

Forest Stewardship Council, Hancock Victorian Plantations and Rainforest Management under Smartwood Interim Standards

**Strzelecki Rainforest Case Study 2001 -2013
August 2013**



College Creek Core Area pre-2009. A site of national conservation significance.

A decade long community campaign led the Victorian State Government to protect this catchment through a buy-back from Hancock Victorian Plantations in October 2006.

This original deal was eventually undermined in August 2008 by the signing of a new deal which allowed for 350 hectares of College Creek and hundreds of hectares of other rainforest buffers in the Strzeleckis to be clearfelled.

The new deal was supported by the Wilderness Society, Victorian National Parks Association, the CEO of Trust for Nature, Hancock Victorian Plantations and the Victorian State Government.

Anthony Amis (Friends of the Earth)/Susie Zent (Friends of Gippsland Bush)



Much of the cool temperate rainforest in the Strzelecki's was mapped by Elaina Fraser (left) and Susie Zent (below) between the years 1996 and 2003. Without their tireless work of ground-truthing and Elaina's mapping, almost every tributary of the Ranges, the community would not have been in a position to know that much of the region's rainforest even existed.



Does this look like a plantation tree to you?

Executive Summary

Whilst there is no doubt that large sections of the Strzelecki Ranges in South Gippsland were planted to provide a source of pulp for the Maryvale Paper Mill it is also important for people to understand that the political rhetoric of the last 70 years is factually incorrect.

It has been a convenient argument for the environment movement, politicians and the timber industry to claim that the Strzelecki Ranges were entirely cleared and contained only plantation timber. As far as the environment movement was concerned the plantations would supposedly provide the solution to an intractable problem. The harvesting of native forests for pulp and paper.

The facts are very different to this scenario. The Strzelecki's were not just all cleared farmland. They comprise a mosaic of old growth, rainforest, regenerated forest, re-forestation and plantations. They also have a complicated land tenure unique in Victoria, if not Australia and are situated on often very steep highly erodible cretaceous sediments.

Whilst the community was wary of embracing FSC Certification particularly without a National Standard and the erroneous definition of plantation used in the Strzelecki's, it was considered that the situation of protecting the biological diversity was so dire that it was worth giving the FSC process a try.

In our experience FSC did deliver some positive outcomes for the first 2 years.

However it also became glaringly obvious, that FSC could not grapple with the complexity of many issues and the power and vested interests of a timber industry that for 70 years was used to getting exactly what it wanted.

Since FSC certification in 2004 industry has continued to:

- Convert native forests to plantation,
- Remove regenerated forest, habitat links, old growth and High Conservation Value Forests with apparent impunity from FSC,
- Pollute watercourses through inappropriate roading and harvest practices, particularly in extreme and unsuitable weather conditions

FSC chose to support the Industry's endeavours to extract wood at any cost despite evidence, even pre 2009 wildfires, demonstrated through their own modelling, that the plantations in many instances were performing poorly and the volume for the 27 year contract to the Maryvale Pulp and Paper could not be met.

The Industry post 2007 refused to engage in meaningful dialogue with key stakeholders and removed themselves from Memorandum of Understanding's.

Late attempts to re-engage with key stakeholders whose concerns had been ignored for many years, is a case of too little too late. The damage has already been done and FSC's reputation has been severely tarnished in this part of Australia.

Susie Zent – Friends of Gippsland Bush. Anthony Amis – Friends of the Earth Australia.

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FSC certified Operation in Site of National Conservation Significance. (College Creek October 2011). A site initially protected in 2006. This road was pushed through in order to transport timber from 2 small coupes, less than 1ha only.

Geez, this bloody FSC process sure is a waste of time. We had this whole place protected 5 years back. Now look at it!



May 23 2012: FSC Audit Team and community members at one of several recently burnt sites at College Creek. All of the 850ha catchment was supposedly put into reserve in October 2006 under the Cores & Links Agreement – After that agreement was overturned by Hancock and the Government in 2008, over 350 ha of forest at College Creek was logged and then burnt.

1. Existing Conservation Measures on Private Land in Victoria

Native vegetation policy

The primary mechanisms for conserving native vegetation (including rainforest) on private land are the 2002 policy document Victoria's Native Vegetation Management: A Framework for Action (the Framework) and the Victorian Planning Scheme.

Provisions.

The Framework established the goal of a 'net gain' in native vegetation, in terms of its extent and/or condition. A further policy announcement, Native Vegetation – Sustaining a Living Landscape, was made

in March 2006. This new, strategic approach to delivering the net gain policy included a package of initiative such as amendments to the Victorian Planning Provisions and guidelines for the assessment of native vegetation clearing applications.

The Government is in the process of removing this protective legislative mechanism and replacing it with The Permitted Clearing of Native Vegetation Biodiversity Assessment Guidelines. Which will rely on mapping at a scale of 100,000 which will essentially mean that there will be no requirement for ecological assessments.

In relation to timber harvesting in State Forest, the protection of FFG-listed rainforest communities and the management of Myrtle Wilt in State forest is achieved by the following key mechanisms:

The Code of Practice for Timber Production 2007 (the Code).

- **Forest Management Plans, including the establishment of Special Protection Zones (SPZs) and the specification of prescriptions for harvesting and road construction and maintenance.**
- **The Flora and Fauna Guarantee (Forest Produce Harvesting) Order.**
- **Allocation Orders and Timber Release Plans.**

All prescriptive measures removed in Code of Practice for Timber Production 2007

The first and second versions included prescriptions for rainforest protection. The 2007 version does not: rather, it requires adherence to the conservation measures specified in approved Flora and Fauna Guarantee Action Statements and Flora and Fauna Guarantee Orders on public land.

Specifically, the Code of Practice for Timber Production (2007) requires that:

- **in public forests, forest management planning and all forestry operations must comply with measures specified in relevant Flora and Fauna Guarantee Action Statements and Flora and Fauna Guarantee Orders; and**
- **in public and private native forests, rainforest communities in Victoria must not be harvested.**

Rainforest communities must be protected from the impacts of harvesting through the use of appropriate buffers to maintain microclimatic conditions and protect from disease and other disturbance.

2. Legalistic Simplifications of Strzelecki Land Tenure

Hancock Victorian Plantations bought out the Victorian Plantation Estate in 1998 and the Australian Paper estate in 2001 which is a mix of freehold land and crown leaseholds. All of the land is deemed to be treated as private land. None of the planning provisions for the protection of native vegetation applies to the HVP estate apart from their freehold land.

**Refer to Red Dot Decision Summary
VCAT NO. P160/2006. Friends of
Gippsland Bush Inc. v Latrobe City
Council March 2006 Citation (2006)
VCAT 465.**

“ORDER I declare that the licence held by Grand Ridge Plantations Pty Ltd comes within the exemption for planted timber or harvesting of “timber harvesting carried out under licence from the Secretary to the Department of Sustainability and Environment” set out in the table to clause 52.17-06 and accordingly there is no need to obtain a permit pursuant to clause 52.17 to harvest timber in Jackson’s 1 coupe on the subject land.”

Native vegetation vs Plantation

“The simplest assessment of this issue has been adopted by GRP, DSE and the FSC, in that all areas designated as plantation on GRP’s plans as sold or leased to them by the State of Victoria as plantation are

considered plantation regardless of what vegetation is present. This legalistic acceptance of areas as plantations has little or no ecological foundation and appears inconsistent with other formal definitions of plantations and native vegetation.

Conclusion

The habitat score of vegetation likely to be cleared in association with the proposed road between Jackson’s 1 and Gonyah Shortcut has been underestimated by GRP. This vegetation has high conservation significance and the framework indicates that clearing of such vegetation is “generally not permitted.”

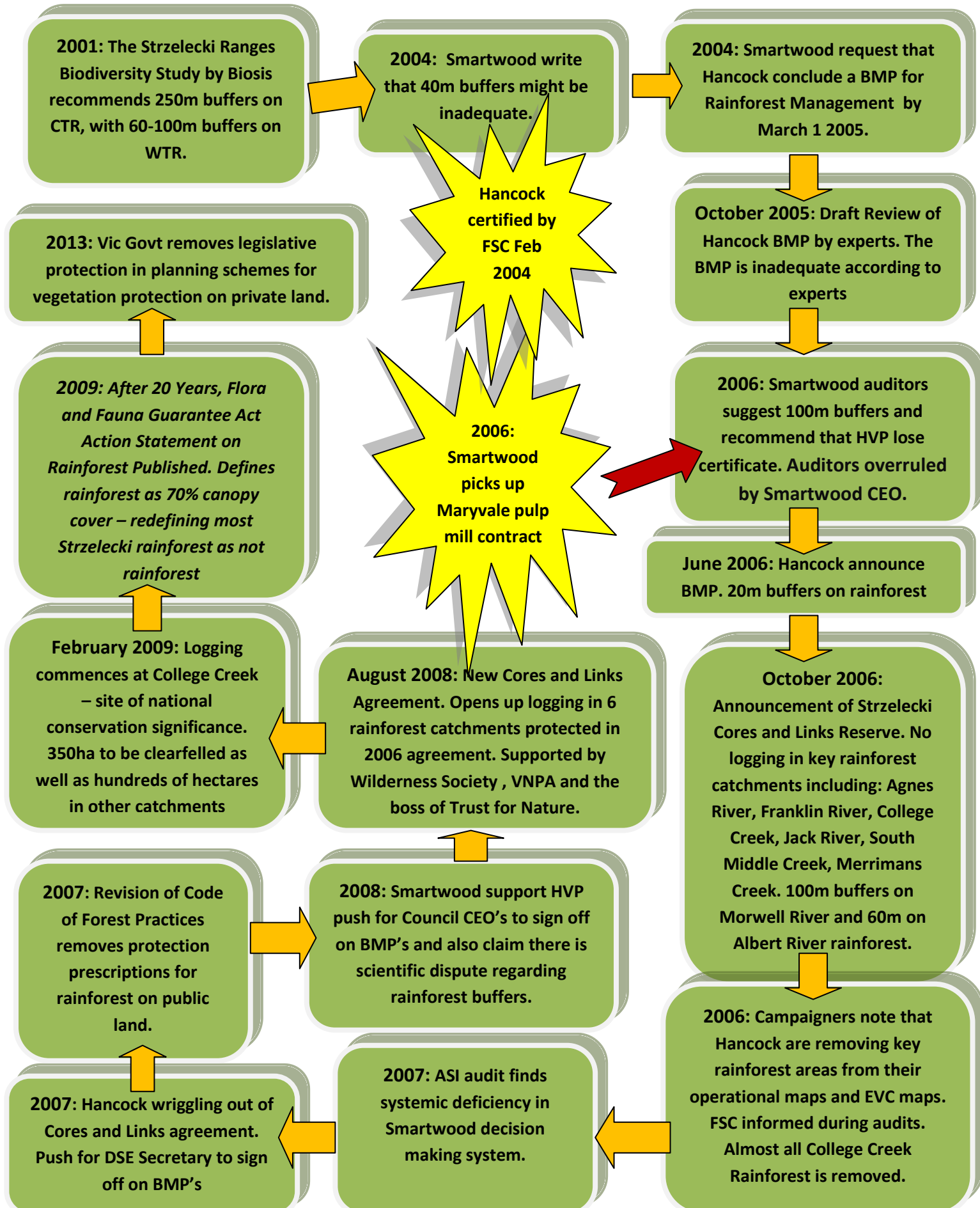
The forest of Jackson’s 1 does not clearly satisfy the definition of plantation provided by the Code but does clearly satisfy the definition of native vegetation provided by the Framework and its associated guidelines.

The vegetation of this coupe is therefore best described as indigenous Wet Forest.”

Source: page 7 Biosis Research Pty. Ltd.
April 2005 Report to Latrobe City (extract)

‘These areas were recommended for hardwood timber production by Council, which noted that the objective of the hardwood planting was to restore the forest so that it will eventually have a similar structure to the original forest. A range of uses was to be provided and no differentiation was made between reforested areas and areas retaining the original forest cover. This is a major change of use and it is unclear whether major changes in silvicultural practise and the provision for non-timber uses is envisaged.’ Source: Land Conservation Council -Review of Victorian Plantations Corporation Vested Lands as requested by the Minister for Planning, August 1993.

3. A Brief History of FSC Strzelecki Politics 2001-2013



4. FSC Fast Losing Credibility in Australia

Originally Posted 26 March 2007 (edited Aug 2013)

http://www.fsc-watch.org/archives/2007/03/26/FSC_Certified-operations_fast_losing_credibility_in_Australia

In February 2004, Hancock Victorian Plantations received Australia's first FSC certification [certifier: SmartWood]. Many interested parties initially hoped that FSC would deliver on what it promised and we would see a marked improvement in Hancock's forest management practices. Those promises have not eventuated and in many ways Hancock's forest management is getting worse not better.

The Hancock certification involved almost 250,000 hectares of land throughout the State of Victoria, with about 70% being ex state owned plantations previously controlled by Victorian Plantation Corporation, which Hancock gained 99 year logging rights in 1998, with the remaining 30% being land that was controlled and leased by Australian Paper Plantations in Gippsland which was purchased by HVP in 2001. Of the 250,000 hectares about 20,000 hectares was hardwood 'plantation', 130,000 hectares being radiata pine and the rest native forest or custodial land.

"Initially most people involved in protecting forests in the Strzelecki Ranges, were cautious yet optimistic with FSC and the certifying body wanting to enter Australia for the first time, Smartwood".

The most contentious issues for Hancock were/are pesticide applications, particularly in plantations located in domestic water supply catchments (the

rural city of Geelong had their water supply poisoned with hexazinone by Hancock for 46 months between December 2004 and October 2008), water quality issues, scale of clearfells, roading, management regimes for the Strzelecki Koala (Victoria's only endemic koala population) and cool and warm temperate rainforest management in the Strzelecki Ranges in South East Victoria.

Initially most people involved in protecting forests in the Strzelecki Ranges, were cautious yet optimistic with FSC and the certifying body wanting to enter Australia for the first time, Smartwood. In the initial scoping, community members basically helped select a very good team including a forester, an ecologist, a soil expert, a social scientist and a roading engineer. Local community members were also interested in seeing if FSC could help bring about a rainforest reserve in the Strzeleckis.

The rainforest reserve known as "The Cores and Links" planned to link up most of the identified cool temperate rainforest in the Strzelecki's. The rainforest and its wet forest eucalypt buffers would total about 8,040ha. Hancock agreed to a two year moratorium of logging the Cores and Links in July 2004 and many thought that the FSC process helped facilitate the moratorium. The Company also signed an MOU with the Trust For Nature who were to facilitate a buy-back of the areas known as the Cores and Links.

Rainforest in Victoria is particularly vulnerable to disturbance. Its biggest threat is fire, which if it occurs will often see the rainforest severely impacted, often being “succeeded” by eucalypt forest. Because of its fragility rainforest is not allowed to be logged in Victoria.

Cool temperate rainforest also suffers from a disease known as Myrtle Wilt, which can enter Beech trees via wounds in the tree. If the disease gets a foothold in rainforest it can wipe out an entire rainforest stand. Rainforest is therefore in an extremely vulnerable position in Victoria. Logging activities in close proximity to rainforest can increase the risk of stirring up Myrtle Wilt spores, increasing the likelihood of disease and can increase risks associated with fire.

In the 2004 FSC audit, Smartwood wrote that 40 metre buffers might be inadequate and that these issues are of "importance and urgency". Hancock were requested by Smartwood to get this issue sorted out, via a Corrective Action Request (CAR), by completing a Rainforest Best Management Practice (BMP) plan by 1 March 2005.

In State Forests, rainforest is basically guaranteed rainforest buffers of 60 metres. That is to say logging can occur in Eucalypt forests to within 60 metres of the rainforest ecotone. (2007 Code Forest Practices however meant that all prescriptive measures were removed). On private land however, which is what Hancock purchased, there is supposed to be a buffer, but no specific buffer width is specified under the Code of Forest Practice. Rainforest buffers have been at

the forefront of forest issues in Victoria for more than 30 years.

The Strzelecki Cool Temperate Rainforest is recovering from past disturbances and is extremely vulnerable. It is located in gullies and drainage lines. In some instances in the past, eucalypt forests were planted next to rainforest leaving no buffer. Hancock is now logging these areas and despite being granted an FSC certificate in 2004, the company decided that their policy would be to leave only 20 metre buffers, usually consisting of Silver Wattle and Mountain Ash.

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By the time the 2005 audit occurred, Hancock had not completed their Rainforest BMP. In the meantime however, they continued to log large amounts of eucalypt buffers in the Morwell River East Branch, a regional site of rainforest significance, leaving only 20 metre 'buffers'. This infuriated conservationists who feared that Hancock was deliberately stalling the process. The audit team rightfully suggested that a Major CAR be written that would either cease operations in all coupes that are adjacent to rainforest or put in place a minimum of two tree heights (100 metre) buffers on all rainforest sites... This

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In the following months Hancock continued leaving 20 metres or less rainforest buffers on Morwell River East Branch and Rytons Junction in the Albert and Morwell River. They also logged pine plantations leaving no buffers on the extremely rare Strzelecki Warm Temperate Rainforest at Macks Creek. Local campaigners also found Hancock logging inside the Cores and Links Reserve which under that time was supposed to be under a logging moratorium. All of this was done with FSC certification.

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In October 2005 a review of the draft Hancock Rainforest BMP occurred by two respected rainforest experts. The fundamental conclusion of the two experts was that buffers in the draft BMP for both cool and warm temperate rainforest were inadequate. Before the 2006 audit came around, June 2006, Hancock publicly announced their rainforest BMP, by leaving only 20 metre rainforest buffers despite their experts claiming such buffers

were inadequate. After the 2006 audit, Smartwood again changed the CAR by granting Hancock another reprieve, in the form of another Major CAR which had to be completed by February 2007.

During this time Hancock continued on their merry way leaving 20 metre buffers (and less) on Smiths Creek, Morwell River East Branch and, worst of all, Morwell River. In June 2006, the State Government of Victoria in the lead up to the State Election decided that a solution to the Strzelecki crisis had to occur. In July 2006, Hancock had also stated that they intended logging College Creek inside the Cores and Links. The two year moratorium had ended.

After several meetings with the community, the government and Hancock, a formal new rainforest reserve was announced in October 2006 via a Heads of Agreement. However, logging was to occur in about 900ha of the new 8,040ha reserve due to Hancock having to meet contractual obligations to the Maryvale mill. This logging could take place well away from rainforests, so although the community was not happy, they ended up agreeing as a way to move the negotiations forward. Six key rainforest catchments avoided logging under the deal.

Hancock supplies the Maryvale mill with

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300,000 cubic metres of hardwood per year until the year 2026. Unknown to the community, Hancock also argued that all contract shortfalls caused by not logging eucalypts inside the Cores and Links (460,000 cubic metres) would have to be made up by logging their custodial land, native forest. This did not reflect the true intentions of the negotiations, whereby the community had demanded that any logging within the Cores and Links would have to be reduced from the supposed shortfall, thereby reducing the shortfall significantly. For an FSC certified company to attempt such a 'con' is extremely unethical. The agreement also stated that 60 metre buffers on Morwell

Local conservationists were astounded to see logging within 5 metres of rainforest species, despite being in breach of the recently signed Heads of Agreement. Hancock apparently wanted to make a 'statement' by carrying out the logging in such a manner.

River rainforest and 100 meter buffers on Morwell River West Branch would eventuate.

In November 2006, Hancock started logging inside the Cores and Links reserve, starting with coupes in the Morwell River region before a proper process had been formalised. Local conservationists were astounded to see logging within 5 metres of rainforest species, despite being in breach of the recently signed Heads of Agreement. Hancock apparently wanted to make a 'statement' by carrying out the logging in such a manner. Hancock also claimed that because the rainforest hadn't been mapped they had no idea it was there and that the

Heads of Agreement maps didn't show rainforest in that particular location. The maps of course were provided by Hancock, without community scrutiny. Is this the way an FSC certified company should behave?

During the 2007 audit in February by Smartwood, it was made clear to the local community that Smartwood were starting to get rather agitated by the demands of the community in regards to protection of the remnant rainforest. During the audit, community members felt that they were being audited and that their position, rather than Hancock's required to be defended and substantiated. The audit was a most unpleasant experience and marked a new low point in relations between the community and Smartwood. The community is now fed up with FSC and Hancock, and feel that the only way that FSC could retain its credibility would be for Hancock to lose their certification.

The ASI Assessment of Smartwood in 2007 made reference to the auditors attitude to Community representatives (and instructed one of the auditors to apologise for his behaviour)

To rub salt into our wounds, in July 2006 Smartwood announced that the biggest paper mill in the country, Maryvale (owned by PaperlinX), had received an FSC Chain of Custody Certification. Because about 60% of Maryvale's supply is sourced from Hancock, the mill qualifies for CoC. The environmental community was aghast. For the past 10 years Reflex copy paper had been under a boycott by 27 Australian based environmental NGO's because of its reliance on the native forests of the Central Highlands and Strzelecki Ranges. No environmental NGOs were consulted about this move by Smartwood and now ENGO's are having to face a barrage of television commercials stating that one of their biggest headaches, Reflex Copy Paper is now certified by the FSC.

The CoC doesn't even include looking at any of the 600,000* cubic metres per year of native forest that the Maryville mill uses, the source of the ENGO frustration.

This scenario is a complete disgrace and will severely undermine FSC's reputation throughout Australia. Anthony Amis



February 2007: Morwell River catchment/Strzelecki Ranges. One of the first coupes logged after an historic Memorandum of Understanding was signed by Hancock, the Victorian Government, Trust for Nature and the Strzelecki Forest Community Group in October 2006. Under the MoU Hancock were supposed to leave rainforest buffers of 60 metres and 100 metres in the Morwell River Catchment. At this coupe, buffers have been found at some locations to be zero metres. This is a major step backwards by Hancock, yet the company remains certified by FSC. Why? Almost all of the bare earth in this photo is in fact cool temperate rainforest buffer.

*600,000m³ refers to 400,000m³ native forest guaranteed under 1996 Wood Pulp Agreement Act (for years 2007-10 – reduced to 350,000m³ 2011-2030) & additional 200,000m³ guaranteed under 2005 Bleached Pulp Facility Proposal 2005-2019.



**Smartwood themselves
are now increasingly
being tarred with a very
dirty brush that
ultimately will severely
tarnish their reputation
in this country.**

5. Are Smartwood lapdogs for the Australian timber industry?

**Originally posted
January 11 2008**

<http://www.fscwatch.org/archives/2008>

An answer to this question appears to be yes. Smartwood's reputation as 'honest brokers' has hit an all time low with their most recent audit of Hancock Victorian Plantations (HVP). So serious are the implications of Smartwood's latest appraisal of HVP that not only has it raised serious doubts about the ethics of Smartwood, but has raised massive credibility issues with FSC itself...

As pointed out on the FSC-Watch website in [March 2007](#), concerns over the certification of HVP's operations in the Strzelecki region of Victoria since 2004 have centred around, but have not confined to, rainforest management issues. The company has been issued with numerous Corrective Action Requests (CAR's) since 2004, many of which have arguably not been met, yet closed, including most seriously those relating to rainforest. So serious has the rainforest issue been, that even Smartwood auditors recommended in both 2005 and 2006 that HVP lose their certification. Both times these recommendations were overturned by Smartwood who decided instead to grant new CAR's, which in turn were then undermined by HVP. We were under the impression that if a company doesn't meet CAR's its certificate is stripped.

Smartwood have shown that this is not the case within the FSC system.

Apparently, FSC International treated the issue as serious enough to get Accreditation Services International (ASI) to conduct an audit of Smartwood in February 2007. However the ASI audit as of late December 2007 is nowhere to be seen and ASI, through a recommendation by FSC Australia, actually employed the services of an Australian forester, who in the past, had given the greenlight to the logging of contentious rainforest areas, including Goolengook, the site of Australia's longest ever forest blockade. A blockade that lasted over 7 years and resulted in hundreds of arrests! Hardly a politically neutral background for an auditor!

We had to wait 9 months for a public copy of Smartwood's 2007 audit of HVP to be made available to the public, with ASI's as yet unsighted report taking longer than 10 months. In the meantime it has been business as usual for HVP who have continued wiping out controversial rainforest buffers and high conservation value forests. Why such long delays? Is Smartwood adopting the same tactics with ASI as HVP have done with Smartwood?

It appears that the rainforest CARs have been written in a way which allows HVP to wriggle out at every opportunity. If a CAR isn't properly fulfilled, Smartwood simply move the goal posts by closing one CAR and granting the company another CAR. One could assume that the CARs have been deliberately worded to grant the company maximum leeway to keep going with a business as usual attitude. This undermining of the CAR process reveals a massive ethical shortcoming, where Smartwood working in cahoots with industry can keep a perpetual freeze on dumping a company from the FSC system despite recommendations from the certifiers own auditors.

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All auditing systems are reliant on the company for payment. How can a certifying body ever be regarded as independent when the certifiers are reliant on these companies for payment? HVP have deliberately misled Smartwood in

HVP attempted to go around the experts by getting approval for the BMP's from the ex-Secretary to the Department of Sustainability and Environment. The same Department that has a worse record in regards to rainforest than HVP!... Even worse is Smartwood's latest proposal that two local shire CEO's will have to sign off on the rainforest BMPs in 2008 (or are SmartWood really just stating an idea from HVP?).

past audits, by telling mistruths and failing to provide key information, yet still Smartwood pat them on the back! In a PR survey of threats and opportunity's funded by HVP, it was no surprise that Smartwood were viewed as being of lowest risk.

The long and short of the rainforest situation is now this. Minimal to zero protection of rainforest by granting inadequate buffers and ignoring peer review conclusions and recommendations made by rainforest experts. The experts are also concerned that young regenerating

rainforest are not being given adequate protection, as the disease myrtle wilt kills the oldest stands of native *Nothofagus* trees. Locals have witnessed this year the chainsawing of young rainforest by HVP. In short nothing has changed since HVP were first certified. Experts have made specific buffer width recommendations in two reports related to the Strzelecki Ranges Bioregion and have also been totally ignored by HVP and now Smartwood. HVP's rainforest Best Management Practices (BMP's) were peer reviewed in 2005 by two experts. The BMP's failed to get acceptance by rainforest experts who said that the company's protection measures for rainforest were inadequate. HVP then argued the toss and deliberately stalled on accepting almost all of the experts recommendations. Current buffer widths are still considered inadequate by the experts. HVP attempted to go around the experts by getting approval for the BMP's from the ex-Secretary to the Department of Sustainability and Environment. The same Department that has a worse record in regards to rainforest than HVP! Apparently Smartwood have endorsed this move.

Worse still, the current BMP (as bad as it is) has not even been provided to logging contractors who are still logging to minimal buffers (which has always been HVP's agenda). Smartwood's latest proposal is that two local shire CEO's will have to sign off on the rainforest BMPs in 2008 (or are SmartWood really just stating an idea from HVP?). These two signatories, untrained in rainforest ecology, will supposedly solve this delicate problem. This basically ignores the best of scientific information concerning rainforest and instead allows these non-experts, usually highly supportive of the economic needs of the timber industry, to be called in as umpires because Smartwood have refused to take

the ethical stand. More 'buck passing' by Smartwood?

Smartwood decided in 2006 that rather than get an ecological solution for the Strzelecki's and de-certifying HVP, they would instead take a greater share in the profits from the rampaging Gippsland based paper industry, knowing full well that the company supplying Maryvale pulp mill, HVP, was blatantly breaching CAR's in the Strzelecki's with absolutely no plans to stop committing the breaches. The moment Smartwood decided to do this was the moment any remaining credibility totally evaporated. Many in the local community felt betrayed by Smartwood and in the FSC system that promised so much but delivered them bugger all. Many are also questioning the viability of a system which flies in 'experts' from other countries who have no track record in understanding unique local politics and history. Most of all though it reveals how the FSC system cannot deal with unethical companies willing to manipulate anything that infringes on their ability to make as much profit as possible.

Anthony Amis, January 2008

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Roberts Road Warm Temperate Rainforest. Strzeleckis Warm Temperate Rainforest is the most threatened vegetation class in the Strzeleckis. Note zero buffers afforded on logged pine plantations



***Pine Logging with
no buffers on WTR***

In 1993, Victoria corporatised its plantations into an entity called the Victorian Plantations Corporation. All land vested to the (VPC) was then reclassified as private land under the Code of Forest Practices.

In March 1998, the Victorian State Government announced its decision to privatise the VPC. In October 1998 VPC was sold to Hancock Victorian Plantations Pty Ltd for \$550 million, a substantial premium above VPC's book value of \$352 million. The privatisation was facilitated by the sale of a licence to over 170,000 hectares of land vested with VPC. This licence grants Hancock the right to operate a plantation business on that land in perpetuity. The licence is transferable, registrable and divisible and all royalties or rents were received by the State in an up-front fee as part of the sale proceeds. Along with the licence, all of VPC's other assets, liabilities and timber supply contracts were transferred to Hancock.

VPC stated that the overall statewide landholding of the Corporation in 1998 was 167,921 hectares. The 1998 Corporation annual report however stated a net statewide plantation area of 106,976 hectares, meaning that almost 61,000 hectares of land vested in the VPC is not plantation. Approximately 40,000 hectares of this land was located in Gippsland.

In August 2001, Hancock then purchased the assets of Australian Paper Plantations, approximately 90,000 hectares of land located on the northern slopes of the Strzelecki's and extending as far east as Longford and Stratford.

Apart from plantations, Hancock controls about 40,000ha of native forest in Gippsland.

6. FSC, Hancock and Smartwood Selling Out The Gippsland Environment

Originally posted February 2009

http://www.fscwatch.org/archives/2009/02/23/FSC_Hancock_and_Sma

The reputation of FSC in Australia has been dealt another nasty blow with Smartwood's 2008 audit of Hancock Victorian Plantations (HVP). It appears that Smartwood has chosen to ignore recommendations made by Accredited Services International (ASI) in August 2007 and has instead rehashed company biased propaganda.

The following quotes from the [2007 ASI audit](#) are telling.

Page 19: *"ASI auditor has serious concerns about the SW decision to maintain certification even if after two years of certification (and 4 years of the main assessment) the company still has several Major CARs..."*

Page 20: *"ASI considers that the results from this ASI audit, as well as results from ASI 2006 office audit for SW, identifies substantial systematic deficiency in SW decision making system for issuing and maintaining certificates..."*

In the conclusion ASI wrote: *"ASI auditor detected that, ... one of the major problems is that SW issued CARs that do not adequately address the identified non-compliances. Many of these CARs*

were extended and/ or closed despite the lack of compliance instead of being upgraded, or other disciplinary measures be proposed against the certificate holder. Another major issue is that SW issued a certificate to a company that did not demonstrate full compliance with FSC certification requirements thus encouraging a continuous improvement approach instead of a performance based certification. This seems to be the root-cause for many problems, including high visibility of the HVP certificate. This is a major threat to the credibility of the SW certification system and subsequently to FSC if not corrected."

It has now been two years since ASI visited Victoria. Hancock's performance has seriously deteriorated in that time with the company now clear-felling areas supposedly set aside in a rainforest reserve in October 2006. It has been business as usual showing that the FSC system can be undermined by unethical certified companies, with both Smartwood and ASI unable to pull Hancock and their destructive practices into line.

The situation in the Strzelecki Ranges is now desperate with locals exasperated with both Hancock and Smartwood. Groups monitoring Hancock now know

that FSC cannot (will not) withstand often dishonourable tactics employed by the timber industry (who also control auditors' purse strings). It is now crunch time for Strzelecki Rainforest and Strzelecki Koalas. FSC Australia stands mute and totally ineffectual, fearing that the loss of Hancock from the FSC system will mean the loss of all FSC certified sawlogs in Australia. In short, the Strzelecki's are being 'sold out' by all parties.

Despite no one from the community supporting this horrendous deal, Smartwood give Hancock the benefit of the doubt by stating in the 2008 audit; *"It should also be noted that the decision of HVP to follow the stipulations of the HoA whether or not the agreement is formalized is seen as a positive step by HVP to meet the concerns of stakeholders"*.

Hancock will be soon clear-felling sites of National Conservation Significance at College Creek, the stronghold of Slender Fork Fern on mainland Australia. The species is critically endangered on mainland Australia. The Heads of Agreement signed by the company and community in October 2006 has now been superseded by a secret agreement signed by Hancock CEO Linda Sewell and Victorian Conservation Minister Gavan Jennings in August 2008. The original agreement fell through after Hancock doubled the amount of timber to be extracted under the deal without properly explaining this change of volume to the community.

The new agreement allows for clear-felling of 1500ha of plantation and reforestation in key rainforest catchments including the nationally significant College Creek. Replanting of the cut over areas will allow Hancock to benefit from carbon credits, whilst ignoring the carbon emitted from the logging. Hancock also have made the most of stating that they will not log any of their custodial land, much of which consists of weed infested gullies and drainage lines of little conservation and industry significance. Hancock are already cutting out forests that were protected under the 2006 deal in complete opposition to the wishes of the local community. Over 100 people signed a petition protesting FSC's continued support of Hancock at a rally at Boolara in July. So much for FSC working with local communities. 75% of the timber cut from the Strzelecki Rainforest Reserve will make its way to Maryvale Pulp Mill which has also benefitted from Smartwood/FSC Chain of Custody Certification since 2006. (This has also occurred with the Maryvale Mill vastly increasing their supply of native forest timber during this time, sourced largely from fire salvage operations).

Despite no one from the community supporting this horrendous deal, Smartwood give Hancock the benefit of the doubt by stating in the 2008 audit; *"It should also be noted that the decision of HVP to follow the stipulations of the HoA whether or not the agreement is formalized is seen as a positive step by HVP to meet the concerns of stakeholders"*.

Strzelecki Rainforest

Much has been written about the dire state of Strzelecki Rainforest and lack of protection afforded rainforest by Hancock. The new audit basically endorses Hancock's agenda of redefining rainforest out of existence, with scientifically indefensible buffers in contradiction to

recommendations made by leading scientists in the field.

On page 4 of its 2008 Audit, Smartwood's assessors make an astonishing claim that there is scientific dispute regarding rainforest buffers. "Furthermore, it was alleged that a rainforest ecologist is of a similar opinion". Why has the audit team failed to mention that recognised rainforest ecologists in Australia are dissatisfied with the rainforest Best Management Practice (BMP) developed by Hancock? It should also be noted that up until the 2008 audit, all ecologists working on the Smartwood Team were also dissatisfied with these BMPs. All of these ecologists have since been removed from future Smartwood audits.

Hancock has done everything to undermine expert opinion on measures required to protect the Strzelecki Cool and Warm Temperate Rainforests. They have sought expert input to gain credibility and to meet Corrective Actions of 2004, 2005 2006, however none of the Corrective Actions have been adequately met. A point raised by ASI in 2007.

We are pleased to see that Smartwood expects Hancock to remain active in their stakeholder communications as the Company has refused to be involved in meaningful dialogue with a number of key stakeholders since 2006 and as far as past audits conditions, the company has failed to consult with stakeholders on measures to protect rainforest post the initial 2004 audit.

Rainforest is protected in Victoria and Hancock has not afforded additional protection. In fact it has been stated repeatedly that the Company has not provided adequate protection for Rainforest in the Strzeleckis (see for example the [Peer Review carried out by Terry Walshe and David Cameron](#) in 2005). If the Company has not afforded adequate protection to Cool and Warm Temperate Rainforest, how can Smartwood claim that Hancock is adopting a precautionary approach which should facilitate a net gain recovery of Cool and Warm Temperate Rainforest? This can not occur.



Hancock Kept Their Certificate!!!

The team concludes that for the three reasons above - failure to complete the BMP, failure to engage in external public review, and failure to implement revised buffer widths for rainforest when the expert review describes the current widths as "inadequate" - HVP has not met the requirement of the MAJOR CAR. Essentially, from an auditing point of view, this is where the matter finishes. Guidance to auditors from FSC and SmartWood states that a MAJOR CAR must be closed out or the certificate will be suspended. In this case, the team concludes that the MAJOR CAR is not closed and the failure to meet it is significant. The team does not accept that there are major extenuating circumstances that contributed to the delay in responding to the expert review which was completed in October 2005. Those delays, since October 2005, were internal within HVP. SmartWood and FSC policy therefore requires that, until the BMP meets the requirements of Principle 9, the Company's continuing certification should be suspended. (2006 Smartwood Audit)

7. Management of Rainforest and Protection of Landscape Values

Biosis Research October 2002

"In the context of an established plantation, implications for significant flora, fauna and fauna habitat include:

** impacts on remnant native vegetation (including dead stags) within plantations.*

** impacts on adjacent threatened flora/vegetation communities and habitat (ie rainforest, windthrow, pine wildings, spread of plant pathogens, increased sediment input in streams)*

** impacts on significant fauna utilising the plantations (ie koalas , Spot- tailed Quoll)*

** disruption to wildlife movement corridors.*

** Many rare or threatened species are intolerant of the frequency or intensity of disturbance associated with development or intensive forest management. Particular habitats may also be limiting because they cannot regenerate within the existing disturbance regime (ie hollow bearing trees can take over 100 years to develop). Management for such species and habitats generally involves not disturbing a defined area of suitable habitat, allowing that species to survive, and for fauna, providing a series of linked habitats allowing a viable population to persist*

The brief required the consultant to identify measures required to protect significant flora, fauna and fauna habitat values in a manner appropriate to the ecology of the species/community, scale of the plantation estate, the resources available to the plantation manager and any existing action statements or recovery plans. The report identifies threatening

"Many plantations have been imposed on native forest ecosystems. These remnant native forests and how they interact with the artificially imposed plantations should be of key concern. Indigenous species can regenerate inside plantation boundaries and plantations located near rainforests should have adaptable boundaries that reflect the unique dynamics involved in rainforest ecology. What may have been an ecological reality when the plantation was established, may not be the same after the plantation is logged 10, 20, 30, 40 years after initial establishment."

processes and measures required to avoid unacceptable outcomes".

Source: Attachment 4 Report for Gippsland Farm Plantations inc. Regional Interpretations of the Code of Forest Practices: Conservation of Flora and fauna, Management of Rainforest and Protection of Landscape values Biosis Research October 2002

"FSC will give you nothing more than what the prevailing legislation guarantees"

8. Comments Updates on 2004 Smartwood FSC Audit Findings Hancock Victorian Plantations

Susie Zent Friends of Gippsland Bush

Rainforest Buffers

The last time FOGB and GRP came to an agreement on Rainforest buffers, was in 2003 on the East Branch of Jeeralang Creek. Since that time I have expressed my concerns regarding the company's harvesting activities in rainforest areas, with senior management.

Support the urgency to address rainforest issues.

All the issues listed were discussed in detail during a 2-day workshop held in July 2004,

The company employed the services of Victoria's most recognised rainforest expert. The expert spent several hours on day 2 explaining the definition of a buffer and the rationale for leaving generous buffers, and taking the precautionary approach. He made recommendations that Core Areas of Rainforest required total sub-catchment protection and that other areas would generally require 2-tree length protection. This was to provide adequate protection against, Wildfire, Wind-throw and the spread of Myrtle Wilt.

“Human activity which results in

artificially elevated or epidemic levels of Myrtle Wilt within Nothofagus – dominated Cool Temperate Rainforest” is now listed as a potentially threatening process on Schedule 3 of the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988.

Disturbance history of the Strzeleckis necessitated specific prescription measures. As it was no longer a landscape of natural forests and the rainforest was surrounded by even aged monoculture plantations, the rainforest was at greater risk from wildfire and the spread of disease than was the case in other localities.

Disturbance history of the Strzeleckis necessitated specific prescription measures. As it was no longer a landscape of natural forests and the rainforest was surrounded by even aged monoculture plantations, the rainforest was at greater risk from wildfire and the spread of disease than was the case in other localities.

Variables

The expert also stressed that a sliding scale should be implemented for RF buffers. Buffers larger than 2 tree lengths may be required on sites of significance, steep slopes and unstable soils. Excluding Core Areas which require total sub catchment protection.

Monitoring of myrtle wilt.

The ecologist discussed with senior management the merits or otherwise of the methodology that they intended to use in

monitoring the disease, Myrtle Wilt. He felt that there was an established, peer reviewed process and that he believed that this was the most appropriate way of determining the extent and spread of the disease. This would also allow a comparison with other sites monitored in the Otways and Central Highlands.

Past and present practices within rainforest areas.

* Waak Track Ryton Junction Minnotti's. No Rainforest buffers 2003

* Removal of rainforest Buffers - 2004

* East Branch of Morwell River examples of - no buffers, 7m buffer, 20m buffer, 30m buffers, slash and debris pushed into rainforest buffers 2003 -4.

* Hidden Valley head of major rainforest Tributary totally removed track 15 2004.

* College Creek harvesting in a core area without ground truthing by Steve Mueck which was the agreed process minuted in meetings of the Strzelecki Working Group. Complete disregard to an established protocol and the MOU signed in October. 2004

FOGB find this to be consistent with the company's refusal to meet commitments signed under a previous MOU between FOGB and APP.

Consultation process

As far as I am aware HVP is not seeking stakeholder input and consultation on the design of buffers.

Our association provided a submission on Myrtle Wilt to the company in 2004. Documents relating to rainforest in Victoria

* I attended a field trip with HVP staff and a HVP consultant to discuss the monitoring of Myrtle Wilt. I emailed HVP personnel with some concerns regarding what I considered to be misleading statements made on that day.

* GRP have since employed the services of the same person to undertake some monitoring sites.

FOGB believes the methodology should be peer reviewed.

* To date we have not seen any of the rainforest ecologists recommendations implemented.



September 2004: Strzelecki Ranges North Face (Parish of Jumbuk - Crown Leasehold): Morwell River East Branch Rainforest off Lawless Track. Hancock have logged within 15 metres of cool temperate rainforest at this site. The person holding the tape in the gully is standing next to a Myrtle Beech tree. Rainforest of regional significance occurring in State Forest is granted at least 40 metre buffers. Yet Hancock at this site has granted 25 metre less than what is warranted in State Forests. This has occurred despite Hancock being granted FSC certification. Photo & Caption: Hancock Watch

9. Corrective Action Requests Issues in 2004 FSC Audit (Smartwood)

Comments by Friends of Gippsland Bush 2013 underlined

“CAR 1-2004: The Rainforest Management BMP shall be completed by 1 March 2005 (it was not completed until June 2006) including a peer review and further stakeholder input. The current practice of stakeholder involvement in boundary marking is to continue with coupes where HVP/GRP harvest plantations adjacent to any areas of Cool or Warm Temperate Rainforest”.

The major stakeholders were never consulted in marking boundaries of WTRF. The practice of walking boundaries for CTRF ceased in 2006. HVP’s Rainforest BMP’s Best Management Practices give no protection of WTRF except when it is on a permanent water course. This is only 20 metre protection.

In 2013 on Upper Middle Creek Road Strzelecki ranges a patch of WTRF growing in established Pine plantation was totally destroyed despite the fact that the issue was brought to the Company’s attention 5 years prior to harvest.

The Strzelecki Forest Community Group attempted to establish a process of defining the sites of CTRF, through a Heads of Agreement signed by the Company, the SFCG, and the Trust for Nature, the State Government, HVP/GRP and Australian Paper in October 2006.

These identifications were all based on independent scientific reviews published and unpublished.

The Company and the State Government removed themselves from this agreement which took ten years of negotiations

The company steadfastly refused to acknowledge the recommendations of Walshe & Cameron Peer Review 2005

revised April 2006 or any other advice provided by acknowledged RF ecologists.

“CAR 2-2004 GRP shall postpone plantation harvesting from the proposed Cores and Links in the Biodiversity Study until the process required under Condition 9.1.1 is complete, and/or there is broad stakeholder input on the specific precautions/strategies that should be put in place so that any harvesting which occurs in the proposed Cores and Links will maintain high conservation values.”

HVP had proceeded to harvest in the Core Area of College Creek in 2005 without community consultation. This site was visited by the audit team Linkletters 2005, where it was found that contrary to the Company's claims that they had harvested in this Core Area.

“Observation1-2004: Given stakeholder concerns and limitations, GRP should explore stakeholder input into the design of rainforest buffers and related management activities until such time that the Rainforest Management BMP is completed and practices dictated by the new BMP are fully internalised by HVP/GRP staff.”

Neither of these recommendations was implemented and still has not been as of 2013. Refer to comments in CAR 1-2004.

Outstanding issues:

On the Bird Track Coupe Jeeralang site have still not been resolved despite the EPA 2005 inspection and Report, shire audits and 2 Smartwood audits.

Page 58- 60 CAR Condition 6.2.1 Policy and Procedures for Threatened Species and Communities

We can see little evidence that rare threatened or vulnerable species/communities being afforded any protection in harvest areas. HVP have put enormous pressure on all Rainforest in the region. This is clearly identified in the Rainforest Peer Review, Walshe and Cameron 2005/6.

The Company is now harvesting high conservation value forests in the areas identified as the key biodiversity areas in the Strzelecki Ranges- the Cores and Links, formerly afforded protection in the HoA 2006, thereby further fragmenting an already highly compromised bioregion.

We have consistently asked for management plans dealing with these highly

threatened species identification, fauna surveys and biolink corridors.....

As of 2013 I have only been given a map of harvest schedule updates in the Cores and Links and koala habitat mapping. However data, reports and other maps have still not been provided .

“Page 60-61 CAR Condition 6.3.1 by the end of year 5, HVP is to identify the distribution and extent of environmental weed species throughout its estate, on both production and custodial lands, as part of a regionally based plant management strategy.....”

Long term unsustainable logging contracts are wrecking this place. FSC won't tackle these contractual issues.



sensitive areas nothing thus far have been forth coming.

Update: As of 2013 request to HVP to provide information on EVC mapping,

With a few exceptions the Company will only address weed incursion if it is impacting on their commercial operations- plantations.

10. Pulp Mill Politics



80% of all forestry related investment in Australia is tied up with the Maryvale Pulp Mill which has been in operation since 1937.

The key driver behind forest destruction in the Strzelecki Ranges is the Maryvale Pulp and Paper Mill. Prior to the 2009 bushfires, Hancock was supplying Maryvale with between 250,000 - 300,000m³ of hardwood per year. The fires wiped out 25% of Hancock's Hardwoods in one afternoon. Hancock's hardwood plantations are also achieving poor growth rates. Bluegum plantations are achieving growth rates 35-70% below expectations. Shining Gum plantations are also performing poorly in many locations.

In July 2005; PaperlinX proposed to rebuild bleached pulp facility at Maryvale. PaperlinX's logging of native forest would increase by almost 50% (200,000 m³) to meet the new demand from the Central Highlands. According to PaperlinX, 22,800 ha gross of new hardwood plantations were required to meet new demand for pulp facility. The new plantations however wouldn't be ready until 2019. The new plantations were to be managed by Midway/Macquarie Bank under controversial MIS schemes. By August 2009 however new plantings by Midway/Macquarie had ceased as had new plantations established by another GIS company in Gippsland, Great Southern Plantations. By 2013 only 34% of the new plantations to supply the new pulp facility had been established and many of these plantations were growing poorly.

Despite, the increase in access to native forest by Paperlinx in 2005, the company achieved an FSC Chain of Custody Certification in 2006, despite FSC auditors recommending in 2006 that Hancock should lose their FSC certification. Smartwood/Rainforest Alliance therefore picked up FSC two contracts in Gippsland, when they should have had none. This is one the major issues concerning why Hancock have retained FSC certification despite a litany of environmental problems in Gippsland.

11. Peer Review Rainforest Best Management Practice

October 2005

Terry Walshe and David Cameron

"The brief of the peer review required a critique of the BMP and requested:

** Examination of the ecological basis of the Rationale, in particular the description of the ecological processes for Cool Temperate Rainforest and Warm Temperate Rainforest and the analysis of elements of the risk profile.*

** Comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed protection measures, in particular the extent of buffering from a risk analysis perspective.*

An assessment of the extent to which the company's BMP was consistent with Principle 9 of the Forest Stewardship Council's (Smartwood) Interim Standard, was central to the review.

The Executive Summary states, when a requirement for a precautionary approach is invoked in accordance with Principle 9 "we consider buffer widths proposed in the BMP to be plainly inappropriate."

"We consider buffer widths proposed in the BMP to be plainly inappropriate."

"In particular we regard the treatment of risks posed by weed invasion, buffer disturbance and edge effects, Myrtle Wilt and wildfire to be deficient."

***"In the context of Principle 9 of FSC Interim Standard protection measures for
"In the context of Principle 9 of FSC Interim Standard protection measures for
Nationally, State and Regionally significant rainforest are inadequate."***

"In particular we regard the treatment of risks posed by weed invasion, buffer disturbance and edge effects, Myrtle Wilt and wildfire to be deficient."

"In the context of Principle 9 of FSC Interim Standard protection measures for Nationally, State and Regionally significant rainforest are inadequate."

Rainforest occurring on company land is considered High Conservation Value

Forests under Principle 9, the authors comment that the company goal makes no mention of the desirability of a precautionary approach.

The review notes that one goal suggests the objective of "no net loss" may be traded-off or compromised by commercial considerations It states:

"Areas of rainforest on Company Land will be managed as Custodial land. Protection measures will be tailored according to the conservation of significance of each patch of rainforest and the impact on investment value of adjoining plantations".

A trade-off with commercial interests is again implied in the BMP Rationale, where it is asserted that, “the overall degree of protection provided to Rainforest across company land is a value judgement designed to balance investment outcomes with conservation of environmental values. The company is best placed to make a responsible judgement.”

The approach adopted by the authors in the review has been to disregard notions of trade offs and to assess the extent to which protection measures proposed in the BMP can be considered consistent with Principle 9 of the FSC Interim Standard.

When reviewing the risk analysis the authors state they are not convinced of the arguments advanced in the Company's Rationale regarding the magnitude of risk that the identified risks pose and the associated imperative to manage those risks under their stated goal of “ensuring no net loss in the extent and quality of rainforest.”

“We regard the rationale's treatment of risks associated with weeds, buffer disturbance and edge effects, Myrtle Wilt and fire to be deficient.”

** Weed Infestation The company BMP fails to address the need for hygiene and vigilance.*

** Buffer disturbance and edge effects The authors are concerned that the rate of disturbance associated with plantation harvesting is greater than the natural level which will lead to an exacerbated impact.*

** Myrtle Wilt the company acknowledges myrtle wilt as a hazard but proceeds to discount the magnitude of the risk by*

arguing the risk profile in plantations is different to that in native forests.

“ we do not agree that the cumulative impact of the plantation management regime presents a significant lower net risk of precipitating a landscape scale wilt epidemic.”

HVP states, “the Company cannot mitigate risks associated with major disasters such as wildfire, storms or climate change.”

It is the authors view that this represents a risk profile applicable to the present early stage in what is a long-term recovery of the Strzelecki rainforests following a century of European settlement activity. The risk profile is essentially a static one.

** Fire In a risk management context there is a greater imperative to mitigate fire risks for core rainforests.*

** Buffer disturbance edge effects the authors note in highly dissected landscapes of the Strzelecki's and Otway Ranges the default minimum buffer can simply be specified by two tree height rule.*

The Draft Action Statement for elevated levels of Myrtle Wilt recommends a minimum of 60 metres plus additional buffers for steep slopes and unstable soils, which are specified in each Forest Management Plan.

The review highlights the importance of recognising that the regional characteristics of the Strzelecki estate of “boxing” all Cool Temperate Rainforest stands within the non- custodial land, irrespective of size or maturity, into their current envelopes, coupled with minimal

Buffer disturbance edge effects the authors note in highly dissected landscapes of the Strzelecki's and Otway Ranges the default minimum buffer can simply be specified by two tree height rule.

buffers, pose unacceptably high long-term and landscape scale level risks in relation to wildfire and disease epidemic.

** Performance criteria and monitoring
Monitoring is a key element underpinning the “continuous improvement” objective of the FSC interim standard. A precautionary approach implies a low risk of significant impact. In contrast HVP's BMP's pose substantial risks.*

The authors comment that inferences drawn from monitoring data can make 2 kinds of mistakes.

(1) - inferring an impact exists where there is none

(2)- inferring no impact where there is one. Any monitoring program needs to consider acceptable thresholds for committing the above errors.

** Assessing conservation significance The review notes that the Peel evaluation is designed to compare sites at a statewide scale and cannot be expected to discriminate reliably between large numbers of sites in a single geographic setting. The purpose of the method is to provide a comparative ranking of sites, already identified and rated, to guide landuse decision making and it is designed expressly to assess catchment based sites containing one or more stands of rainforest , not individual stands of rainforest. Most criteria evaluate all the stands in a site collectively and one attribute, catchment integrity, can only be assessed at the landscape scale.*

** The report then goes on to list the anticipated identification of the Cores and Links*

Rainforest sites. Note College Creek maintains its status as does the Gunyah Gunyah region.

The authors state that the assessment procedure in the Operating Standard for the Evaluation of Conservation Sites of Significance of Rainforest on Company land' appears to be of dubious value.”

In further comment the review states “ We regard the 40 metre buffer proposed for State significant rainforest at College Creek to be clearly inconsistent with the ecological value of the area.”

“We consider buffer widths proposed in the BMP to be plainly inappropriate.”

The report is critical of the lack of buffering on Cool Temperate Rainforest and Warm Temperate Rainforest.



March 2005: FSC auditors, working for Smartwood about to enter cool temperate rainforest at Morwell River East Branch – buffers here <20m – site of Regional Significance.

12. Conditions From 2006 Smartwood Assessment Report

Comments by FoGB in red underlined

“Page 39 – 40 CAR #:

Condition 9.1.2

Reference Standard #: 9.1

Non-compliance:

Major Minor

Applicable finding from Assessment Report (2004): “The native vegetation of most of these bioregions has been significantly depleted and many remnants are likely to be of at least bioregional conservation value. Examples include Wet Forest (depleted in the Strzelecki Ranges) and Cool Temperate Rainforest (sites of national and state conservation value within the Strzelecki Ranges). There is no current monitoring of the impacts of harvesting on custodial lands.

However, GRP has proposed a project to assess the distribution of Myrtle Wilt and monitor its impact on Cool Temperate Rainforest.”

Corrective Action Request: Throughout the certification period, HVP will join with State Government programs to monitor the incidence of myrtle wilt in cool temperate rainforest on HVP estate.

Timeline for Compliance: Throughout the certification period....

Status: Not Met. OPEN and Becomes MAJOR CAR 3-2006

Follow-up Action:

Condition 9.1.2 becomes MAJOR CAR 3-2006. By the 2007 annual audit, HVP shall complete and report on an initial broad scale survey for Myrtle Wilt in the Strzelecki Ranges”

This was a totally unsatisfactory exercise where the Independent Expertise was used again to give HVP credibility but this expert was then not allowed to write up the report and certainly has NEVER endorsed it at any level! A typical example of ticking the box and manipulating the CAR, yet again.

We have made repeated requests to have access to this report.

“Page 40 CAR #:

Condition 9.4.1

Reference Standard #: 9.4

Non-compliance:

Major Minor

Applicable finding from Assessment Report (2004): HCVF includes much of the remnant native vegetation (custodial land) within the HVP estate.

The most extensive and sensitive areas are managed by GRP. The HVP mapping and assessment program (Section 8 of the HVP/GRP Forest Management Plan) indicates that this region will be the first to formally manage HCVF under the new BMP procedures.”

“Specific regional indicator species or communities have not been selected.

Programs are still being developed and could not be audited.” (pages 105-106)

Corrective Action Request: Condition 9.4.1: HVP is to have determined, with input from State Government and interested local community groups, a shortlist of species that can be realistically and practically monitored

as an index of diversity and ecosystem health in HVP's custodial lands in the Strzelecki Ranges and the Gippsland Plain. The results of HVP's various biodiversity monitoring programs will be provided to SmartWood on an annual audit basis.

Timeline for Compliance: By the end of Year 2.

Audit findings:

Since the assessment report in 2004, HVP has made little progress to meet this Condition. In a submission to the audit team, HVP suggested three species that they felt could serve as indicator species and that would partly meet this condition. These proposals were partly based on on-going or proposed work with these species. The species are:

- Koala, based on the developing HVP work with Australian Koala Foundation. This work includes mapping of vegetation and koala habitat and development of a management plan, largely in response to community concerns for genetic integrity and population diversity.

- Myrtle Beech, based on plans to monitor myrtle wilt in rainforest and surrounding wet forest; and,

- Macro-invertebrates, based on previous work which could be repeated to provide an index for monitoring riparian ecosystem health and water quality....

Page 41 Results of monitoring are not being provided to SmartWood on an annual basis, although reports of faunal surveys done in the GRP area were available to the audit team.

Status: Not Met. Open. Becomes MAJOR CAR 4-2006

Follow-up Action:

Condition 9.4.1 becomes MAJOR CAR 4-2006: HVP is to determine, with input from State Government and interested local

community groups, a shortlist of species that can be realistically and practically monitored as an index of diversity and ecosystem health in HVP's custodial lands in the Strzelecki Ranges and the Gippsland Plain. The results of HVP's various biodiversity monitoring programs will be provided to SmartWood on an annual audit basis"

Major Community groups who have had a long term involvement in the FSC Audit Programs were not consulted to provide a shortlist of species to be monitored.

All we have witnessed up until 2013 is destruction of rainforest buffers, destruction of remnant old growth, fauna corridors and continual sediment run-off polluting major water courses.

"CAR 2-2006

Reference Standard #: 9.1

Non-compliance:

Major Minor

Description of non-compliance

Corrective Action Request:

MAJOR CAR 2-2006. Within 90 days, HVP shall demonstrate the following:

• A technically rigorous and thorough revision of the current Rainforest BMP has been

completed; this revision should incorporate the specific recommendations of the peer review and other technically sound inputs gathered through public review, and, where applicable, a clear rationale as to why specific recommendations proposed by peer review or other inputs have not been accepted by HVP;

• A revised BMP is provided to all HVP staff and contractors involved in their implementation;

- Full implementation of the revised BMP has formally started; and,

- A specific monitoring programme related to the Rainforest BMP is in place that will be able to provide systematic information on HVP performance in attaining Rainforest BMP conformance.

Timeline for Compliance: Within five months of the finalization of this annual audit.

Page 45 CAR #: MAJOR

CAR 3-2006

Reference Standard #: 9.1

Non-compliance:

Major Minor

Description of non-compliance: Myrtle Beech is an important attribute defining the cool temperate rainforest that is of high conservation value. Principle 9 requires that management measures in high conservation value forests shall maintain or enhance the attributes that define those forests, including myrtle beech. Monitoring of myrtle wilt is required to ensure that management measures are adequate to maintain and enhance the presence of myrtle beech in these high conservation value forests.

Corrective Action Request:

MAJOR CAR 3-2006. HVP shall complete and report on an initial broad scale survey for Myrtle Wilt in the Strzelecki Ranges.

Timeline for Compliance: Within five months of the finalization of this annual audit.

2. Audit decision

While there has been considerable progress made on most of the conditions and CARs that were audited for compliance, the audit team has found that HVP has barely maintained certifiable performance and has not

adequately addressed Conditions and CARs as defined by SmartWood and FSC policy. A total of 27 conditions and CARs were audited. 18 were met and closed. 7 were not met or remain open as follows:

- All MAJOR CARs were met although resulting in an additional MAJOR CAR;

- 2 CARs were not met and become a single MAJOR CAR with a 5-month timeline for completion;

- 3 Conditions were not met and become MAJOR CARs – all with 5-month timelines; and,

- 2 Conditions remain open and are on-going through the life of the certificate;

The five additional MAJOR CARs are listed above in Section 2.4. All of these MAJOR CARs must be met within 5 months of the finalization of this audit report or by the agreed upon 2007 audit period of February.

FSC policy requires that if MAJOR CARs are not met, the certificate should be suspended until such time as they have been adequately addressed or until such time allowance as provided by FSC and SmartWood policy. Thus, it should be noted that failure to address the MAJOR CARs identified in this report during the 2007 audit will result in suspension of the certificate”.


Well it would seem yet again Smartwood has failed to comply with the above mandatory requirement.

The ASI audits of 2007 and 2011 highlight Smartwood's inappropriate response to extended time frames.

So why is Smartwood still an acknowledged accrediting body and why has HVP retained its Forest Management certification?

Why has Maryvale retained its COC when HVP has not met Major CAR's within the required timeframe?

HVP is actively destroying sites containing HCVF including CTRE, WTRF stands of old growth. All sites of national state and regional conservation significance, identified by independent scientific reviews.



GRAND RIDGE PLANTATIONS

**EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST
MOUNTAIN ASH SAWLOGS**

**Grand Ridge Plantations Pty Ltd
would like to call for**

Expressions of interest in the short-term sale of Mountain ash sawlogs from its plantation estate in Gippsland, Victoria.

The following approx quantities are on offer for mill door sale:

- Large sawlog - 3000 tonnes
- Medium sawlog - 10,000 tonnes
- Industrial sawlogs - 40,000 tonnes

Parcels will be available for sale from July 1, 2006 for a one-year term.

The Weekly Times February 22, 2006. Hancock had been saying at this time that the company's wood supply commitments/licences mean that a reserve would not possible due to a shortage of wood!!!



David and Goliath battle awaits GIPPSLAND conservation group The Express, Thursday, 26 January 2006 Page 7 By LESLIE WHITE

Friends of Gippsland Bush (FOGB) has taken unprecedented legal action against a subsidiary of Canadian based MFC Global Investment Management. (Hancock Victorian Plantations) ..

The legal action will be taken in the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) under an Application for Enforcement Order under Section 114 to 120 of the Planning and Environment Act 1987.

It is alleged Grand Ridge Plantations has removed native vegetation for the construction of an access track on Crown Land in the Parish of Gunyah Gunyah, in the Strzelecki Ranges.

It is also alleged that the company intends to remove native vegetation without gaining permits from Latrobe City Council and that this would breach Section 52.17 of the Latrobe City Planning Scheme...

13. Hancock Dispute Rainforest Experts and Stall For More Time – Source: 2006 Smartwood Audit. Meanwhile Logging Rainforest Buffers Continues Unabated.

“Following the 2005 audit, HVP selected and engaged two experts to review the companies' draft Rainforest BMP, including the proposed widths of buffers. The review was completed and was submitted to the Company in October 2005. It is a lengthy and very detailed review that addresses many considerations and issues related to the management of cool and warm temperate rainforest in HVP holdings. The audit team recognizes that HVP undertook this review in a very significant way and sought out two respected experts in this field. It is clearly an expert review, rather than a peer review. HVP provided substantial resources and assistance for the reviewers and they received a very thorough, well-documented and well-reasoned 32 page report in return. The fundamental conclusion of the two experts is that the buffers in the draft BMP for both cool and warm temperate rainforest are "inadequate", particularly where, as in FSC Principle 9, a precautionary approach is required.

HVP responded to the review report in early November 2005 by sending the reviewers an annotated version of the report containing a substantial number of points where HVP disagreed with the report. At the time of the audit in March 2006, HVP provided the audit team with an expanded list of points, but these additional points had not been sent to the two expert reviewers. Since the HVP response in November, there has been no other communication between HVP and

the experts and the draft BMP has not been completed or revised.

The audit team reviewed the experts' report and the HVP response and interviewed both experts and the HVP staff who were directly involved. The two experts told the team that they consider their report to stand on its merits. They acknowledge some of the points raised by HVP but dispute others, and do not feel that any of the points change the fundamental conclusion of the report regarding the width of rainforest buffers. HVP told the team that they would like the expert report to be revised to address their disagreements but acknowledge they have not pursued this request since November. The team concluded that while there are disagreements over some points of detail in the review, HVP has not disputed the major conclusion of the review that the existing BMP is inadequate to meet the requirements of Principle 9 of the FSC Standard.

Despite the conclusions of the expert review, HVP has taken no action to revise and complete the BMP. They provided the audit team with a 5-page outline of the company response to the expert review, but it does not appear that any of the proposed responses have been undertaken and the responses do not include revisions to the buffer widths or acknowledge the conclusion that they are "inadequate". HVP has also not sought any outside public review of the draft BMP, as required by the MAJOR CAR, and has also not sought any outside public review of the

draft BMP, as required by the MAJOR CAR, and has not made the report of the expert reviewers, or HVP's proposed response, available to anyone outside the company. No external public review has been initiated or completed at the time of the audit.

The team notes that HVP has also not taken any actions to contact the two experts to follow up on their initial response in November 2005. The rainforest BMP remains in the same draft form it was at the time of the 2005 annual audit.

Finally, HVP is continuing to apply the same, or in some cases narrower, buffer widths as in 2002 and 2004 when the original SmartWood assessment report and the monitoring audit described those buffers as "inadequate" and imposed CAR-2004 to establish a process to determine adequate buffer widths. That CAR was not met in 2005 and led to MAJOR CAR 9-2005 being imposed then.

The team concludes that for the three reasons above - failure to complete the BMP, failure to engage in external public review, and failure to implement revised buffer widths for rainforest when the expert review describes the current widths as "inadequate" - HVP has not met the requirement of the MAJOR CAR. Essentially, from an auditing point of view, this is where the matter finishes. Guidance to auditors from FSC and SmartWood states that a MAJOR CAR must be closed out or the certificate will be suspended. In this case, the team concludes that the MAJOR CAR is not closed and the failure to meet it is significant. The team does not accept that there are major extenuating circumstances that contributed to the delay in responding to the expert review which was completed in October 2005. Those delays, since October 2005, were internal within HVP. SmartWood and FSC policy therefore requires that, until the BMP

meets the requirements of Principle 9, the Company's continuing certification should be suspended.

The Company makes the case that this CAR cannot be considered in isolation. Application of the BMP has serious implications to the Company's resource availability in the Strzelecki area of its operations because many of its plantation stands are contiguous with cool temperate rainforest. For example, part of the Company's resource (the 'Cores and Links') has been under a voluntary moratorium on harvesting because of these associated values. Recent modelling of woodflows from the whole GRP resource has shown that future contracted commitments cannot be met without harvesting of plantation stands within the Cores and Links. While the audit team accepts this connection, the presentation on resource availability made to the audit team did not demonstrate that buffer width on rainforest was a 'go' or 'no go' variable in meeting commitments. In fact the modelling demonstrated that the Company would have to implement both the existing (inadequate) BMP and harvest almost all the plantation in the Cores and Links to meet its contracted commitments. Thus, the shortfall and Cores and Links situation does not give the Company any reasonable excuse to avoid its commitment to deal with the expert review of the BMP. The only way out of the resource impasse would be to find alternative sources for woodflows so that the resource can meet commitments when the BMP is modified to meet the requirements of the expert review.

In addition, the company is concerned that a Draft Action Statement on Temperate Rainforest is under public review and it does not want to take action in advance of the finalization of that Action Statement. The audit team does not accept that this is a reason to delay implementation of provisions to meet FSC requirements in Principle 9.

Following the field audit, further information and evidence was provided to SmartWood that resulted in a determination that this MAJOR CAR had technically been met, however due to the poor wording of the CAR the intent has not been met. Thus, this CAR is closed out and a new MAJOR CAR2-2006 has been added that will be audited in February 2006 for completion. HVP has been advised that failure to meet the MAJOR CAR within that time frame will result in suspension of their certificate based on requirements of FSC.”

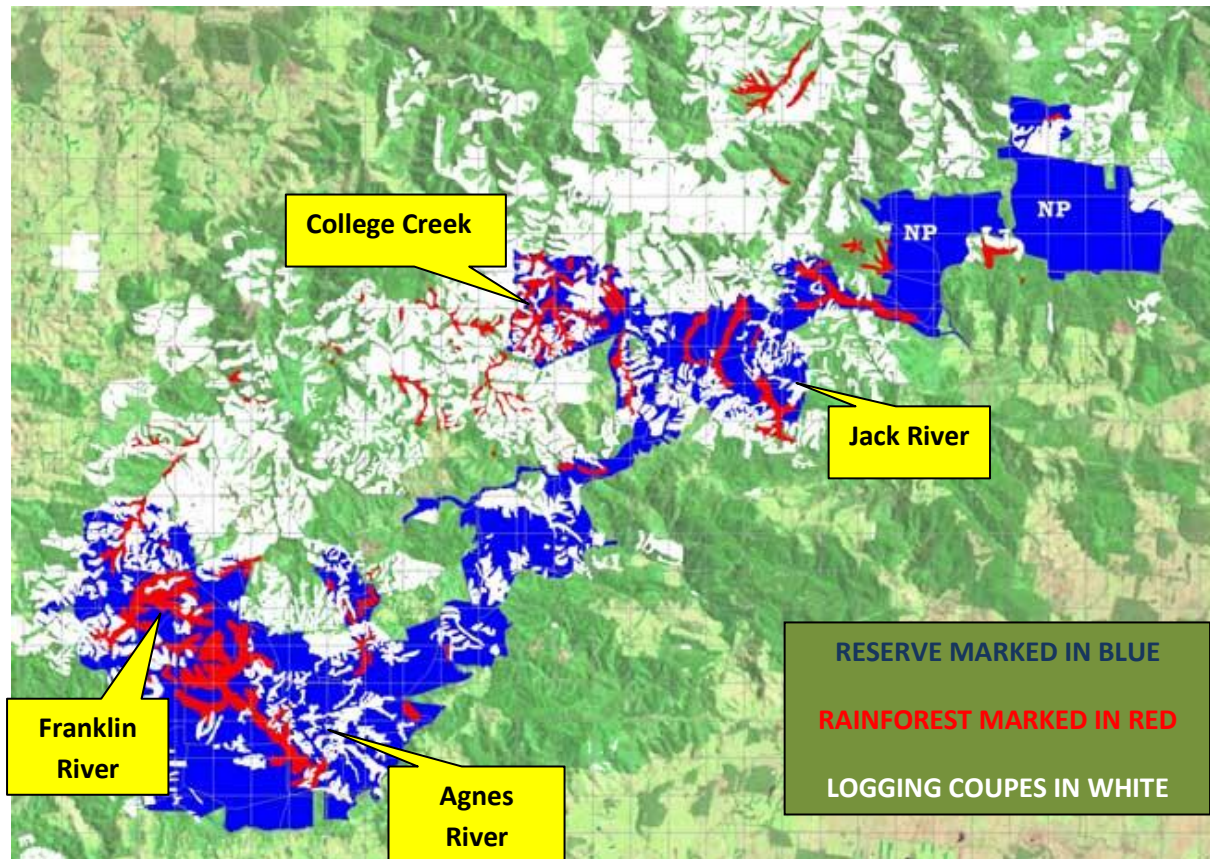
Since this report was written the above CAR wording has been changed and consequently closed in 2008. See report on the politics of this action. As far as we are concerned this Major CAR has never been met. The closure of this CAR was an outrage and on this principle, SmartWood Rainforest Alliance, should have had its accrediting status removed and HVP should have had its certificate of Forest Management removed.



September 2006: The western edge of the Smiths Creek rainforest can clearly be seen by the photo taken from the Midlands Highway. The rainforest seen in the gully is surrounded by planted Mountain Ash and remnant native forest. The Mountain Ash was established by Australian Paper Manufacturers in the mid 1970's. Most of the rainforest is located on the Agricultural Reserve Leasehold (Parish of Jumbuk) which is now held under 60 year leasehold by Hancock Victorian Plantations. The Agricultural Reserve is bounded on the western side by private land allotments (Parish of Budgeree) now owned by Hancock Victorian Plantations. 20 metre buffers here.

14. Strzelecki Cores and Links Rainforest Reserve

Map is the current state of the Reserve – not what the community requested in 1999



October 13 2006: Strzelecki Cores and Links Rainforest Reserve announced by Victorian Conservation Minister John Thwaites (man in grey suit standing). Deal fell through 2 years later.

Community concern about the sale of the Victorian Plantations Corporation in 1998 (the Strzelecki Public Forests) to Hancock Timber Resource Group in the US, without community consultation led to the formation of the Strzelecki Working Group (SWG) in 1999. This group comprising Latrobe, Wellington & South Gippsland shires, the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (WGCMA), Hancock Victorian Plantations Pty Ltd (HVP) and its subsidiary Grand Ridge Plantations (GRP) the Trust For Nature (TFN in 2000) along with environmental and community groups, engaged Biosis Research Pty. Ltd. to assess the conservation values of HVP holdings in the Strzelecki Ranges. (The Strzelecki Ranges Biodiversity Study. Biosis Research. November 2001).

The purpose of the study was to identify areas of high biodiversity value and develop management options for protecting these values. Five core areas and associated habitat links were identified as focal points for biodiversity and included areas of Cool Temperate Rainforest and populations of rare, threatened and endangered flora and fauna, which are vulnerable to disturbances.

The areas were identified as: Merriman's Core Area linking Tarra Bulga National Park to South Middle Creek on the Tarra River to Jack River and College Creek Core areas joining the Albert River and Ryton link to Gunyah Gunyah Rainforest Reserve. These are all sites of National State and Regional conservation significance.

In all other circumstances these areas of leased crown land would have been set aside in protected parks/reserves decades ago. These are all high conservation value forests.

However in the Strzelecki Bioregion the driving force behind all timber policies has been dictated by the Maryvale Paper Mill and the Timber Industry at the expense of all other ecological and social factors.

Failure to protect the Biodiversity values of the Strzelecki Ranges

Government policy and legislation has failed to protect the ecological assets of the region. The Strzelecki public forests have been treated differently to all other public forests in the state.

(Refer to attachment "Land Conservation Council -Review of Victorian Plantations Corporation Vested Lands As requested by the Minister for Planning, August 1993".)

The Victorian Plantation Corporation acquired State Forest areas, prior to government commitment to the Gippsland Regional Forest Agreement. This means that the Strzelecki Ranges were excluded from protection under the Comprehensive Adequate and Representative Reserve System (CAR). Presently, only 2% of the Strzelecki Ranges are protected within reserves or parks.

The minimum area for public forests is 15% representation of the original vegetation cover. This represents thousands of hectares protected in other public forests in Victoria.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU's)

HVP/GRP entered into an agreement with the Community and Trust for Nature by signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Trust for Nature and the Nature Conservancy in 2004. When the Company removed itself from this MOU another Agreement was signed with the State Government, the Community the Trust for Nature and Australian Paper in October

2006. This agreement is referred to as **the Heads of Agreement (HoA)**.

The **HoA** was to provide an opportunity for HVP to meet its contractual arrangement to the Maryvale Mill with a "one off harvest" (until the volume of 600,000 cubic metres pulp was reached), of designated areas within the Cores and Links.

Access to Custodial land

Rather than further fragmenting an area which was already compromised due to decades of land mismanagement it was agreed that if there was a shortfall after the "one off harvest" in the areas in the Cores and Links, a small amount would have to be accessed from Custodial land. These would be carefully selected sites from isolates, outliers and areas within plantations.

The amount to be accessed from Custodial land was to be validated after audits of the volumes being accessed from each coupe, were determined. The company presented the 460,000 cubic metres figure, it was never accepted by the community and had not been validated by any audits.

The HoA detailed the process whereby the best biodiversity outcome would be delivered linking Tarra Bulga National Park to the Gunyah Gunyah Rainforest Reserve . This agreement provided a degree of transparency and accountability with full community consultation at every level of the process.

The Trust For Nature a Statutory Authority was to manage the project which would eventually deliver a world class Rainforest Reserve.

The HoA delivered sub-catchment and partial sub-catchment to the Core areas of Rainforest to ensure their long term viability.

The major stakeholders involved in all of these agreements was the Strzelecki Forest Community Group, (the SWG minus the Industry) who networked widely with many other groups within their communities.

Breach of Trust

On the 30th May 2008 the community was informed via a media release that the past 10 years of negotiations between the company and the community through the Strzelecki Forest Community Group had been abandoned by the company and the government for a "secret agreement" whereby the Core Areas of Rainforest which had been given total protection under the HoA would now be harvested.

Custodial land to be protected under this "secret" deal: land which is identified by the company as non plantation areas- according to the map (scale of 1:50.0000) released to the Public, 50% of the area includes weed infested gullies, riparian zones in Pine and Shining Gum plantations, areas which contain little merchantable timber and is varied in quality & size and is often isolated pockets not connected to other corridors of native bush. The exception being a few areas adjacent to Tarra Bulga National park.

The new deal is a distraction from the major issue, saving the Core Areas of Strzelecki Cool Temperate Rainforest by leaving intact buffers of wet forests connecting existing parks and reserves thereby providing a healthy viable reserve system. This deal has no similarities to anything that the major stakeholders have discussed over the last 10 years and therefore should not be referred to as the Cores and Links Reserve.

This is the 3rd time that this company and its predecessor AMCOR/APP have refused to deliver commitments made to the community and statutory authorities.

Friends of Gippsland Bush are waiting for the company to deliver 12,000 hectares of Nature Reserves promised to the people of Gippsland in the "8 point" agreement signed between FOGB and APP in 1997. Sites of National significance such as the Darlimurla Block are not included in this New Deal.

HVP removed themselves from the MOU signed with the Trust for Nature and Nature Conservancy in 2004 claiming that their modelling was incorrect and a failure of 1100 hectares of Blue Gum would lead to a shortfall of 600,000 cubic metres of pulp for the Mill.

Failure to meet commitments made in the HoA

The figure of 600,000 cubic metres was the only shortfall figure ever presented at Public Meetings from 2005-2006. The Company informed all parties post signing the HoA that the shortfall was over 835,000 cubic metres and that this did not include the sawlog component (nothing to do with the shortfall of pulp to the Mill) which would increase the volume over 1,000,000 cubic metres.

The Company also claimed that none of the shortfall would come from the designated harvest areas in the Cores and Links, agreed upon areas as per the HoA , but it would all come from Custodial land.

Needless to say the community and the Minister of the day Minister John Thwaites rejected these outrageous company demands.

In 2008 without consultation with the stakeholders involved in negotiations which led to the signing of the HoA, the company removed itself from the process. We were informed by a media release.



College Creek Clearfell 2010 Prime Koala Habitat Guttled



Dozens of old growth stags burnt and bulldozed at College Creek – This shot taken April 2012.

15. Strzelecki Cores and Links Ecological Values

Hancock Continue to Clear-fell High Conservation Value Forests

The Cores and Links comprised the following catchments: Jack River, Merriman's Creek, South Middle Creek, College Creek, Albert River, Agnes River, Franklin River & Morwell River.

All sites are of State & National conservation significance.

Agreement signed between Hancock Victorian Government and Victorian State Government allows for clearfelling of 1500ha inside the cores and links (including 600ha in key rainforest core areas [350ha inside College Creek alone]). This agreement was publicly supported by VNPA, TWS and the TFN, in joint Press Release dated 30/5/08.

Background:

The fight to save the Strzelecki State forests has been an ongoing issue since the 1890's.

Two large reservations of mountain ash forest in the higher eastern-Strzelecki's; the Gunyah Timber Reserve and the Agricultural College Reserve (College Creek) in the Parish of Jumbuk, were recognised to be highly significant. Report on the South Gippsland Study Area, District 2 Land Conservation Council October, 1980.

"Rainforests and Cool Temperate Mixed Forests of Victoria Bill Peel DNRE January 1999" lists College Creek - Level of assessment attribute State. Ryton Junction regional, Gunyah Gunyah National.

"Hancock Victorian Plantations Peer Review of proposed Rainforest Best Management Practices October 2005 reviewed April 2006 Terry Walshe and

David Cameron" lists College Creek state significance for rainforest. Jack River and Merriman's Creek have a provisional state ranking.

Extracts:

"An assessment of the extent to which the company's BMP was consistent with Principle 9 of the Forest stewardship Council's (Smartwood) Interim Standard, was central to the review.

The Executive Summary states, when a requirement for a precautionary approach is invoked in accordance with Principle 9 "we consider buffer widths proposed in the BMP to be plainly inappropriate."

"In particular we regard the treatment of risks posed by weed invasion, buffer disturbance and edge effects, Myrtle Wilt and wildfire to be deficient."

"In the context of Principle 9 of FSC Interim Standard protection measures for Nationally, State and Regionally significant rainforest are inadequate."

Rainforest occurring on company land is considered High Conservation Value Forests under Principle 9 , the authors comment that the company goal makes no mention of the desirability of a precautionary approach".

Case Study: College Creek North face Grand Ridge Road - Site of National significance

"Strzelecki Ranges Biodiversity Study Biosis Research 2001" ranks College Creek as a site of National Conservation significance for its flora and fauna attributes and lists College Creek as one of 5 Core areas of Cool Temperate Rainforest

linking Merriman's, Tarra Bulga National Park to the Gunyah Gunyah Rainforest Reserve.

College Creek Background

College Creek has long been recognised as a site of great historical and scientific significance. This fact was brought to the Timber Industry and State Government's attention in 1996.

Post the February 2009 wildfires College Creek was the last relatively intact refuge on the North face containing large tracts of old growth, cool temperate rainforest, regenerating and planted forests.

There has been recent positive identification of the Spot-tailed Quoll in the vicinity of College Creek. (Chris Belcher scat identification July 2010).

Prior to the one off harvest, College Creek was home to many threatened species including the Powerful Owl, and the Australian mainland stronghold for the critically endangered *Tmesipteris elongata* and many others.

Positive sightings, recordings and scat analysis of fauna included - Greater Gliders, Yellow bellied Glider, Bobucks, Gang Gangs, Rosellas, Yellow Tailed Black Cockatoos, the Broad-toothed rat, Platypus, Water Rat, Giant (as yet unnamed) native earth worm, Lyre Birds, Echidnas, Bandicoots, Antechinus, Sugar Gliders, Strzelecki Burrowing Crayfish

and a stable population of the endemic Strzelecki Koala.

The latest DNA work undertaken on the Strzelecki Koala highlights its major role in maintaining healthy populations across Victoria and Australia. Tristan Lee Australian Mammology 2011.

Two distinct genomes have been identified which separates the South Gippsland koala from the rest of the Victorian and South Australian translocated animals.

If you view recent photos depicting the destruction during and post-harvest it will be obvious that most of the rainforest, old growth, stags, hollow dependent fauna, arboreal communities and mycorrhizal fungi present in the soil have little chance of surviving this onslaught.



**College Creek High Conservation
Forest Gutted. 2010**

HVP removed themselves from the MOU signed with the Trust for Nature and Nature Conservancy in 2004 claiming that their modelling was incorrect and a failure of 1100 hectares of Blue Gum would lead to a shortfall of 600,000 cubic metres of pulp for the Mill.



College Creek Rainforest

16. 2007 Smartwood Audit Findings

The key issue here is Rainforest CAR's being closed by Smartwood without being properly addressed. (FOGB Comment)

"At the beginning of this audit, HVP gave the audit team a revised Rainforest BMP (policy and procedures, and operating standards) along with a Rainforest BMP rationale, a Field Determination of the Boundary of Rainforest document, the peer review of the HVP response, an eight page document which details how the Corrective Action Request (CAR) has been addressed, and several sheets detailing the preliminary results of the rainforest monitoring.

*In regards to the first dot point of this CAR, HVP consulted two rainforest experts in 2005 to peer review the companies' draft Rainforest BMP. This peer review report was submitted in October of that year. This review was a lengthy and detailed analysis of the draft Rainforest BMP, and generally concluded that the Companies' protection measures for rainforest were inadequate. **HVP responded to the peer review in early November 2005, and during October 2005 and April 2006 minor amendments were made to the peer review, but the Rainforest BMP was not completed. Thus the MAJOR CAR was imposed.***

During this audit, the audit team interviewed one of the authors of the peer review report and HVP staff involved with the Rainforest BMP, and confirmed that no further revisions in response to the peer review had been discussed with the authors of the peer review since April

2006. However, HVP have now produced a revised Rainforest BMP, which has incorporated some of the comments from the peer review (e.g. monitoring and some buffer widths) and where HVP deemed these comments to be inappropriate, they have produced a 'clear rationale' (e.g. measuring 30 meter buffer widths for most regional/local remnants of rainforest, from the mid point of the ecotone and other operational procedures). There is also evidence that several stakeholders were sent the draft Rainforest BMP and responses were provided, although it is stated in a document provided to the audit team that 'no information which had not already been considered was received'. HVP also provided evidence that approximately 40% of the Rainforest on Company land will be buffered by a conservation reserve if the Cores and Links agreement progresses and a further 30% of Rainforest interface with Custodial Land.

Therefore, the first requirement of the CAR has been met, as a revision of the Rainforest BMP has been completed and some comments incorporated from the peer review. Where comments from the peer reviewers have not been incorporated, a rationale has been provided. Further, in a letter dated 16th October 2006, the revised Rainforest BMP has been reviewed by staff (not one of the peer review authors) from the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE), and HVP's approach to the management of rainforest has been endorsed by DSE as "being consistent with the outcomes sought in the draft Rainforest Action Statement".

The audit team has some technical concerns with the revised BMP. These include how buffer widths are measured

Is the rationale Correct?

DSE come to Hancock's rescue

Smartwood starting to side with Hancock against the recommendations made by experts.

(i.e. are they measured in the horizontal plane?), how buffer widths are determined for steep terrain and the adequacy of the buffers for some stands of rainforest. At the time of the audit, there are no references to the first two issues in either the BMP Rationale or the Operating Standard, and buffer widths are still considered "inadequate" by the experts who conducted the peer review.

These issues are particularly pertinent when considering the 'precautionary approach' of Principle 9, and both the nature of rainforest remnants in the Strzeleckis and the steep topography of the Strzeleckis. Consideration of these points would also make the Company's rainforest rationale become more aligned with rainforest management strategies for public land, and definitions under the Application of the Code - Plantations, as described in the Code of Forest Practice for Timber Production, Draft for Public Comment, February (DSE 2006). The audit team concluded that the first requirement of this MAJOR CAR has been met but the Rainforest BMP and the requirements of Criterion 6.2 are further discussed in Appendix 111. CAR 2/07 is imposed there.

In regards to the second dot point of the CAR, the revised Rainforest BMP has been distributed to all HVP staff, but not yet physically to contractors. HVP provided two valid reasons for this. They wish to progress the BMP further before distributing it to contractors and, operationally, contractors only require the coupe plans, which are supervised by HVP staff. During this supervision any information related to the Rainforest BMP are relayed by HVP staff to the contractors. The team concluded that this was sufficient to close this part of the CAR. However, the audit team believes that the requirement to distribute the Rainforest

BMP to contractors has merit and should be undertaken in the near future. This has been included as Observation 8/07.

In regards to the third dot point of the CAR, interviews with HVP staff, both in Melbourne and in Gippsland, indicates that the implementation of the revised BMP has formally started.

In regards to the fourth dot point of the CAR, the audit team was informed by HVP staff that monitoring had begun on two coupes with remnant CTR present. This had been undertaken in June 2006 and February 2007. One is the Tarra-Bulga coupe and the other is Pattinson Road coupe. Parameters being assessed include buffer disturbance/integrity and the incidence of Myrtle Wilt, as per the recommendations of the peer review.

In summary, the audit team does not agree with all the suggested rationales where HVP has not accepted suggestions or comments of the peer reviewers, and feels that the recommendations from the peer review should be incorporated further into the BMP (including how buffer widths are measured, how buffer widths are determined for steep terrain, and the adequacy of buffer widths. These are discussed further in Principle 6 and CAR 2/07 is imposed there). However, it is evident that HVP have met the key objectives of this MAJOR CAR i.e they have undertaken the peer review, they have provided a rationale where they differ, and they have begun a monitoring program. Therefore the audit team has concluded MAJOR CAR 2-2006 is met and closed.

Status: Closed

* Cool Temperate Rainforest is Nationally threatened and is listed under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act."

17. Email to Accredited Services International from Susie Zent FoGB 2007

* Several Draft Action Statements for - Human activity which results in artificially elevated or epidemic levels of Myrtle Wilt within Nothofagus- Dominated Cool Temperate Rainforest, elevated levels are directly related to logging and thinning operations in this document.

Rainforest and Cool temperate Mixed Forests and Slender Tree Ferns.

Are under review.

* The Strzelecki species identification list including Wet and Cool Temperate Rainforests and Warm Temperate Rainforest has been approved by the department.

* There are numerous Threatening Processes which are listed under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act. These include Fragmentation and Habit loss and Human activity which results in artificially elevated or epidemic levels of Myrtle Wilt within Nothofagus -dominated Cool Temperate Rainforest..

Any listed threatening process has undergone a rigorous scientific review process.

HVP have totally ignored recommendations in these documents.

* HVP has consistently refused to apply the precautionary principle to any of their harvesting operations. This application is critical as pointed out in all scientific data related to Cool Temperate Rainforest.

* The authors of Hancock's rainforest BMP's make repeated references in the

Peer Review on measures required to provide the Strzelecki Rainforests with adequate protection. They state categorically that HVP's Rainforest buffer's are, inadequate and assumptions made by the company are not correct.

I am continually astonished that an FSC Certified company is allowed in its 5th year of Certification to leave minimal to zero buffers on the Strzelecki Cool Temperate and Warm Temperate Rainforests, ignoring all recommendations made by the top Rainforest ecologists in the country.

* I am continually astonished that an FSC Certified company is allowed in its 5th year of Certification to leave minimal to zero buffers on the Strzelecki Cool Temperate and Warm Temperate Rainforests, ignoring all recommendations made by the top Rainforest ecologists in the country.

* The Company's attitude and actions insults the intelligence and integrity of these professionals

* HVP's latest actions - removing themselves from the HoA, signed by the government, the Trust for Nature, the Strzelecki Forest Community Group, which comprises three Shires and the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority and Community representing NGO's, HVP, Grand Ridge Plantations and Australian Paper in October 2006 , via a media release, is yet another example in a list extending over a decade, which displays a complete disregard for a broad range of key stakeholders who have attempted to work with the company to deliver the best biodiversity outcome for the Strzelecki Bioregion.

* Although there were many elements of the HoA we were not comfortable with it would have delivered a degree of protection for the Core Areas of Rainforest linking existing National Parks.

* This "new deal" will ensure the destruction of at least two Core Areas of Rainforest, College Creek and Merrimans which had been given total protection in the HoA.

* It will lead to further fragmentation of an area already under enormous stress and give totally inadequate protection to Cool Temperate Rainforest refer to Cameron's Review of HVP's Rainforest Best Management Practice October 2005.

The option of utilising outlyers and isolated areas of Custodial land (rather than increasing the harvest level in the Cores and Links to unsustainable levels) which the company had agreed to, would have achieved a far better biodiversity outcome, conserving key areas of Wet and Cool Temperate Rainforest. Refer to Strzelecki Ranges Biodiversity Study 2001.,

* The company continues to harvest stands of old trees, native bush and Crown land Reserves. This includes large areas which are not plantation...

* Wet forests are being converted to a monoculture of non-indigenous pine and shining gum...

.How can the above actions comply with FSC Standards and Principles?

This letter was printed in the Latrobe Valley Express in response to the Minister's media release and a follow up article re- the Cores and Links.

The Minister's media release cannot be referred to as the Cores and Links deal, as it bears no similarity to what the Strzelecki Forest Community Group comprising, three shires the Catchment Management

Authority the Trust For Nature and community organisations, negotiated over a 10 year period which led to the signing of the HoA in October 2006.

The HoA ensured a level of transparency and accountability. It was to be the framework for the contract to be signed by the company and govt. The past minister refused to sign a contract which was not endorsed by the community.

College Creek a listed site of National Significance was afforded sub catchment protection, Total exclusion from harvesting. It will now be harvested. Merriman's a site of State significance containing an historic walking track will also be harvested

Minister Thwaites had gone to great lengths to protect the Core Areas of Rainforest linking Tarra Bulga National Park to Gunyah Gunyah Rainforest Reserve. This would ensure the best biodiversity outcome maintaining a healthy viable ecosystem.

College Creek a listed site of National Significance was afforded sub catchment protection, Total exclusion from harvesting. It will now be harvested. Merriman's a site of State significance containing an historic walking track will also be harvested.

As I have stated in past correspondence the protection of 15000 -20000 hectares of Custodial land- what are the actual figures, is a totally separate issue.

I have never claimed that the Custodial Land does not have any biodiversity values.

The Custodial Land has varying degrees of quality size and connectivity. It includes weed infested gullies and small pockets of isolated bush

It is absolutely critical that existing National Parks and reserves are maintained

and enhanced. That is why an independent scientific review identified the Strzelecki Cores and Links as containing the highest biodiversity values in the Strzelecki's.

The community is angered that the company and govt., without consultation, have walked away from an agreement which would have delivered a world class reserve system.

We have asked for details of the agreement brokered between HVP, Australian Paper and the govt. thus far our requests have been denied.

We look forward to receiving details contained in this agreement.

Regards

Susie Zent

Secretary FOGB

Comments to RF BMP

Although there have been minor revisions in the latest BMP's in personal conversation with experts who have seen the Revised BMP's 2007 they maintain that their critique in the Review of 2005/6 still applies.

At the time the review was undertaken the Company had agreed to protect the Core Areas of Rainforest linking Tarra Bulga National Park to the Gunyah Gunyah Rainforest Reserve.

The protection of these areas no longer applies, thereby placing the Strzelecki Cool Temperate Rainforests under enormous threat as the Company's protective measures for Rainforest are deemed to be totally inadequate.

Q: Who Pays For the "Independent" FSC Audit?

A: The company that is being audited.

"FSC needs to break the direct economic link between the certifiers and the loggers that want to get certified. It needs to enact much stricter sanctions against certifiers that break the rules... It needs to immediately ban the issuing of certificates where there is no local forestry standard that has been agreed by local stakeholders."

http://news.mongabay.com/2008/0417-hance_interview_counsell.html

18. Friends of Gippsland Bush's Response to HVP's Rainforest BMP's – 2007?

FOGB's initial response to HVP's RF BMP's

Operating Standard For The Identification And Protection Of Rainforest On Company Land-Document

1 Purpose

No Net Loss does not reflect Victorian Government Policy

The purpose should reflect Victorian Government policy which is net gain in both the quality and quantity of native vegetation across the state on both public and private land.

2 Identification of Rainforest

There is no definition of Rainforest as claimed by HVP. There is a description in the Code of Forest Practices (CFP) for Timber Production which has been misquoted. It is not *defined ecologically as closed.....* this has been HVP's addition. HVP has also omitted to include "*Refer to the Rainforest and Cool Temperate Mixed Forest Action Statement for a full definition including field identification.*" which the company is refusing to implement.

70% foliage cover relates to mature forests with no disturbance, ignoring post disturbance healing which takes 150- 200 years.

Page 2 The minimum standard area for recognition of rainforest is 0.1 ha; so why

has HVP applied 0.2ha ?...

Boundary determination.

Page 7 Pine Plantation adjacent to Rainforest creates problems. One example being at Blythman's 2003/4 where several tributaries of CTRF were destroyed with the removal of the pines

Buffers for Strzelecki Warm Temperate Rainforest

Macks Creek is an example of shoddy practices having adverse impacts on Warm Temperate Rainforest.

20 meter buffers afford little protection and why would the company not protect Warm Temperate Rainforest (WTRF) less than 0.2 ha and WTRF located on non-permanent streams?

This conflicts with buffers recommended in the Strzelecki Biodiversity Study 2001 and Gippsland Regional Interpretations of the CFP: October 2002.

It also ignores advice provided to the company by the Department's rainforest ecologist during site inspections.

If HVP is going to use the reputation of credible rainforest ecologists then at the very least they should implement standards recommended by these scientists.

Page 10& 11 Attachment 5 CTRF Identification and Protection Decision Key.

If HVP is going to use the reputation of credible rainforest ecologists then at the very least they should implement standards recommended by these scientists.

I am reluctant to make comment on this section as it is not based on any scientific rationale or RF data published over the past 20 years.

HVP's "definitions" make no sense. Where are you going to find closed canopy cover greater than 70%?

If HVP are making reference to the Action Statement then do not take it out of context. Refer to pp 1-2 Draft F&F Guarantee Action Statement Rainforests and CT Mixed Forests of Victoria.

Rainforest Policy and Procedure-Document

Goals there is no legislated definition they are descriptions to be used in combination with the differential species list and all other relevant legislation.

Net Gain not Net Loss is Victoria's policy-Victoria's Vegetation Management A Framework For Action.

Page 3 2.3 Mapping

Data produced in the past 20 years related to Victorian Rainforests, does not support HVP's definition of rainforest. The company's buffer widths where Rainforest will be identified, do not meet the minimum requirements for protection of these communities.

2. Identifying conservation significance.

1st paragraph- the claim that HVP are using quality rating based on Peel 1999 cannot be substantiated. Peels work is not replicated in HVP's Operating Standard for the Evaluation of conservation Significance for Rainforest.

Page 4

Have Peel Cameron or Mueck made recommendations to reassess the conservation significance of College Creek? It was ranked as a site of State Significance by Peel DSE 1999.

Page 5 Monitoring

This text is taken from credible sources however unless HVP employ suitably qualified rainforest ecologists to implement monitor and interpret the data it will be of little use.



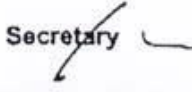
Tmesipteris obliqua (Endangered on Mainland Australia)



Ancient Myrtle Beech at College Creek



Department of Sustainability and Environment

TO: Secretary  Ref: SEC003805
SEC003805R
FROM: Natural Resources File:
SUBJECT: Rainforest Management Policy, Procedure and Operating Standards

RECOMMENDATION/S

1. That you sign the attached reply to Ms Linda Sewell, Chief Executive Officer, Hancock Victorian Plantations (HVP).

KEY ISSUES

2. The changes made to HVP's Rainforest Management Policy, Procedure and Operating Standards conform to the requirements of the *Code of Practice for Timber Production 2007* (the Code) and the draft Action Statement for Rainforest under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*, as they relate to private native forest.
3. HVP is under increasing pressure from conservation groups to adopt the rainforest protection prescriptions that apply to public land, for the management of HVP land in the Strzelecki Ranges, South Gippsland. This goes beyond the requirements of the Code and the draft Action Statement, and risks establishing a precedent with potential impacts on other private landholders.
4. The attached reply endorses the Rainforest Management Policy, Procedure and Operating Standards and reaffirms DSE's position that environmental standards for the management of private native forest do not necessarily need to align with those for public native forest.
5. The reply also notes that HVP may need to review its Rainforest Management Policy, Procedure and Operating Standards once the Action Statement for Rainforest is finalised and approved. DSE could assist with this further review at the appropriate time.

So much for
FSC Principles
and Criteria.
They are now
irrelevant for
HVP

CONTEXT

6. DSE endorsed HVP's Rainforest Management Policy, Procedure and Operating Standards on 20 October 2006, following a long period of consultation associated with the revision of the Code and the development of the draft Action Statement for Rainforest.
7. In February 2007, HVP was audited for Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification. HVP has stated that as a result of the audit, it was required to increase rainforest buffer widths to align the approach to rainforest protection adopted for public native forest.
8. The revision of HVP's Rainforest Management Policy, Procedure and Operating Standards was undertaken in consultation with DSE staff. The Company is now seeking your endorsement of the revised Rainforest Management Policy, Procedure and Operating Standards.

Oh Really!!!

Approved by: 

Date: 29/10/17

Janine Haddow, Executive Director Natural Resources ☎ 9637 8014

Reviewed by: Kylie White, Director Forest Resources ☎ 9637 8416

Prepared by: s25: irrelevant Project Manager Actions for Biodiversity Conservation s25: irrelevant

SEC003805

Page 1

19. 2008 FSC Audit

Comments by Friends of Gippsland Bush in red & underlined

“Rainforest Buffers

Page 9 HVP shall revise the Rainforest BMP to

- Provide that buffer width is based on horizontal measurement, not slope distance;*
- Increase buffer width according to slope and average height of tallest stratum; and*
- Increase buffer width according to the latest tiered approach to rainforest protection on public land.*

The revised Rainforest BMP shall be provided to SW and endorsed by either two Councils (CEO) who administer GRP operations or DSE (Secretary).

Timeline for Compliance: By the 2008 annual audit.”

This is a classic example of Smartwood changing CAR wording. The first 5 audits have been totally ignored with regard to principle 6 and 9.

Neither the Council nor the Secretary of the Department has the expertise/knowledge to comment on the adequacy of HVP’s rainforest buffers.

They have also ignored their own staff’s expertise which is applied on public land.

Reputable, recognised rainforest ecologists have repeatedly stated to both the Company and auditors this includes ASI that HVP’s rainforest BMP’s are totally inadequate.

“Evidence to close CAR: The revised Rainforest BMP includes a statement that

the buffer widths will be measured on horizontal distance (see “Operating Standard for the Identification and Protection of Rainforest on Company Land”).

A Summary Letter supplied in the FSC Binder provided to the SW auditors prior to the audit does acknowledge that HVP will have additional discretion on the width of buffers and in particular note that buffer width may be increased for specific sites in consideration of steep topography.

A statement to this effect is also contained in the Operating Standard for the identification and protection of Rainforest on Company land Page 6, section 3.4.2 second paragraph :“Buffers may be applied in circumstances not covered under Attachment 6 or the minimum buffer widths may be increased for specific sites based on a risk analysis of the site characteristics of topography, rainforest canopy and plantation stand conditions to achieve the key outcomes for rainforest in the vicinity of plantation”

In this statement HVP goes further than required in the CAR by including site factors in addition to steep slopes (which is one aspect of topography. The other factors are the nature of the rainforest canopy and the plantation stand conditions such as the size (total weight and height) and lean of the plantation trees that are being harvested. This makes it a more comprehensive consideration of risk compared to just considering steepness of slope and height of the tallest stratum.”

What a ridiculous statement!

“HVP claims that the application of the latest tiered approach in relation to the relationship between the tallest stratum

and slope is not appropriate for their plantation areas. Instead HVP contend that the minimum buffer provided is sufficient to protect the CTR from accidental tree fall and combined with current harvesting practices (eg directional tree felling) ensures that the CTR communities are protected. HVP has never used a tiered approach which protects rainforest sub- catchments.

HVP produced documentation to show that the Rainforest BMP had been endorsed by the DSE (Secretary) and the Wellington Shire Council. The Wellington Shire Council acknowledges that the BMP meets the requirements of the Code of Forest Practice for Timber Production – 2007.

The DSE Secretary notes that the BMP is “consistent with relevant actions within the draft Flora and Fauna Guarantee Action Statement for listed rainforest communities and myrtle wilt disease”. At the time of the audit this Action Statement was still in draft form.”

Why would Smartwood request a Peer Review of HVP’s RF BMP’s, only to ignore the recommendations?

HVP’s BMP’s may meet Code requirements but they do nothing to protect WTRF and CTRF, mitigate for weed and disease impact and the threat of wildfire.

Yet again past corrective actions which were very specific about RF protection, buffer widths and community inclusion in decisions regarding RF buffer widths, have been ignored.

We have provided many scientific documents which refute the above claims made by Smartwood and the Company.

It is interesting to note that HVP ignored all recommendations in the

Draft Flora and Fauna Guarantee Action Statements relating to protection of rainforest. HVP waited until most protective measures for rainforest were removed from the Final Action Plan, the revised Code of Forest Practices (2007), which excluded the mandatory 60 m buffer for protection against myrtle wilt and which excluded management plans for the protection of WTR, slender and skirted tree ferns.

The 70% canopy cover which supposedly defines CTRF is an Industry construct which holds no ecological validity.

The Company has conveniently omitted to include the most definitive rainforest research which has been accepted by the department. This manual is included in the Final Action Statement for Rainforest ‘A Field Guide to Rainforest Identification in Victoria. Differential species keys for the delineation of rainforest boundaries’. DSE December 2008.

This document makes specific reference to the Strzelecki Cool and Warm Temperate Rainforests, plus how to apply the manual in fragmented landscapes.

“Therefore HVP have met the requirements of this CAR and more specifically criteria 6.2.3. However, the audit team wishes to acknowledge that stakeholders remain dissatisfied with the Rainforest BMP and in particular in relation to the buffer width and identification/classification of rainforest patches. Furthermore, a key rainforest ecologist is of a similar opinion. However, the audit team would note that contention and debate within the scientific community is not uncommon and that these debates are mirrored within the stakeholder community. The outcome of the debate within the scientific community (as it

specifically relates to identifying and classifying rainforest communities) will be reflected in the final Flora and Fauna Guarantee Action Statement. The audit team would therefore make the observation that HVP monitor this debate

to the extent of reviewing the Action Plan when it is finalized and modifying the current BMP as required.

CAR Status: CLOSED”



***January 2008 Strzelecki Ranges Morwell River Catchment near Grey Gum Track:
Minimal buffer on this rainforest. Note Slender Tree Fern (threatened species
under Flora and Fauna species. Nationally vulnerably species). Hancock leaving
no buffers on cool temperate rainforest. Disgusting corporate behaviour.
Vulnerable to offsite catchment effects.***

20. The ENGO Sell-Out Friday May 30, 2008

Why?



Friday 30 May 2008

Media Release

STRZELECKI FOREST PROTECTION WELCOMED BY ENVIRONMENT GROUPS

The Wilderness Society (TWS) and Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA) today welcomed the Victorian Government's announcement to protect over 20,000 hectares of native forests in Gippsland's Strzelecki Ranges.

TWS campaigns manager Gavan McFadzean said Victoria's carbon dense native forests played a major role in combating climate change.

"This move is a much needed addition to the reserve system in Victoria," Mr McFadzean said. "Without this commitment the remaining native forests in the Strzelecki Ranges were at threat from logging and woodchipping.

"We are pleased to see the Victorian Government moving to protect native forests in the Strzelecki Ranges. We now look forward to the ALP's other major forest election commitment – the real and absolute protection of the last significant stands of old growth forests, our greatest carbon banks, in East Gippsland".

VNPA executive director Matt Ruchel said the government's announcement was "great news for one of Victoria's most important, and most beautiful natural areas".

"The Strzelecki Ranges were known 50 years go as the 'Heartbreak Hills', due to the land impoverishment that followed excessive clearing of forest, but now these remarkable hills can have a bright future," Mr Ruchel said.

"The remaining tall forests of these ranges and the magnificent rainforests they shelter can now be enjoyed by us and our children's children.

"With climate change bringing added impacts to all of our natural areas, measures to protect them are more important than ever before".

For interview: Gavan McFadzean, TWS, on 0414 754 023
Matt Ruchel, VNPA, on 0418 357 813
Media contact: Daniel Clarke on 9341 8113 or 0407 771 072

What isn't explained in the press release, is that this announcement would allow for clearfelling in key rainforest catchments 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.

From a media outlet dated On June 10 2008: *"The Wilderness Society seem to be backing away from their initial support of the deal. I received a media release from them (which was sent to me by HVP!!) praising the deal, and after 48 hours of chasing, several phone calls and e-mails, I finally got a response from TWS - referring me to Friends of the Earth!! Who, clearly, don't support the deal at all. So they're obviously not interested in explaining why they support it, or if they still do. It's quite strange. We'll keep following the story."*

As one Strzelecki campaigner put it on June 10 2008 about obvious TWS and VNPA greenwash: *"But it's too late, HVP and Government are using this support to undermine what the locals and scientific reports are saying. HVP are also using Wilderness Society and VNPA to bypass FoE and FOGB to keep their FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) label which the Maryvale mill uses to flog off its paper. They are Corporate Patsies!"*



June 29, 2008: 100 Strzelecki Residents call to Save College Creek. Hancock, The Victorian Government, Wilderness Society and Victorian National Parks Association supported logging in College Creek and other icon areas of the Strzeleckis one month earlier.



Tmesipteris-elongata (Critically Endangered on Mainland Australia) Mainland Australia's stronghold is at College Creek

21. Hancock Press Release Concerning Certification February 11 2004

NEWS RELEASE 02-11-2004

Hancock Victorian Plantations Receives Certification for Responsible Social and Environmental Practices

RICHMOND, Vermont, February 11, 2004 -- Hancock Victorian Plantations (HVP), Australia's largest private forest plantation owner, has become the first large-scale plantation manager in the country to be awarded SmartWood/Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification for the responsible management of its forest operations.

SmartWood/FSC certification recognizes that HVP manages its forest operations in a socially and environmentally responsible manner. The certification also suggests additional enhancements that can be made and provides for annual audits.

Melbourne-based HVP, which owns and manages 605,150 acres (245,000 hectares) of forest plantations across Victoria, annually supplies approximately three million tons of plantation grown softwood (pine) and 300,000 tons of plantation grown hardwood (eucalypt) to sawmillers, panel producers and pulp and paper mills in Australia and overseas.

"With HVP's commitment to attain certification, as well as the constant efforts of Tim Cadman, FSC national contact person, and other supporters, we expect an increased appreciation of the value of FSC certification and an increase in the FSC initiative in Australia," said Jeff Hayward, SmartWood's regional manager for Asia and the Pacific. "FSC certification in Australia is a new concept so this certification has been particularly challenging. Nevertheless, the process has now been established and we are off to a fine start."

"I am delighted to see that a large resource manager like HVP has made such a positive commitment to providing timber from well-managed forests under our system," said FSC Australia Contact, Tim Cadman. "It has been a long and exhaustive process and it is a credit to HVP, the social and environmental stakeholders who had a great deal of substantive input, and to the certifiers SmartWood for doing such a comprehensive assessment. I hope this will lead the way for many more companies to embrace this new direction for Australia's timber resources."

The HVP certification process, led by SmartWood Director and team leader Richard Z. Donovan, included direct interaction with more than 200 stakeholders in Victoria, across Australia and outside the country as well.

HVP submitted to an initial SmartWood scoping audit in May, 2000 to determine the company's readiness to meet the strict FSC standards for protecting the environment and the rights and welfare of workers and local

communities.

Three years later, HVP underwent a full FSC assessment by five SmartWood experts, which included site visits to forest areas, individual and interest group stakeholder meetings and interviews, as well as extensive telephone and email communications. HVP also has agreed to annual on-site audits by SmartWood auditors.

"Hancock Victorian Plantations (HVP) is very pleased to become the first major forest manager in Australia to receive Forest Stewardship Council certification," said Kevin White, Chief Executive Officer, Hancock Victorian Plantations. "FSC certification of Hancock Victorian Plantations is recognition from a respected, international and independent third party of our company's program of continuous improvement in forest management and environmental performance. Certification delivers accountability of our operations in a much more transparent manner, which is good for all our investors, our customers and anyone interested in our business."

"This certification is a significant, hard won and welcome accomplishment for the Hancock Timber Resource Group and Hancock Victorian Plantations," said Bruce McKnight, vice president for forest stewardship globally for Hancock Timber, which provides management oversight of the HVP investment for various Australian and North American superannuation funds.

"We have been working with SmartWood for more than three years. We are pleased now to be able to offer our customers in Australia and elsewhere the opportunity to incorporate the use of FSC-certified raw material into their products."

HVP voluntarily maintains around 30 percent of its holdings for plantation protection, conservation and other community values. These "custodial lands", which contain important native vegetation, are preserved from harvesting.

Forest certification provides a means by which retailers and consumers can evaluate the origin of forest products and consider the impact of their production on the world's forests. Certification gives consumers the option of "voting with their dollars," of choosing wood and wood products that come from sustainably managed forests. SmartWood certification ensures that timber harvesting is ecologically and silviculturally sound, and socially and economically beneficial to local communities. SmartWood brings foresters, manufacturers, conservationists and consumers together to improve forest management.

http://www.htrg.com/news_02_11_04.htm