Additional Submission for Senate Committee

Inquiry into the Status, Health and Sustainability of Australia's Koala Population

Anthony Amis – Friends of the Earth Melbourne 10/8/11

I would like to add additional information in regards to my presentation and submission to the Senate Committee.

This information pertains to some of the intricacies of the Strzelecki Ranges and its land tenure and history. I believe that the submission and statements by Hancock Victorian Plantations over simplifies these issues.

Firstly I was disappointed that the CEO of Hancock Victorian Plantations, Linda Sewell, was not asked further questions from the Committee in regards to the statement made by Ms Sewell, that the company does not log native forest. If you look at many of the photos in my original submission you will see that this statement is a falsehood.

Secondly, there is a presumption being made that the Strzeleckis was cleared farmland and that trees were hand planted on the farmland to eventually become the trees that Hancock is now logging. I tried to explain that many trees targeted for logging by the company could have self seeded inside 'plantation boundaries' and may have been remnants along gully lines, roadsides and natural regeneration. These trees can be logged during normal logging operations and if grown inside 'plantation boundaries' are regarded as being plantation ingrowth by the company. Likewise plantation boundaries are essentially lines on maps, in areas of indigenous reforestation, when does the planted area start and who is monitoring to make sure that logging contractors do not take trees that are growing on the edge or outside of the 'plantation boundary'. Responsibility for enforcing the Code of Forest Practices is carried out by local government.

College Creek is an interesting example of the complications of land tenure in the Strzeleckis. The land is located on the north side of the Strzelecki Ranges and was(?) Under 60 year lease under the Wood Pulp Agreement Act 1967. Widespread logging occurred in the College Creek catchment in the mid 1970's by Australian Paper Manufacturers. However from a 1967 aerial photo provided on the next page, it is clearly shown that College Creek was a mixture of old growth, regrowth and rainforest. Photos from the 1930's may show some clearing in the catchment from the 1930's and 1940's (I don't have copies of these photos), however even if one accepts the argument that the catchment was logged in the past, by the late 1960's the catchment was regenerating back as native forest, which was then clearfelled in the 1970s, with the clearfelled areas replanted with indigenous MountainAsh. Some remnant trees would have also seeded into the logged areas.

The College Creek catchment is unusual because of its;

Location. A northerly facing aspect and the significance of its flora and fauna.

The extent of Cool Temperate Rainforest, listed under schedule 3 of the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act, is larger than that contained within Tarra Bulga National Park.

The area is mapped as an endangered and rare Ecological Vegetation Community, EVC, in Victoria.

Rare and vascular plant species identified by the Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DNRE) botanists and plant specimens lodged with the Victorian Herbarium.

Slender Cyathea cunninghamii Rr (and Skirted Tree Ferns to be listed) - Rare in Australia and rare

in Victoria.

The stronghold in Victoria for the Slender Fork fern, Tmesipteris elongata Rv - Rare (in Australia) and vulnerable (in Victoria) abd is known in only 3 localities in Australia.

Oval Fork fern Tmesipteris ovata r-Rare in Victoria. State Significance.

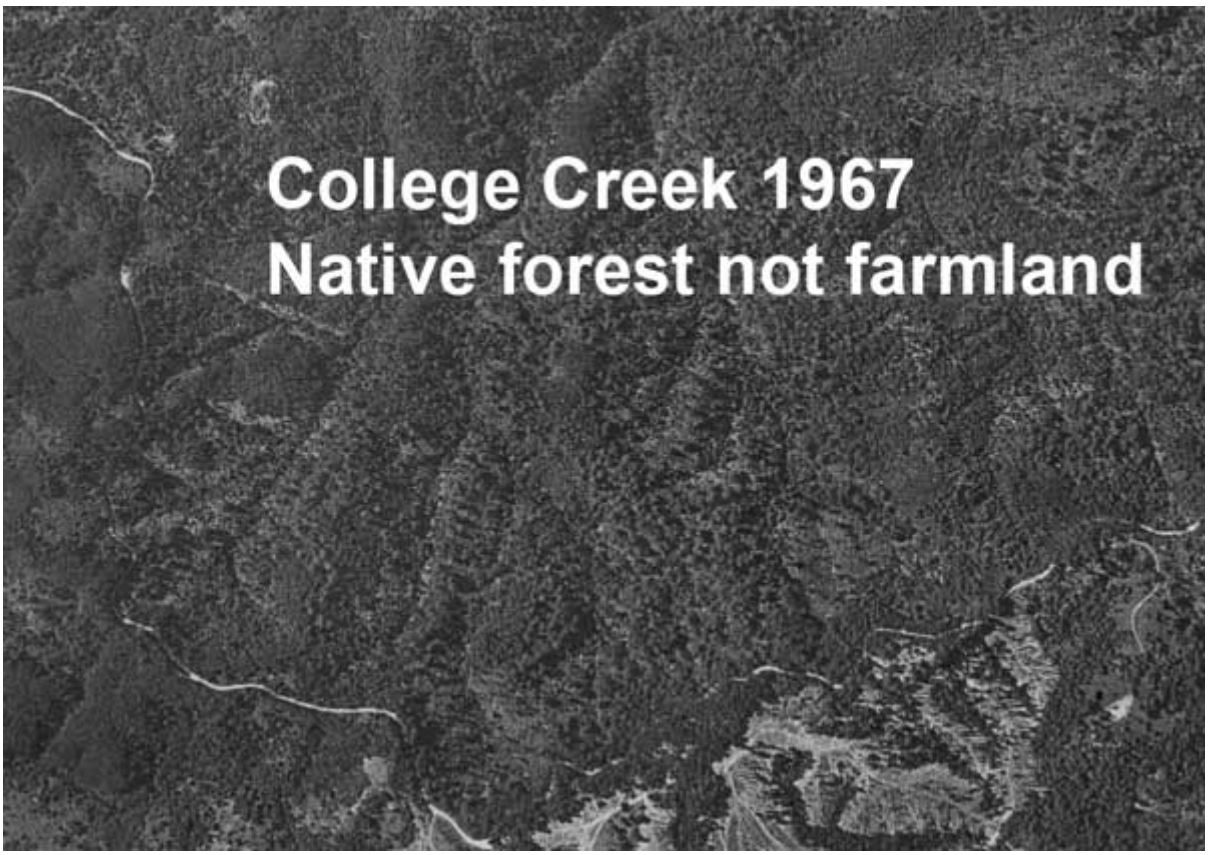
River Hook sedge Unicia nemoralis r-Rare in Victoria.

Rare Fauna includes identified by samples sent to Barbara Triggs and DNRE Zoologists identifying recorded Owl calls.

The Broad tooth-rat with a restricted habitat and disjunct distribution in Victoria.
Strzelecki (endemic) Koala.
Yellow-bellied Glider (chewballs and sighting). State significance outside its recorded range. Requires further verification. Powerful Owl - threatened species listed under Schedule 2 of the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act. dependent upon hollow bearing trees.
The Strzelecki burrowing Crayfish provisional listing under Schedule 2 of the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act.

To then claim that this catchment is merely a plantation planted on cleared farmland clearly underplays its actual importance. The catchment has again been targeted for logging over the past couple of years placing more pressure on the long term survival of many of its species and cool temperate rainforest.

August 2010. The only koala sited at College Creek by Friends of Gippsland Bush/Friends of the Earth since clearfelling commenced in the catchment in early 2009.



College Creek 1967

College Creek 1999

The Monash University Study

In July 2010 I attended a meeting convened by , who was at that time an advisor to then Environment Minister Gavin Jennings. The meeting was held in the lead up to the 2010 State election as a way to see if there were any issues that Friends of the Earth wanted to raise with the Labor Government. There were several issues brought up at the meeting, one being logging of native forest near W-Tree in East Gippsland, one being construction of a golf course 1km above the offtake to Melbourne's drinking water supply at Sugarloaf Reservoir and the issue of the Strzelecki Koala. In regards to the koala, a representative said that work was being conducted on the genetics of the animal by Monash University. When I pressed for more information I was told that the DSE would get back to me.

In response to my query I was told that the Monash Study was in the process of getting funding, which meant that it hadn't started at all. I emailed both on July 16 regarding this problem and never got a response.

Comments regarding State Government role from email dated 16/7/10.

To

"Thanks

From the meeting we had earlier this month I was given the impression this new study by Monash University had already commenced. Obviously it hasn't. In summary from your email I can summise the following.

1. *The Monash Project has not started and is reliant on funds that have not been approved as yet.*
2. *The Monash Project could take some years to finish (if it goes ahead).*
3. *The Monash Project will replicate work soon to be published on Strzelecki Koala Genetics. It will also carry out survey work whose methodology could be questioned.*
4. *Hancock will produce a brochure in the next few weeks and a strategy later in the year. (I should point out that the state government are now caretakers of Hancock's custodial land after the Strzelecki Cores and Links deal which handed back 20,000ha+ of land back to the State in August 2009.*

   the State now has responsibility for the 'lions share' of koala habitat in the Strzeleckis. I would argue that this fact alone means that the State should be taking a far greater role in this matter.
5. *The Survey work could be done in a much shorter timeframe by Steve Phillips and team who have the expertise and track record in this field. This is what he specialises in. He is arguably the best in his field. He also won't have to replicate the genetic work as it has already been completed. I cannot stress strongly enough that the situation with the Strzelecki Koala is dire. It cannot wait several more years to get results (if the Monash study even gets off the ground). The genetic work has already been completed, all we need to do now is the survey work.*

Can I suggest that we arrange a meeting with Steve Phillips in Melbourne ASAP to discuss this urgent matter further. He would also be able to provide a methodology for his survey work. It may also be good to have Tristan Lee at the meeting who can give a presentation about what his new study has found. Steve would this be possible? I still believe that support on the survey initiative would be a very Steve would this be possible? I still believe that support on the survey initiative would be a very positive thing to announce in the lead up to the election. Regards Anthony"

In their March 2011 Koala Brochure Hancock Victorian Plantations again make reference to the supposed study by Monash University. The point of concern which I want to make is that the genetic work has already been done, by Houlden in the 1990's and now by Tristan Lee in soon to be published Australian Mammology. Any further work on the Koala genetics could take years and it could be argued that extracting DNA from koala faeces may not be as accurate as the methods which Tristan Lee employed.

The real work that is desperately required is koala population counts and assessing breeding populations. This work should start now, not at some unspecified time in 5 or so years. A methodology has already been developed by Steve Phillips in NSW and it may be worthwhile for the committee to contact Mr Phillips.

By that time Hancock will have exhausted the majority of their Mountain Ash 'plantations'.

As I pointed out in my original submission, Hancock has publicly known about the significance of the Strzelecki Koala since October 2000. The supposed koala atlas is not in the public realm and what I have seen is that it deliberately avoids mapping Mountain Ash forest, which is the forest that Hancock largely target.

ORGANISATIONS ANNOUNCE JOINT KOALA PROTECTION INITIATIVE: INTERNATIONAL ZOOLOGISTS JOIN INDEPENDENT STUDY.

MELBOURNE OCTOBER 2, 2000 - Hancock Victorian Plantations (HVP) and the Australian Koala Foundation (AKF) announced a joint Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and the beginning of field studies to learn more about koalas and their habitat on HVP's leasehold properties in the Strzelecki Ranges of Victoria.

In a joint announcment, Kevin White, chief executive officer of HVP, and Deborah Tabart, executive director of AKF, said the memorandum - which provides for an independent year-long review of koala population and habitat preferences - is expected to lead to a comprehensive forest management plan involving protection for the species in the Strzeleckis.

White and Tabart said the MOU provides a framework for obtaining scientifically credible data on koala populations, critical habitat and future habitat needs. The desired outcome is a management strategy to meet the long-term needs of the koalas in the region as well as the commercial interests of HVP's investors.

The MOU was signed by both parties earlier in the year after talks began last December. It is the first such agreement between the AKF and a timber operating company.

Field studies begin today led by AKF's head of conservation research, Mr John Callahan along with zookeepers from five major North American zoos: Toronto, San Francisco, Bergin, San Diego and Disney's Animal Kingdom. Dr Wayne Marion wildlife manager for Hancock Timber Resource Group, also will participate.

"The scientific community regards the Strzelecki koala population as making an important contribution to the national koala gene pool" Mr White said. "This MOU along with the field studies, will hopefully lead to a situation where critical koala habitat on HVP's holdings will be permanently protected."

Tabart said "This MOU and the final Koala Habitat Atlas that will be produced could lead the way to sustainable logging by all companies in the Strzelecki Ranges. The koalas in this region are critical to the future of Victorian koalas and we are delighted that HVP understands their scientific importance."

The Koala Habitat Atlas is a project that aims to rank, identify and map critical habitat in a given area. The project already has received a Computerworld Smithsonian Award of Innovative Use of Technology. "These maps will enable us to find the critical koala habitat on the property" said Tabart. "Until that is done, it is difficult to predict whether forest operations are affecting the koala population. We do acknowledge that HVP has effectively set aside large conservation areas in its policy not to log native forests. The maps will give certainty to HVP investors, the AKF and most importantly, the koalas" Tabart said.

Whilst HVP is owned jointly by US and Australian pension funds and infrastructure investors, the Melbourne-based company is overseen by the Hancock Timber Resource Group (HTRG), the world's leading timberland investment management organisation for institutional investors. HTRG is a wholly owned subsidiary of Boston-based John Hancock Financial Services, Inc. (NYSE:JHF)

AKF is a privately funded international organisation whose prime focus and aim is the long-term conservation and effective management of the wild koala in Australia. The organization has offices in Brisbane, New York, Washington and Tokyo.

For more information please contact:
Deborah Tabart. Executive Director, AKF
Ann Sharp, General Manager, AKF (up to 29 Sept)
John Callaghan, Principal Ecologist, AKF who will be in the field