



## Minister for Agriculture and Food Security

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Dear Ms Storey,

- 8 NOV 2012

### LEADBEATER'S POSSUM PROTECTION

Thank you for your correspondence of 28 September 2012 regarding the protection of Leadbeater's Possum habitat and the judgement of Justice Osborn in *MyEnvironment vs VicForests* [2012].

The Government is aware of Justice Osborn's findings in this case, which found in favour of VicForests. The Government accepts the judgement of the Court.

Under the Coalition Government there are over 3 million hectares of Victorian native forest permanently protected in national parks and conservation reserves.

Timber harvesting occurs on only 0.08 per cent of Victoria's total 6.6 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. 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. It is policy that no 'old growth' Ash Eucalypt forest is harvested in the Central Highlands and a 'Giant Tree' protection policy has been implemented to safeguard the ecological value of these trees as habitat.

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

All coupes are inspected prior to harvesting for the presence of habitat suitable for Leadbeater's Possum. Any areas that meet the criteria as habitat for the Possum are by

policy strictly excluded from timber harvesting to protect the animal's population. 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.

Calculations of the sustainable level of harvesting have taken into account the impact of major bushfire events over recent years.

I note that your letter calls separately for reviews of a) the Comprehensive Adequate and Representative (CAR) Reserve System in the Central Highlands; b) of Special Protection Zones; and also c) of the Leadbeater's Possum Action Statement. In each case you also propose a predetermined outcome, undermining the integrity of the respective review requests.

The Baillieu-Ryan 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 wealth for thousands of families, supplying quality hardwood timber for use whilst at the same time protecting the important environmental assets and native species valued by all.

Thank you for your interest in the environmental protections adhered to by Victoria's sustainable native forest industry.

Yours sincerely

**Peter Walsh MLA**  
Minister for Agriculture and Food Security