



24 February 2011

Stephen Palethorpe
Committee Secretary
Senate References Committee on Environment and Communications

Dear Sir,

RE: Senate inquiry into the status, health and sustainability of Australia's koala population

Thankyou for the opportunity to respond to a submission put to your committee that makes assertions about HVP Plantations and our plantation activities. This response clarifies 4 points:

- HVP does not harvest native forest
- Agreements made by HVP, specifically the Cores and Links Agreement
- The credibility behind our culture and practices
- HVP's koala program

HVP does not harvest native forest

Referring to the Strzelecki Ranges in a book published in 1991, Dr F.R. Moulds, chairman of the Forest Commission Victoria from 1969 to 1978 wrote,

“More than 20,000 ha of plantations (softwoods and hardwoods) were to be successfully established by both the Forests Commission and Australian Paper Manufacturers Ltd, including those on the land leased by the Commission to APM for reforestation purposes.”¹

If ‘Strzelecki public forests’ have been treated differently from all other public forests in the state, it is because they are plantations rather than native forest, established for the encouragement of local industries.²

Understanding the history of the Strzelecki Ranges is pivotal to placing debates about the Strzelecki Ranges into perspective. Much of the Strzelecki Ranges was previously failed farmland which had been cleared for settlement but by the 1920s, turned derelict and in many cases abandoned. The area has largely been re-established to softwood and hardwood plantations, underwritten by significant long term capital investment from public and private sources.

Over half of our Mountain Ash plantations, a species local to the area, were established by a paper making company, APM. The State owned plantations were sold to HVP by the Victorian State Government in 1998 as working plantations with the expectation that the company would continue to provide industry with timber resources and maintain the regional jobs they provide.

HVP do not harvest native forest. Around 40% of land managed by HVP in the Strzelecki Ranges is native forest. This forest is permanently protected by a Land Management

Cooperative Agreement with the State Government which was part of the “Cores and Links Agreement”. Our estate in the Strzelecki Ranges therefore consists of a mosaic of permanently protected native forest and a network of protected vegetation corridors that intersect plantations of various ages and species. Considering the destructive early history of the Strzelecki Ranges, this forest and plantation mosaic has enhanced the koala habitat and will continue to do so.

Agreements

The fundamental issue behind the FOGB grievance is that they wish to not see hardwood plantations in the Strzelecki Ranges harvested. This point is difficult to find common ground on, given that we are a plantation company and own the plantations in question. That is not to say that we haven't implemented numerous and various agreements to maximise values other than timber production that are important to the community. We believe that most community members appreciate the healthy balance that has been achieved in the Strzelecki Ranges between conservation and industry benefits.

HVP honour the many agreements it has made as well as those made by our predecessors. The 'Cores and Links' is the name given to a series of 'core' areas nominated in the Strzelecki Ranges that are 'linked by other areas that are designed to represent corridors. In 2001, HVP agreed to a moratorium on harvesting plantations within the Cores and Links area while a wide range of stakeholders discussed how best to manage the competing needs of the Strzelecki plantations. A final agreement could not be reached with all the stakeholders and so the Victorian Government and HVP worked together to secure in 2008 the balanced outcome we have today which encompasses much of the discussions preceding the final agreement. The final agreement culminated many years of work and has resulted very much in a net positive outcome. This outcome includes over 20,000ha of native forest immediately and permanently protected and the formation of a new 8000ha publicly owned reserve. For further information on the Cores and Links, an information brochure can be found at <http://www.hvp.com.au/index.php?sectionid=61> .

The credibility behind our culture and practices

HVP has a culture formalised in our Forest Stewardship System that aims to minimise any potentially negative impacts our operations may have on environmental and social values. The credibility and legitimacy of our practices are supported by two internationally recognised and independently audited forest management certification standards. Environmental standards for private forestry are regulated in a similar fashion to public forests through the legislated Code of Practice for Timber Production.

For a balanced view on our approach to community relations, management in the Strzelecki Ranges or our activities in regard to koalas, we suggest you speak to Gippsland shires, local Landcare Networks, the Balook and Districts Residents Association (BADRA), local CFA brigades, Monash University Gippsland and Peter Menkhorst, consultant koala expert to the DSE.

Koala Program

HVP recognise that the koala is an iconic species and that the general public expect land managers to act responsibly in regard to its conservation. Together with a reputable national group with a very high level of expertise in koala management, HVP commissioned and produced a koala habitat atlas. This work identified the primary koala habitat on HVP managed land. The Mountain Ash plantations in the Strzelecki Ranges were not identified to be primary habitat. HVP do however manage about half of the native forest koala primary habitat in the Strzelecki Ranges. All of this area is permanently protected.

The Black Saturday fires burnt about 50% of HVP primary koala habitat demonstrating the real threat that wildfire represents to the koala population in the Strzelecki Ranges. HVP recognise this point and have structured our koala management plan accordingly. HVP are also heavily involved in a Gippsland and state-wide arson prevention program. Our fire protection, planning and fire-fighting activities on Black Saturday were commended by the Bushfire Royal Commission.

A copy of our koala brochure can be found at <http://www.hvp.com.au/index.php?sectionid=79> which outlines our strategies. HVP are involved in a number of positive initiatives with interested groups within the community. These are outlined in an accompanying letter.

Conclusion

HVP have a different perspective from that depicted by FOGB. Native forest on HVP land is protected. Investment by the plantation industry has resulted in the reforestation of a once degraded landscape. This achievement has allowed 60 years of sustainable, carbon positive wood production that has resulted in a robust industry, long term regional employment, the production of many useful and 'import replacing' products, and substantial enhancement of environmental values including koala habitat. HVP have a culture, backed up by dual forest management certification that aims to minimise any potential negative impacts from our operations. Overall, we see our management in the Strzelecki Ranges as having an overwhelmingly net positive outcome.

Malcolm Tonkin
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¹ F.R. Moulds, 1991, *The Dynamic Forest: A History of Forestry and Forest Industries in Victoria*, Lynedoch Publications, p.117.

² F.R. Moulds, 1976, 'Foreword' in *The Strzeleckis: A New Future for the Heartbreak Hills*, W.S Noble, Forest Commission Victoria.



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Dear Sir,

RE: Senate inquiry into the status, health and sustainability of Australia's koala population

A copy of our koala brochure can be found at <http://www.hvp.com.au/index.php?sectionid=79>. This brochure outlines the history of the Strzelecki Ranges, the status of the koala to the best of our knowledge, and the various initiatives we are involved in to enhance the status of the Strzelecki koala. Specifically, the initiatives are as follows:

- Mapping and classification of the ecological vegetation classes managed by HVP in Gippsland
- Australian Koala Foundation commissioned to produce a Koala Habitat Atlas for HVP managed land in the Strzelecki Ranges
- Long term biodiversity monitoring plots
- Research project with Monash University exploring the genetics of the Strzelecki koala
- Developing a koala census technique with Monash University
- An operating standard that was developed with advice from Peter Menkhorst, consultant koala expert to the Department of Sustainability and Environment.
- Koala training for our operators, planners and supervisors which was conducted by Peter Menkhorst and Colleen Wood (from Southern Ash Wildlife Shelter)
- Establishing wildlife corridors in liaison with other groups such as Trust for Nature, Landcare groups and the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority. The aim of building corridors is to connect koala habitat on HVP land to isolated stands of habitat external to HVP on land which has largely remained cleared of native vegetation.
- HVP also have a number of other policies and projects that are consistent with enhancing the status of the Strzelecki Koala including planting road easements with native trees, participation in pest animal and plant control programs, preserving eucalypt plantation trees for various reasons and restoring areas of native forest.

HVP do not harvest native forest. Native forest is managed for stewardship and conservation purposes.

Yours sincerely,

Malcolm Tonkin
General Manager, Stewardship and Risk