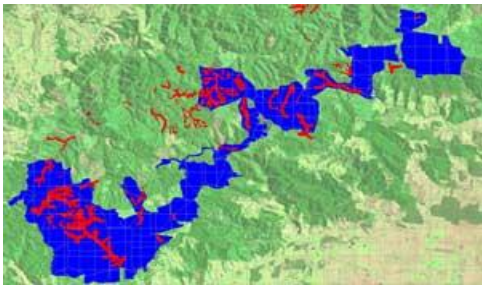


Dec 2016 Brief summary of the 20 year campaign to establish the Strzelecki Cores and Links Reserve.

Leaflet produced by Friends of the Earth and Friends of Gippsland Bush



The Strzelecki's have the least amount of land set aside in Parks and Reserves in any forested region of Victoria. The Strzelecki's has only 2% of the original vegetation protected in where the minimum requirement for public land is supposed to be 15%.

1937: APM Pulp and Paper Mill begins production at Maryvale.

1940's-1990's: APM establish thousands of hectares of Radiata Pine and Mountain Ash/Bluegum plantations in the Strzeleckis and Central Gippsland. This land was eventually sold to Hancock Victorian Plantations in 2001.

1949-1992: Hardwood Mt.Ash reforestation by the State Government begins in the Strzeleckis. Land reforested with hardwood totalled 7251ha

by 1992. The peak year for hardwood reforestation was 1978 (372.1ha). This land was corporatized in 1993 into Victorian Plantations Corporation, and sold to Hancock Victorian Plantations in 1998.

1962-1992: Softwood reforestation by the State Government begins in the Gippsland region. 15,207ha of pine eventually planted, with the peak planting year being 1977 (1179.7ha).). This land was corporatized in 1993 into Victorian Plantations Corporation, and sold to Hancock Victorian Plantations in 1998.

1966: Wood Pulp Agreement Act sees thousands of hectares of land on the north face of the Strzeleckis allowed to be converted to tree plantations for the Maryvale Pulp Mill. Many areas, including College Creek had regenerated back from earlier land clearing. This land was eventually sold to Hancock Victorian Plantations in 2001.

1976/77: Hundreds of hectares of College Creek logged and replanted with Mt Ash. The logged forest contained old growth and 40-50 year old native forest regeneration.

1993: State's Plantations Corporatised, through creation of Victorian Plantations Corporation. This included large areas of native forest surrounded by plantations and reforestation in the Strzelecki Ranges. Due to legislative concessions and exemptions the industry was not subject to public land processes and planning provisions for the removal of native vegetation. This led to a situation where sites of National and State significance and many threatened species had no protection.

Under the VPC Act 1993 forests formerly owned by the Forest Commission, were excised from public land and leased in perpetuity. This

Act allowed all forests within the leased area, including native bush, to be converted and used for the sole purpose of plantation production.

Cores and Links Negotiation History

Mid 1990's Trust for Nature's Regional Manager Anne Westwood, identifies remaining native forest in the Strzelecki's as the highest priority for broad-scale conservation in West Gippsland.

1996-2003: Local conservationists Susie Zent and Elaina Fraser map most of the rainforests of the Strzelecki Ranges. College Creek (leased by Amcor) identified as a conservation priority for the region.

1996: Amcor apply for clearance of 1950ha of native forest throughout Gippsland. Friends of Gippsland Bush (FoGB) formed to oppose clearing.

1996: Friends of the Earth (FoE) and FoGB start a 20 year alliance for greater protection of the Strzelecki Ranges. (A separate campaign was also started to establish a 30,000ha National Park in the region).

1997 March: 8 Point agreement signed between Amcor and FoGB stops logging in 87% of the forest (1700ha) that Amcor wanted to clear in 1996.

1998 October: State Government sells Victorian Plantations Corporation to HVP – essentially meaning that much of the Strzelecki's was now classed as private land. **There was no public consultation and the region was also excluded from Regional Forest Agreements, the community was outraged at this lack of public consultation.**

1999: LABOR SAYS IT WILL “ENSURE PROTECTION OF ALL CONSERVATION AREAS IN THE STRZELECKI RANGES”

1999: Community disquiet led to the establishment of the STRZELECKI WORKING GROUP (SWG) The group comprised of Latrobe, Wellington and South Gippsland Shires, the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority, Hancock Victorian Plantations Pty Ltd (HVP) and its subsidiary Grand Ridge Plantations (GRP) along with community groups and the Trust for Nature in 2001.

1999: The SWG engaged Biosis Research to assess the conservation values of HVP holdings in the Strzelecki Ranges. The Strzelecki Ranges Biodiversity Study 2001.

The report detailed high conservation forests of the Strzelecki's. Much of the high conservation value land was under HVP control and classed as private land. The report also recommended 250m on cool temperate rainforest of the region, effectively meaning no logging within key rainforest catchment boundaries.

The Cores and Links concept was born, linking Gunyah Gunyah Reserve in the West to Tarra Bulga National Park in the East. There are 5 core areas, Gunyah, College Creek, Jack River, Tarra-Bulga (already reserved) and Merriman's Catchment. These are all sites of National, State and or Regional conservation significance and have been identified as areas of high biodiversity value. The five core areas and associated habitat links were identified as focal points for biodiversity and included areas of Cool Temperate Rainforest, Warm Temperate Rainforest and populations of rare, threatened and endangered flora and fauna, which are vulnerable to disturbances.

2000: Hancock Watch website started by FoE to document logging practices in the Strzeleckis. Site is still operating in 2016. hancockwatch.nfshost.com

2001: The State Government was approached by the SWG in 2001 to facilitate a buyback and provide fair compensation to HVP to relinquish its harvesting rights in 2400 hectares of Eucalypt in the 8400 hectares of the Cores and Links.

2001 September: Australian Paper Estate sold to Hancock Victorian Plantations. This sale included the College Creek leasehold.

2002: The Department of Natural Resources and Environment removed itself from the Strzelecki Working Group and negotiations.

2003: Trust for Nature and The Nature Conservancy offer to facilitate buy back negotiations on behalf of the community.

The Trust had the support of the state, was an independent statutory authority with its own legislative rights, and was seen to be an honest broker which specialised in reservation processes.

2004 October: A MOU was signed by Trust for Nature, the Nature Conservancy and Grand Ridge Plantations (HVP). The aim was to approach the government to provide a mechanism whereby the sites identified in the Biodiversity Study could be provided with permanent protection. The MOU lasted until October 2005 and meant that no logging would occur within Cores and Links Reserve. However some logging did occur.

2006 February-2006 September: Several Cores and Links discussions in Melbourne with the SWG (without Industry), Trust for Nature, Friends of the Earth, DSE, Ministerial Staff and HVP. It was evident from these meetings that DSE and HVP were working against interests of community by pushing for clearfelling of key areas inside the Cores and Links.

2006 October: State Government (John Thwaites) announces commitment to protect cores and links through a partnership with HVP the Secretary to DSE for and on behalf of the State of Victoria, the Trust For Nature(Victoria), the Strzelecki Forest Community Group (SFCG) whose representatives were from the Council of the City of Latrobe, the Council of the Shire of Wellington, the Council of the Shire of South Gippsland and Australian paper Pty. Ltd. through a Heads Of Agreement (HOA).



John Thwaites announcing the Cores and Links Reserve HOA 13/10/06

The Trust for Nature was to manage the Cores and Links Rainforest Reserve, for the people of Victoria, but Melbourne Manager of TFN breaks TFN's commitment to manage the Cores and Links, without informing Regional Manager.

2006 October: Logging commences in Cores and Links Reserve – Snakesback Track (Morwell River Catchment) without HOA partners being informed. “Trust” between HVP and community already fraying.

2006 December – 2008 May: Logging proceeds at 10 locations inside Cores and Links Reserve without consultation with partners of HOA over the next 17 months. Community now very distrustful of HVP

2007 March: FoE publicly claim that HoA has been breached “... *agreed logging buffers for cool temperate rainforest had been ignored, the logging company had entered coupes before mapping had been carried out and also claimed that some rainforest had "gone missing" from maps handed to the State Government by the logging company.*

2007 July: Steve Bracks resigns with the Environment Minister John Thwaites, John Brumby becomes Premier. Gavan Jennings becomes the new Environment minister.

2007 October: State Government signs off on HVP’s Rainforest Best Management Practices, guaranteeing rainforest buffers <20 metres, instead of 250 metres recommended by Biosis in 2001.

2007-2008: Several meetings occurred with HoA stakeholders and SWG to resolve supposed HVP supply agreement problems. Problems arose regarding the intent of the 2006 MoU. HVP wanted more timber (1,000,000m³) than the community would accept. A stalemate ensued.

2008 May: **New Cores and Links Agreement signed between State Government and HVP** allowing for 600 hectares more logging within key catchments in the Cores and Links. Critically important Rainforest buffers were included in the new one off harvest agreement.

New agreement allowed for clearfelling in previously protected areas including Agnes River, Franklin River, College Creek, Jack River, South Middle Creek, Merrimans Creek, Morwell River and Albert River. All of these rainforest catchments had been guaranteed protection two years earlier.

The Community and key stakeholders were excluded from these negotiations. 9 years of gruelling negotiations with all parties was totally dismissed.

Many complaints were raised (over 10 hears) about the harvest operations in these sensitive sites. The regeneration process was not suited to the recovery, post- harvest, of this rainforest reserve.

2009 February: Hancock start logging College Creek, one week after bushfires. Monitoring of logging within the Cores and Links by FoE and FoGB 2009-2016. <http://hancockwatch.nfshost.com/docs/LoggingIndex.htm>

2016 the key stakeholders who were instrumental in the signing of the HoA 2006 were approached to engage in discussions regarding the first hand back of the Cores and Links.

It is important to understand that: The Cores and Links Reserve was initiated and driven by the Community. The original 2006 HoA was a transparent inclusive process which could have delivered a world class reserve system. Post 2008 we certainly do not have what we had all negotiated in good faith but it does provide the only opportunity to save 8040 hectares linking Merriman’s Creek to the Gunyah Gunyah Rainforest Reserve plus 15,000 hectares of protected Hancock custodial land.