies into discovering, appreciating and maintaining our biodiversity. Effective management of our national and state parks and forests is the one of the many steps that could be taken to head off the rapid rate of extinction for certain fauna and flora. These areas need to be become strongly identified as OFF LIMITS for political gain. Similarly, the serious consideration to the work of Professor David Lindenmyer regarding effective management of our forests, the protection of habitat and the economic gains available NOW. By changing attitudes toward the economic viability of forests from woodchip to carbon sink, through stimulating economic investments allowing private and government bodies to realistic engage in measurable sustainability for the good of the WHOLE.

We already are witnesses to what the environment looks like when environmental regulation and species protection is lacking, worldwide. The evidence is before us in the change of air and water quality, species dying. For me personally and for those whom I have shared the Toolangi Forests, a sense of deep grief and despair where lush forest once stood, wildlife roamed, fungi and other organisms co-existed balancing the whole of life, gone in a slash, bash and grab to feed paper greed. (See poetry-attachment 5)

Bottom line, please do not hand to the State Government the responsibility for protecting our fauna and flora. The current track record is reinforcing extinction of precious species, Our natural diversity is a precious inheritance that we hold in trust for future generations, therefore it needs a BIG PICTURE approach by governments, private companies and passionate human beings in order of us (Australians) to demonstrate leadership in environmental protection. We need to articulate ideas that grow from intimate experience of nature.

Thank you for your consideration and I wish you well in your deliberations holding the complexity of the severity of Australia's environmental problems.

Yours sincerely,
MARY WHITE rsm

PERSONAL NOTES FROM JOURNAL OF MARY WHITE
SAVE SYLVIA CREEK PROTEST JULY 2011

1. The campaign started very quickly. I was thrusted into action. My motivation strongly influenced by the fact that this logging was happening in my own back yard. It was the area in which a lot of Glenburn teaching was experienced with our bushwalks, walk the land and more.
2. The campaign gained intensity each day with constant emails, phone messages, alerts about the actions being taken by VicForests, DSE, Government, Media and campaigners.
3. The weather was very COLD, WET AND WINDY as bitter as the battle that was being fought
4. I had to spend a lot of time drafting material for letters and mail outs. I had to learn more about the fact and get underneath the high emotions that were causing through me in order to write factually and with empathy.
5. There were deadlines to meet regarding media releases, which I directed toward the YEA Chronicle. I had never dealt with media at this level before, a huge learning curve. I was approached to speak to media, namely the ABC.
6. Putting yourself in the frontline of protest movement, the constant taking of photographs by media and DSE personal is confronting…
7. Facing DSE personnel who intimidate you..the constant treats of being arrested.
8. Meetings at Toolangi, where we were informed about our rights if arrests. Obtaining material of ones legal position gave some relief…however the tension of being arrested was constant and real.
9. Balancing the tension of speaking out and not being understood…
10. There was and is a high emotional toll due to my personality and disposition. I do get assistance with this, however it is at cost.
11. The heightening of ones awareness around any form of forestry logging is now a permanent state. The trauma is embedded in the psyche
12. It has stirred me to read more and become more active in research and writing, rather than the upfront work.
13. A deep appreciation that the need for grief work and the development of a language of spirituality for such justice issues

For the Forests we Stand
For the Forests we Speak
For the Forests we Grieve
For the Forests we Rise

Mary White
25th March, 2012

Centre for Ecology & Spirituality
183 Burns Rd. Glenburn. 3717
Victoria, Australia

22nd July, 2011

Dear

LOGGING SYLVIA CREEK FOREST

I regularly take visitors who come to our centre (from interstate and overseas) for drives and walks through the Toolangi Forest. I am extremely disturbed at what is happening to this pristine forest now.

The latest coupe, which VicForests and DSE have confirmed, contains old growth trees. These are meant to be protected. Concessions have now been made by VicForests by removing three hectares of old growth and rainforest from their logging plans, but the chainsaws are into the remaining forests today.

There appears to be a broad terms of reference regarding the measuring of habitat for the endangered Leadbeater's Possum. Over half of the Leadbeater's Possum forests habitat was destroyed in the Black Saturday bushfires, so it does not make sense that these areas continue to be stressed through logging.

Unfortunately lots of debates by all parties involved in this logging are intermingled with elements of truth, however from where I stand it appears that a culture of mistrust has grown within the framed issue of "sustainability and culture of best practice". The voice of the forest, which is a mixed aged forest containing old growth component in it, is being muffled out. How can 60-70 year old Mountain Ash obtain old growth status? In 50 years time, this will be the old growth forest for the next generation. Similarly, carbon is very political at this time. Can we afford to remove the precious resource, which contains the highest amount of carbon?

Can we obtain a halt to logging now? Valuable information is at hand from the people on the ground. Similarly, VicForests, Dept of Sustainability and Environment and other bodies hold information. We need to broker a peaceful resolution, which is possible, and remove the blurred lines of demarcation and responsibility.

I seek your urgent assistance and action on this matter.

Yours sincerely,

MARY WHITE rsm

Centre for Ecology & Spirituality
183 Burns Rd. Glenburn. 3717
Victoria, Australia

9th August, 2011

Hon Peter Walsh
Minister for Agriculture and Food Security
Level 20
1 Spring Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Mr Walsh

LOGGING SYLVIA CREEK TOOLANGI

I refer to my letter sent by email on 22nd July, to the Premier, regarding this matter, which was forwarded to you by his Chief of Staff on 5th August, 2011.

I became very distressed today to hear Mr Baillieu's response to a question put by Peter of Bundoora on ABC radio at 8.50am. Mr Baillieu stated his position regarding logging, namely that he will continue to support the timber industry based on determinations made under the previous government.

One could perceive Mr Ballieu and therefore your governments support of illegal logging practises being employed by VicForest in the said region. DSE have found Pre-1900 trees in the western end of the Sylvia Creek Coupe after a ground survey took place 3 days after logging had commenced. VicForests deny the logging of old growth forests. The assessment process has failed, Detailed mapping in the coupes has been carried out by ecological consultant Jaques Cop and others. We, concerned residents, are frustrated by the lack of detailing being carried out by VicForests who have acknowledged that they do not produce maps to identify where Pre-1900 trees and Leadbeater habitat are located.

Mr Walsh I urge you to intervene and broker a peaceful solution. Surely you will rest easy, when in your governments support of the timber industry, you know that best practise really has been implemented, rather than relying on the spin of various departments justifying a bottom line.

Valuable information is at hand from people on the ground. Similarly, VicForests, Dept of Sustainability and Environment and other bodies hold information which could resolve this current conflict.

Yours sincerely,

MARY WHITE rsm
Also sent to:
Hon Ted Baillieu, Hon Cindy McLeish

Department of Sustainability and Environment

8 Nicholson Street
PO Box 500
East Melbourne Victoria 8002
Australia
Telephone: (03) 9637 8000
Facsimile: (03) 9637 8100
ABN 90 719 052 204
DX 210098

Ref: CC0048710

File:

Ms Mary White

16 November 2011

Dear Ms White

TIMBER HARVESTING IN THE TOOLANGI AREA

Thank you for your correspondence to the Hon Ryan Smith MP, Minister for Environment and Climate Change, regarding timber harvesting in the Toolangi area. As this matter falls within my area of responsibility, the Minister has asked me to respond on his behalf.

Public policy over forestry and native timber harvesting has endured a history of often heated and emotional debate which has tended to unnecessarily divide communities.

The Victorian Government believes a balanced approach that ensures long term environmental protection of valued species and habitat can be achieved, whilst at the same time supporting a sustainable forest industry, providing employment to around 11,000 Victorians.

More than 3.5 million hectares of Victorian native forest is permanently protected in national parks and conservation reserves. Timber harvesting occurs on only 0.08 per cent of Victoria's total 6.7 million hectare public native forest estate annually. The timber sourced from public forests is used for quality hardwood products such as furniture, flooring and other building materials, as well as in writing and office paper.

Timber production operates within world-standard forestry management practices that are subject to continuous improvement and are scientifically based to ensure forest values are recognised and conserved. The state-owned company that manages forest harvesting, VicForests, is certified under the Australian Forestry Standard which is internationally recognised by the world's largest forest certification scheme.

Harvesting in the Central Highlands is focused on regrowth forests, areas that have either been logged previously or devastated by bushfire. No 'old growth' Ash Eucalypt forest is harvested in the Central Highlands. All pre-1900 origin trees are protected from timber harvesting to safeguard the ecological value of these trees as habitat.

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State Government Victoria

In this regard harvesting in public forests under the Victorian Government's policy is a genuinely sustainable industry. Harvested trees are replaced by new trees, which grow over time, restoring the values that are appreciated by Victorians and visitors to our state.

There is an extensive reserve system within the Central Highlands region designed to protect Leadbeaters' Possum habitat. No timber harvesting is permitted within these reserves.

The Victorian Government takes the protection of our natural environment seriously. Victoria has precious ecosystems and we are committed to preserving our native species and habitat for the enjoyment of future generations.

A responsible balance can be achieved in Victoria with a sustainable, long-term native forestry industry guaranteeing employment and prosperity for thousands of families, and supplying quality hardwood timber for use, whilst at the same time protecting the important environmental assets and native species valued by all.

Timber harvesting operations planned by VicForests in coupe 297-526-0001 (Gun Barrel) near Toolangi have been stopped pending the outcome of proceedings in the Supreme Court of Victoria relating to its compliance with statutory provisions. Given the pending court action it is inappropriate to comment on the particulars of this matter.

Thank you for writing on this issue.

Yours sincerely

Lee Miezis
Executive Director, Forest & Parks

FOREST STAND

The Forest of Toolangi is a symphony
Of ancient beings and ever new
The forest is a holy mystery
Forever calling inside of you

Mountain Ash in its grandeur stands
Leadbeater Possum poised in humble adoration
Mountain Pepper and Correa
Dress circle, features

Ferns of ancient origin
Fungi to numerous to name
Trace pristine landscape
Music of stream
creek accompanied
Toolangi Forest my name

Crash, Trash and Crab
Pull, tug and rip open
Burn, scorn, lay barren
The heart of my existence

Paper product
Human Greed
Powers in high places, silent
One big trip, on speed

It's not to late
Shift gear, reverse
Let the symphony of forest
Carry you
over the hump of this dilemma

Forest aspirations
written on every leaf, twig and branch.
The lungs of human existence
Given half the chance

Listen, wish
See me, you
Toolangi heart
Land

Mary White
2nd August, 2011