

Stakeholders contest the future of Goolengook

A. Nelson

RMIT-NATSEM Centre, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, RMIT University, Melbourne

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ABSTRACT: This case study outlines the competing interests of stakeholders in Goolengook, a crucial site of forest contestation in Victoria, Australia. It highlights conflicting perspectives and activities associated with ecological and social pressures for change in policy on State forest management and use. The analysis starts in the mid-1990s when the future of Goolengook became a hotly contested political issue. By the time the blockade at Goolengook was busted in March 2002 protesters had waged Australia's longest running continuous forest blockade in history. The fundamental clash has been between those who have given priority to ecological values and those who have seen Goolengook in terms of its monetary value as a source of wood fibre. In October 2002, the Victorian Minister for Environment and Conservation announced a temporary moratorium on logging in the old growth forest in Goolengook and requested that the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) identify equivalent timber resources in East Gippsland to satisfy pre-existing state contracts with industry. Even when the Minister acted to protect the old growth values of Goolengook the proposed terms of reference given to VEAC indicated that economic power dominated the contest between ecological and monetary values.

1 BACKGROUND

White settlement and agricultural activities disturbed significant tracts of Australian forests during the twentieth century. However, even in the 1990s, native vegetation from the Alps to the seacoast in East Gippsland (EG), Victoria, was still relatively intact. Vast areas remained uninhabited. Walking in them instilled a sense of primordial earth. Gigantic trees, hundreds of years old, and tree ferns several metres high proliferated. The Indigenous Gunai (Kurnai), who lived there for thousands of years before white settlement, had been completely self-sufficient in this complex forest ecosystem and the adjacent coast. Just a decade ago, a botanist of international renown, Professor David Bellamy, claimed in *The Age* (7 Nov. 1994): "if everything else was logged out in the temperate world and just this area was saved, the whole world could be regenerated".

Located in the heart of EG forests, in the center of far eastern Victoria, the Goolengook Forest Management Block (Goolengook) covered 9166 hectares of the Goolengook River catchment, south of Errinundra Plateau and around 45 kilometres north-east of Orbost. Relatively protected by market distance from timber industry activities until the 1960s and 1970s, the main human impact there was bushfire. Logging of Goolengook began in 1976 and focused on the south-eastern quarter. Ninety-eight per cent of the forest in the block in State control, the Land Conservation Council (1986) recommended that around 7018 hectares or 77 per cent of the Goolengook block be made

available for multiple uses in the mid-1980s. However little activity ensued. Then, in August 1982, a State integrated-management policy suspended harvesting pending the outcome of flora and fauna surveys conducted in 1988–1989.

In his classic history of Australian forests, Dargavel (1995: 152–53, 195–99) offers the broad political, economic and environmental context to contestation in EG forests during the 1970s and 1980s. The controversy at Goolengook arose in the mid-1990s, when environmental activists already had in place national campaigns against the exporting of woodchips, harvesting of old growth forest and government subsidies for the wood fibre industries. Overlapping federal and State responsibilities in forest policy had complicated developments. As protesters frequently invoked federal interests in State campaigns, Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) were introduced in the mid-1990s to redefine competing and conflicting authority as well as confirm the division of forests into conservation reserves and zones for timber harvesting and other commercial activities. The first RFA, which secured resource for commercial wood fibre interests but failed to address key ecological issues, was for EG (West 2001; Barnett and Moseley 1996). Subsequently Goolengook became an icon in protest over the future of Australia's forests.

2 THE CONTEST

In the mid-1990s proposed timber harvesting in Goolengook inflamed those who treasured its ecological values as a unique rainforest. The case highlighted a fundamental clash between those who gave priority to ecological values and those who viewed native forests as resources for capitalist enterprises. While Goolengook has been managed for multiple purposes, its use by and management for the wood fibre industries proved most controversial. Protests led to hundreds of arrests in a series of campaigns over several years. By the time police busted “Fort Goolengook” at 5am on 5 March 2002—to resume logging planned in four coupes there—protesters had waged the longest running continuous forest blockade in Australian history.

After much political pressure on behalf of the old growth forests in Goolengook, a moratorium on logging was announced in October 2002. The advisory Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) was charged with identifying equivalent timber resources in EG to satisfy existing State contracts with industry. These terms of reference did not quell environmentalists broader concerns with protecting old growth. The government's decision suggested that economic power still dominated the contest between ecological and monetary values. The terms of reference became such a sticking point that two years later Goolengook had still not been considered by VEAC.

While assessments by environmental scientists highlighted the unique ecological values of Goolengook that prompted forest activists to campaign for its protection, State politicians and foresters had continued to support its management and use as a resource for the wood fibre industries. The case indicates that political structures have failed to resolve environmental conflicts within the responsible department¹ and governing party ranks as well as within the general public. The government made one strong attempt to offer mechanisms to enable conflict resolution when pilot forest reference groups were established for different communities in Victoria in 2001. They were disbanded after the EG group moved in favour of saving Goolengook! Adversarial economic and political structures have supported the dominance of monetary values in decision-making. This paper examines divisive forest policies and practices that mock a holistic “*forest conscienceness*”.

¹ Throughout this paper ‘department’ refers to the responsible forestry authority which changed its name in 1993 from the Department of Conservation and Environment to the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and in 1996 to the Department of Natural Resources and Environment. The 2002 forestry reforms, made the Department of Sustainability and the Environment responsible for conservation and management of forests. VicForests was established to oversee commercial activities.

3 THE REPORT

The Goolengook flora and fauna surveys (1988–1989) departed from the common site-specific assessments. In what is referred to simply as “the Report” from hereon, Lobert et al. (1991) assessed the ecological values of Goolengook in State, national and international contexts and identified numerous sites of significance. They nominated eight vegetation communities and 20 sub-communities, ranging from riparian and montane forest to cool and warm temperate rainforest, damp and lowland sclerophyll forest and wet sclerophyll forest, and highlighted unique overlapping rainforest. Mainly due to the Long-footed Potoroo (*Potorous Longipes*), the block was classified a site of global zoological significance. They concluded that: “the combined flora and fauna values of the study area are exemplary within the pre-logging survey program and, indeed, the combination of particular significant biological values known to occur in the Block are not known from any reserve system in south-eastern Australia”.

Due to Goolengook’s ecological rarity and floristic values, the authors suggested that timber harvesting and associated silvicultural and burning regimes would damage its warm temperate rainforest flora and fauna. They recommended special wildlife conservation measures to conserve areas of food and habitat for sedentary and migratory birds. They noted 11 bird species classified nationally as threatened, including the endangered Sooty Owl (*Tyto tenebricosa*) and Powerful Owl (*Ninox strenua*), and advised linking bird reserves together and with riparian reserves to provide forest patches and corridors. They suggested that rotations of less than 120 years—common in recent decades—threatened the habitat of most forest dependent amphibian and reptilian species.

Finally, they stressed the need for more research to determine seasonal requirements and adequate sizes for all fauna reserves. The period of fieldwork in the block was short, a singular failure because the complex forest ecosystems of EG have never been studied in detail; for instance Errinundra Plateau contains large numbers of species, like fungi, that have not been catalogued.

The Report nominated seven sites of biological significance and recommended protecting rainforests—that accounted for over half the combined areas of the sites of significance—to be managed for conservation, flora and fauna values. These recommendations followed a familiar policy of zoning forested landscapes into areas for:

- i) conservation purposes,
- ii) commercial uses, or
- iii) conservation and limited harvesting.

This policy assists entrepreneurs to gain forest resources for monetary values but for reasons that are outlined below has failed to protect ecological values. Indeed in mid-1997 when protesters launched a major offensive to stop logging in old growth forests in EG, spearheaded by actions at Goolengook, three of the Report’s authors—Lobert, Lunt and Robinson—made this point in a letter to *The Age* (9 June 1997):

... as scientists once employed by the conservation department to survey the Goolengook area, we are appalled at the prospect of logging in this unique area ...

Clearly, the entire Goolengook area should be added to the Errinundra National Park. Instead, Marie Tehan has allowed logging, and 'saved' just small, disjointed areas, protected by narrow buffers of dubious merit.

To suggest that the Goolengook forest can be conserved by saving a bit of this and a bit of that is akin to suggesting that we can preserve the Sydney Harbour Bridge by saving just one of all the different types of bolts, a few pylons and a representative truss.

4 THE VICTORY OF RESOURCE SECURITY

The National Association of Forest Industries (NAFI) and the Forestry Division of the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) represent the wood fibre industries from logging and

saw milling to pulp and paper manufacture. In the late 1980s, they lobbied politicians and demonstrated against conservationists who were demanding an end to logging in native forests and woodchip exports (*AFIJ* April 1988: 30). Against calls to “lock-up” forests, industry unified for resource security that became the spine of RFAs: “We need to remind politicians that the forest industries constitute the second largest manufacturing industry group and the second largest employer group in the nation” (*AFIJ* March 1988: 61). Union chief Bill Kelty (*AFIJ* March 1989: 56) placed the movement solidly behind management: “it means more jobs, more trees and more investment”.

In mid-January 1990, the Orbost Chamber of Commerce (*The Age* 11 Jan. 1990) organised a demonstration of 2000 residents, who blocked the main street with logging trucks. The federal government (*Herald* 11 Jan. 1990) called for a summit with industry and conservation interests but struggles only intensified. Shops were temporarily closed on 15 January. A few weeks later a massive gathering was held at Coolangubra (NSW) to commemorate the arrests of over 1200 forest activists in south-eastern Australia during 1989 (*The Age* 31 Jan. 1990).

In mid-February the loggers made national headlines, blockading the Princes Highway—the main thoroughfare through eastern Victoria—with over 50 excavators, bulldozers, diggers, tractors and trucks, costing them \$350,000 per day. Within three days the blockade near Orbost tripled in size to involve 3000 vehicles that stretched 6 kilometres (*The Age* 14 Feb. 1990). They rallied at Parliament House Canberra 13 February with 100 logging trucks and left a bulldozer on the steps (*Herald* 13 Feb. 1990). Exactly one week later, 3000 timber industry supporters with 350 trucks converged on the Treasury Gardens adjacent to Parliament House in Melbourne where industry delegates met with the Premier. Industry used their muscle by threatening an investment strike. (For details, see *The Age* 8 Feb. 1990: 6; *Sun* 13 Feb. 1990: 1-2; *The Age* 13 Feb. 1990: 3; *SRM* 17 Jan. 1990; *Herald* 13 Feb. 1990.)

Over a year later, NAFI (*AFIJ* May 1991:38–39) heralded resource security legislation as “the most significant decision for the forest industries in the past decade” and added that this had been “unthinkable two years ago when the environment lobby was at the peak of its power”. A balance was believed achievable by establishing and maintaining protected reserves and special management practices that took into account conservation values while allowing sustainable natural resource use. The stated aim of the department in its EG Forest Management Plan (DCNR 1995b: 36) was to “provide greater resource security for the development and the growth of an ecologically sustainable timber industry”.

5 IMBALANCE

Anger over the first RFA in EG—signed off for implementation in December 1996—entrenched the protesters at Goolengook. “All political lobbying, massive public support and parliamentary participation having failed to save Goolengook, people are now demonstrating their dissatisfaction over the whole RFA process, based on the Goolengook decision,” one of the leaders of the environmentalists, John Flynn, wrote (*SRM*, 25 June 1997). Before its implementation the RFA was already judged a failure because participation and ecological values had not been rated highly enough (Barnett and Mosley 1996; *SRM* 16 Oct. 1996). Later developments demonstrated that the RFAs had the effect of deregulating industry by returning power to State and market forces: when Victoria gained control of export licensing, woodchip exports from EG increased significantly.

Protest at Goolengook began quietly in 1996 but reached national prominence mid-1997. The major organising groups were the Concerned Residents of East Gippsland (CROEG), the Goonerah Environmental Centre Organisation (GECO), the Wilderness Society (TWS) and forest activists from Friends of the Earth (FoE). CROEG regularly held long-weekend Forests Forever camps around Easter and the Melbourne Cup vacations with educational talks and guided walks in the forest as well as slide nights in Melbourne and elsewhere. Activists pursued flora and fauna surveys, some with significant results—forcing the department to prohibit logging or roads in specific areas to respect requirements associated with the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act.

Loggers, who started work in Goolengook just before World Environment Day, 5 June 1997, faced substantial protest. Protesters engaged in a series of non-violent actions: blockading roads, chaining themselves to machines, sitting on platforms that they had built up to 30 metres high as well as acting as “black wallabies”—hiding and reappearing in bush being cleared by loggers in an effort to disconcert them and disrupt clear felling.

Loggers had verbal and physical support from the department, police and many politicians, who voiced despair at the “protesters’ unwillingness to accept the umpire’s decision after the signing of the RFA”. The Environment Victoria forest campaign coordinator, Rod Anderson, presented the conservationists’ view by referring to the EG RFA as a “Bible” and “umpire” only for those whose interests it represented—“the only agreement being between the industry and government”. Within a fortnight of police action against the blockaders, 66 had been arrested and three police were injured while using angle grinders to release protesters locked-on to loggers’ equipment. (For all these developments see *The Age* 9, 11, 13, 14 June 1997 and *SRM* 18 June 1997.) Those arrested included the Greens leader, Bob Brown, and Brigette Muir, the first Australian woman to scale Mt Everest. She lost her sponsor Beaurepaire, the tyre company, due to media reportage of her hoisting a banner proclaiming “LET THIS FOREST FOREVER REST” atop a 300-year-old tree at Goolengook. Performers Peter Garrett, Greg Champion and Paul Kelly spoke out (*The Age* 18 June and 2 July 1997). FoE staged an occupation at the department’s headquarters in Melbourne. *The Age* (28 June 1997) commented that outrage over the RFAs being presented as “the final solution” had culminated in forest actions of a scale and intensity not observed for 10 years. Indeed, within a month the total arrested stood at 103 (*Bairnsdale Advertiser* 4 July 1997).

6 ANALYSIS OF A FOREST DIVIDED

Sites of significance identified in the Report covered 55 per cent of Goolengook. However, a decade later, 55 per cent of the block was still available for department-supervised logging even though, in the meantime, National Park reserves had been expanded and the EG RFA amended specifically to include the Goolengook Flora and Fauna Reserve (*The Age* 21 April 1999; Picone 2000). Vagaries in the practice of policies, the low impact of the Report in the department and the inadequacies of zoning in protecting ecological values fuelled protests at Goolengook from 1996.

Ecological values lost out to commercial values because:

- 1) Many of the block surveys in EG were not comprehensive or detailed enough to reveal all conservation issues. Department staff and researchers who were interviewed during 2000 by Morrell and Nelson confirmed that they had been under pressure to complete fieldwork for logging to resume. Surveys were cursory, conducted in spatial isolation and limited by seasonal conditions. Team members were unable to stagger work for optimum analysis and interpretation of findings.
- 2) The printed findings and recommendations of environmental scientists working on the EG block surveys were influenced by senior staff who edited and made cuts to the original drafts. For years, environmental scientists had been charging department forest managers with “unprofessional behaviour”, accusing them of intellectual suppression, of sanitising drafts of scientific work and for “fiddling” with recommendations (*The Age* 14 Feb. 1990:15). Dr French (*Ibid.*) criticised the Victorian Government for silencing scientists and described the flora and fauna surveys as “political documents” that reputable scientific journals would disregard. Not all block reports were published.
- 3) The low impact of the Report on Goolengook confirmed the environmental scientists’ lack of influence within the department, especially regarding advice that affected logging (Noble 1994: 117ff). Similarly significant works criticising departmental policy and prescriptions for south-eastern Australian forests—for example Norton and Dovers (1994)—were not referred to in the EG Forest Management Plan (1995). Indeed friction between foresters and conservation scientists in the department has become legendary.

- 4) Clear definitions of forest types for which distinct regulations apply are required in practice. The contentious nature of scientific classification and assessment has been demonstrated in ongoing disputes over terms like “rainforest” (Burgmann & Fergusson 1995; Cameron 1992) and “old growth” (Woodgate et al. 1994 Ch. 2). As a result, department staff did not implement expected practices, which fuelled distrust (*The Age* 11, 13 and 19 Feb. and 8 March 1992; *SRM* 27 Nov. 1991).
- 5) Contestation over what is ‘sustainable’ expressed rather than resolved conflicts. Traditionally the timber industry has measured resources in terms of ‘sustainable yields’—estimates of the amount of timber that can be harvested every year for the foreseeable future. EG biologists Prober and Thiele (*SRM* 7 Feb. 1990) criticised “sustained harvesting” as “ecologically nonsensical”—“because it ignores the rest of the forest”. Whole-of-forest sustainability stresses conservation criteria for evaluating timber harvesting practices, for example, advocating for ecologically sensitive selective logging and ruling out clear felling (see www.ecoforestry.info).
- 6) Many silvicultural, harvesting and regeneration practices in EG have been designed to sustain timber resources rather than conserve the forest. Regrowth of single-age trees, a severe fire hazard, has diminished conservation values and heightened the potential monetary value of the forests. After resigning as head of the Flora and Fauna Unit of the department in March 1995, Stephen Mueck (*The Age* 14 Nov. 1995:15) charged the government with misleading its citizens; to suggest that there's a “holocaust event like logging and everything then grows back is just not true”. Clear felling and regeneration burns destroy tree ferns that have a nursery function in forests and understorey microclimates. Subsequent regrowth tends to consume more water and rainforests tend to dry out. Mueck (*Ibid.*) has criticised the short length of harvest rotations. In 2001 the average was 80 years. Lugg et al. (1993: 77–102) report few substantial habitat hollows even after 80 years of regrowth.
- 7) Environmental scientists respect the “precautionary principle”, which means only allowing activities that are expected to be relatively environmentally safe. This principle is recognised in word by all Australian governments in the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment signed in May 1992 (Commonwealth of Australia 1996). RFAs and long-term contracts with industry preclude flexible and precautionary decisions that might require, for instance, altering sustainable yield figures. Instead, sustainable yield targets are set in legislation to ensure industry resource security. Gibbons (1994: 78) suggests that as loggers riddled the forests of EG they disrupted ecological processes in unpredicted ways. More research is required to prove the subtle and long-term consequences of current forestry practices.
- 8) Logging requires infrastructure, like roads and machinery, that damages inroads to coupes through soil erosion and compaction, silt filtration into adjacent streams and disturbance that encourages weeds and pest species. The Victorian Code of Forest Practices (CNR 1995) focuses on harvesting operations rather than landscapes. It is not prescriptive, nor enshrined in legislation. While acknowledged as an industry standard, breaches of the code occur relatively regularly (*The Age* 15 Sept. 1999).
- 9) Logging disturbance diminishes conservation values. The Report concluded that the lack of human disturbance left Goolengook with a “high level of biological integrity”. On the one hand, the department has argued that logging has been ecologically safe. On the other hand, the department classifies areas where logging has occurred in the past with a lower ecological value than areas where no logging has occurred. Logging makes landscapes vulnerable to the ‘doughnut hole’ effect by containing areas of high conservation and preventing their expansion (Picone 2000). Many animals need more than one type of ecosystem in a connected landscape for food and habitation. Such populations diminish when landscapes are reduced to islands of partially suitable habitat. Charges of “ringbarking” relate to clear felling in strips down the Errinundra National Park boundaries (*The Age* 27 July 1998); the “edge effect” of such fragmentation is known as “ecosystem decay” (Donatiu 2001). Lindenmayer (1996) agrees with Norton and May (1994: 11) that “there is now a substantial body of scientific information indicating that integrated forestry harvesting does result in significant detrimental impacts on eucalypt forest biodiversity”. Similarly Rosauer (2000) has recommended a “matrix management

approach” to EG forests with non-reserve areas “managed sympathetically to link and complement the populations occurring within protected areas”.

7 EXCLUSION AND VIOLENCE

Maintaining a blockade that involved hundreds of protesters for weeks on end cost time, energy and money. The movement learned to economise: they slowed actions down and flattened involvement to give a similar effect over longer periods. Fort Goolengook became a permanent camp even though sometimes only a few remained there, especially during the cold winters when logging scarcely occurred. Each summer actions attracted media and led to arrests.

Already in mid-1998 the Victorian Government sided with commercial interests by making it a criminal offence—punishable with fines of up to \$2000—for anyone but loggers or police to enter a nominated Forest Operations Zone, like Goolengook, without a special permit (*The Age* 27 July 1998). This outraged environmentalists, who relied on Fort Goolengook to publicise their case, and led to a deluge of letters to newspapers. That year the Conservation Minister, Marie Tehan, also supported reducing a buffer zone along a significant stretch of the Goolengook River from 200 metres to 100 metres. This escalated environmentalists’ fears for the area, especially its aquatic life.

By 1999, exports of woodchips amounted to around 8 million tonnes—70 per cent of the national production—even though polls indicated that a majority of Australians opposed such exports (The Wilderness Society 2000). Then between 1998-1999 and 2000-2001, a record amount of woodchips came out of Victoria’s native forests and the volume of woodchip logs sourced from EG more than doubled to almost 400,000 tonnes (*The Age* 24 Sept. 2001). This made forest activists more convinced than ever that wood chips drove native forest clear felling; a KMPG report produced in the late 1990s and cited in the *Australian* (31 May 1999) questioned the limited competition in the industry and argued that the real market value of Victorian timber was 30-60 per cent higher than department determined prices. These developments inflamed protesters.

Throughout the summer of 1999 and 2000, an ECO-deck tree platform was suspended between four enormous trees in one of the coupes scheduled for clear felling in old growth forest and the wet gully of Little Goolengook River (Friends of the Earth 2000). On 24 January 2000, dozens of protesters occupied the headquarters of East Gippsland Logging Company in Orbost. They demanded an independent inquiry into the company and an end to the EG RFA. Even though Goolengook was six hours’ drive from Melbourne, by this stage protesters were linked by e-groups via the Internet. Information travelled fast. News about police surveillance or a busting of Fort Goolengook could be transmitted into homes immediately.

Violent fights had occurred between loggers and activists in Orbost and Goolengook all along, even involving gunfire (*SRM* 19 Feb. 1995). An associated action at the department’s head quarters in East Melbourne resulted in seven protesters receiving compensation of \$50,000 for injuries from pressure point tactics used by the Victoria Police (*The Age* 10 Nov. 2000). However, the most serious incident occurred on the night of 21-22 February 2000, when around 45 industry supporters attacked the small camp at Goolengook. This was not long after forest activists had flagged down a logging truck on the Princess Highway near Orbost to lock themselves onto its back tray. The night attackers destroyed cars, caused tens of thousands dollars worth of damage and brutalised protesters (three were hospitalized) which led to 21 charges of riot and a few imprisonments (*The Australian Magazine* 13-14 May 2000: 28-31; *Potoroo Review* #172, 2000: 1,4; York and Davi 2003).

The mass media, attracted by performance, tended to emphasise conflicts and present them as intransigent debates. Only alternative media—like Triple J, 3CR, Channel 31, Green Left Weekly and 3RRR—reported regularly and in depth on Goolengook, teasing out some of the more subtle issues, for instance, involving Aboriginal land claims. Aboriginal activity at Goolengook involved issues of jurisdiction, land claims and logging. Several local groups and individuals—for example, the Gunai elder, Robbie Thorpe, and Bidawal direct descendant, Albert Hayes—have been outspoken about the special place of Goolengook in Aboriginal lore (York and Davi 2003).

In the several years of struggle there was little constructive dialogue between forestry industry unions, industry managers and environmentalists about key issues, especially in EG and involving Goolengook. Unionists refused to talk to blockaders on principle and environmentalists reported having no choice but to blockade unless unionists were prepared to talk and occasionally take an ethical stand. Protesters have expressed regret that their campaigns in the forest almost invariably affected small players in the wood fibre industry, but argued that struggle on the ground was the most effective for their cause.

8 COMMERCE AND PROPERTY

The vast majority of EG forests are State forests. The wood fibre industries rely on State-controlled resources and have developed a close working relationship with State foresters. There are several reasons for State collusion with industry. Scott (1998: 13) suggests that “fiscal and commercial logics coincide ... on the bottom line”; the fiscal focus of government neglects ecological values and complexity as well as creative alternatives, like ecoforestry and community forestry (see www.ecoforestry.info). Indeed, while State foresters have been responsible to political and bureaucratic authorities, both politicians and department staff have legitimised the interests of private wood fibre concerns in forest resources. Even when employed in the public service, foresters are likely to identify with commercial interests for reasons of job security, especially given the degree of public sector retrenchments (*The Age* 10 May 1999). Sawmillers, manufacturers and distributors prefer a standard product; foresters have a vested interest in turning native forests into plantation-style regrowth. Environmentalists have continued to criticise the department and government for allowing woodchip exports and subsidising the wood fibre industry (*The Age* 3 June 2000; Grey 1994). By February 2002 CROEG (*Potoroo Review* #172, 2000) revealed that over the previous few years woodchip logs had been sold by the department for just 10–11 cents a tonne in royalties.

The division of forests into zones managed for either conservation or industry values, and especially the Special Management Zones with their mix of conservation and commercial use, has highlighted the dichotomy between management for monetary interests and ecological values. Territory and interests were segregated as if one could deliver each stakeholder a “piece of the pie”. This might seem rational to a community in maps and reports however, as outlined above, this approach is particularly detrimental to ecological values. This way of perceiving and “solving” the conflict mirrors a capitalist mentality based on rights and regulations associated with territory and boundaries. But the zoning “solution” violates important ecological principles. Ecologically valuable landscapes are characterised by complexities and vagaries that are antithetical to needs of bureaucrats, politicians and capitalists for simple, measurable outcomes and deliverables.

9 NATIONAL PARK PROPOSAL

In 2000, CROEG released a Goolengook National Park proposal by Andrew Picone advocating the extension of the Errinundra National Park south to incorporate more of Goolengook. Picone (2000:1) argued that “the fragmented and linear nature” of the existing system of reserves meant that they were “inadequate to maintain the values they were established for”.

While the Minister did not support the proposal, it gained public support (*Potoroo Review* #166, 2000:11). Certain members of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) Victorian Conservation and Environment Policy Committee were eager to have it endorsed at the State Conference, 21-22 October 2001. A cohort of party members representing the “majority view” of the associated Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Subcommittee (2000:1) developed a document in support of the Goolengook National Park Proposal. However, by October 2001, the committee had split so badly over the issue that its supporters resigned. By December 2001, State forest policy lay at the mercy of pro-industry party members who represented the Forestry Division of the CFMEU. Apparently, the “victorious” right-wing faction was so embarrassed by the unseemly struggle in its own committee that no proposal was put to the October 2001 ALP State Conference. Clearly Goolengook had

proved as contentious and divisive an issue in the party backroom as it had been in the public field where conflicts over forest management continued unabated during 2004.

Community members had started audits of department wood allocations in EG by the early 1990s. Monitoring to check adherence to sustainable yields through examination of licence levels and log documents confirmed substantial fluctuations between the department's Wood Utilisation Plan resource estimates and the industry's real timber yields. In February 2002, Minister Garbutt and Premier Bracks announced State-wide forestry reforms. These reforms separated the conservation and forestry arms of the department and reduced sustainable yield figures by around one third State-wide and 43 per cent in EG (Bracks and Garbutt, 2002). While the reforms appeared to support conservation, they were associated with pressures from industry and academic researchers who had suggested that department estimates of sustainable yield were flagrantly over optimistic (ABC Radio National 10 March 2002). In short, they confirmed conservationists' fears of mismanagement. To add insult to injury, at 5 am on 5 March 2002, police and department officers broke Fort Goolengook to support logging planned in four coupes. Initially the protesters had not been deterred and announced, "Our Dreaming is Strong", when their rights to enter or remain in the block were withdrawn. However, the logging started on 8 March and by early April four coupes of old growth forest in Goolengook had been clear felled — some of it in unique overlap rainforest, some of it in Special Management Zones and more next to the Flora and Fauna Reserve.

The logging at Goolengook had the effect of refocusing political concern within as well as without the State ALP on the Goolengook National Park proposal. Subsequently, the Minister announced a moratorium on logging there in October 2002. Around that time the Australian Greens Party had introduced a forestry policy to signal the end of logging in native forests, old growth forests and forests of high ecological value. The Greens Party supported a wood fibre industry based on plantations, recycling, alternative fibre industries and assistance to retrenched workers.

10 CONCLUSION

Developments at Goolengook have highlighted the absence of successful processes for airing distinctive perspectives and identifying common ground between the stakeholders. As a result management did not proceed in a mutually satisfactory way. From a community-based perspective that advocates substantive democracy, even the concerned Minister's belated request for advice from VEAC seemed like an authoritarian impasse; VEAC would be umpire in a debate-style presentation of the facts. The policy of dividing forests has evolved from a divided society and has reproduced natural and social divisions. A superficial approach to balancing contradictory activities in distinct zones has had the effect of undermining ecological values and promoting monetary ones. An ecoforestry, whole-of-landscape and whole-of-community approach would suggest selective logging and more environmentally sensitive practices across the board—caring for the forest with a genuine "forest conscienceness".

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