

Getting involved: A personal account of involvement in the forests debate in Western Australia

Beth Schultz

Conservation Council of Western Australia, 2 Delhi Street, West Perth, Western Australia, 6005

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ABSTRACT: People become involved in the forests debate for many reasons. My involvement was fortuitous. I arrived in Western Australia in 1970 with no knowledge of its environment or environmental problems. In 1975 I was introduced by friends I made through my children to an issue that caught my attention and changed my life: woodchipping of native forests. Twenty-nine years later, I am still involved, though my interests have expanded to include native forest use and management generally. There have been some notable successes along the way.

During those years, I have also watched others become involved, some, like myself, spontaneously, following fortuitous events, others after being approached for assistance. I have observed and in some instances, accidentally or deliberately played a role in their involvement. One such is Murdoch lecturer (now Associate Professor) Dr Michael Calver, who began to take an interest in forest policy and management quite by chance in 1995. Another is former AFL champion Craig Turley, who became active in WA's old growth forest campaign in 1997. Yet another is former West Coast Eagles coach Mick Malthouse, whose spectacular involvement in 1998 proved to be a turning point in that campaign. I offer some recollections of my encounters with these three fellow-participants in the forests debate in WA and some observations on WA's forests.

1 GETTING INVOLVED – A PERSONAL ACCOUNT

People become involved in all sorts of causes for all sorts of reasons, to varying degrees and for varying lengths of time, and there is a significant body of research on the subject. However, I and, I suspect, most other activists don't read about or study activism. We just do it.

I became involved in the forests debate in Western Australia (WA) by accident. I'm a Queenslander and I arrived in WA in 1970 after two years in France and nine in the USA. I knew nothing about WA except that there was jarrah forest and karri forest, with big trees useful for timber. This was what we learnt about WA in Queensland State schools in the 1940s, or at least all I remember. When I arrived here from the USA, with two children in tow and another soon on the scene, I visited these forests and something struck a chord in me. The karri forest in particular attracted me – extraordinary forest and amazing trees. How do they suck water and nutrients up to their canopy, 80 metres into the sky? Then

there is the special karri forest smell – cat’s pee and damp humus. And the sounds! Karri forest sings, though you rarely see the singers – they are too high up in the treetops.

So when in 1975, a geographer friend, Jeanette Conacher, whom I met through my children, told me that something called woodchipping was about to get started in WA and that it would be based on the karri forest, I took the first step towards becoming involved. I went to a meeting called by a few individuals to oppose woodchipping. That was the precursor to the formation of the Campaign to Save Native Forest, the CSNF, which from 1975 through the 80s and into the 90s ran a formidable campaign to expose woodchipping and other misuse and mismanagement of the karri forest. The CSNF also became involved in the jarrah forest, where a foolish, short-sighted State Government had allowed bauxite mining to become entrenched. Sadly, the CSNF ceased to exist in the 1990s.

Inspired by my involvement with the CSNF, in late 1975 I co-founded the South-West Forests Defence Foundation (SFDF) – a terrible name, given to us by a lawyer – with Arthur Conacher, a geographer from the University of Western Australia (and Jeanette’s husband). We wanted to end woodchipping through legal action but when that didn’t work out, we ran a parallel campaign with the CSNF for the better use and management of our forests. We were very active from 1975 until the 1990s, when the WA Forest Alliance (Wafa) took over as the lead forest conservation organisation in WA. Since then the SFDF has worked with and through Wafa. This alliance of some 20 groups based in the Perth metropolitan area and throughout the South-West, under its convener, the outstanding strategist and activist Peter Robertson, has been very successful and is, I believe, responsible for the big advances made in forest use and management in this State since its formation in 1990.

The forests debate has attracted some remarkable people whom I have been privileged to meet and get to know: the WA artist Guy Grey-Smith; Professor David Bellamy, from the Universities of Nottingham and Durham in the United Kingdom; Greens Senator Bob Brown, from the Australian Senate; and hundreds of others less well known to the public. I wish I had kept a diary of my trips to the forests down south. Since my first trip in 1975 (to see a clearfell coupe on Dog Road in Shannon forest, now Shannon National Park), I have made hundreds of trips with hundreds of people, sometimes one or two, occasionally in groups of 20 or 30. There have been official trips with groups, for example, the Senate Standing Committee on Science and the Environment in 1980 or 1981 as a follow-up to its major 1977 report on woodchipping and the environment; the Manjimup Shire Council in 1982; the Resource Assessment Commission in 1991, during its comprehensive two-year inquiry into Australian forests; the Environmental Protection Authority in the 1990; and the Conservation Commission in 2002 and 2004.

I have also made trips with notable individuals, both opponents and supporters, like forester/botanist Professor Peter Attiwill in 1981; State and now Federal parliamentarian Dr Carmen Lawrence in 1995; and Hon. (now Senator) Ross Lightfoot, with whom on the issues of woodchipping, clearfelling and waste (but probably nothing else) I am in total agreement. Mostly I went with small groups of people who were prepared to take the time to go and see for themselves what the ‘extreme environmentalists’ were on about. I’m sure that every one of these people, after seeing the destruction caused by current logging practices, regardless of what I or anyone else told them, came back convinced that what was being inflicted on our forests was unnecessary, indefensible and just plain wrong.

Up until a few years before his death in 1993, my most frequent companion on these trips was John Thomson, a life-long non-graduate forester, whose knowledge of forests and the logging industry was phenomenal. He parted company with foresters over woodchipping, which, like us, he saw as a costly and destructive abuse of good forest. Over the years I saw how he was ostracised and treated very rudely by other members of the profession as a result of his public criticism of clearfelling and woodchipping.

Through the SFDF, I have been involved in several court cases, right up to the High Court of Australia. There was the 1981 *Trade Practices Act* case in the Supreme Court of WA, in which one of our members, Marlish Glorie, challenged the promotional short film “Forests Forever,” produced by

the WA Forests Department and the local logging industry lobby group, the Forest Industries Federation of WA. Marlish took the action because the State Government would not allow the SFDF to become incorporated, and other SFDF members didn't want to run the risk of being liable for costs if we lost the case (which we did). There was a second *Trade Practices Act* case in 1990, when the SFDF attempted to challenge a nation-wide series of television advertisements produced by the national logging industry lobby group, the National Association of Forest Industries. I don't think these actions were worth the effort.

More productive were the court actions for injunctions to stop logging in Jane and Sharp forests, where magnificent old growth karri forest was being clearfelled. These actions ended in the High Court of Australia in 1998 and cost us a lot of money. Although we lost every case, the actions for injunctions achieved what we set out to do: protect precious forests. The Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) was the WA State Government department responsible for all aspects of public forest management, including both conservation and logging. Between 1994 and 1997, CALM planned to log in Hester, Jane, Kerr and Sharpe forests (there were 22 coupes planned for Sharpe forest alone), and logging commenced but was stopped through the injunctions and never resumed. Under the State Government's "Protecting our old-growth forests" policy, developed by the Australian Labor Party (ALP) before it won the 2001 election, almost all the forest we worked to save in these four areas will be protected in formal conservation reserves, in accordance with the Forest Management Plan 2004-2013.

The first big advance in forest conservation came in 1983, with the election of the Burke Labor Government. The CSNF was formed by a group of men who were very active in the ALP. They were members of the Party's Conservation and Environment Policy Committee and they gave the ALP a (for those days) very good forest policy, which the Premier, Brian Burke, was obliged to implement. The policy included making the Shannon River Basin and the Forests Department's conservation management priority areas (intended by the forestry lobby merely as deferred logging areas) into national parks. Although it took five years for the Shannon to be gazetted as a national park in 1988, and we are still waiting for others, at least there can be no more logging in those forests.

The second big leap forward for forests came in 2001, with the election of the Gallop Labor Government. With an ear to the ground for community concerns and an eye on electoral success, the ALP developed its visionary "Protecting our old-growth forests" policy, which gave political backing to community aspirations. Despite some bureaucratic duplicity (mainly about the definition and mapping of old growth forest), the Government is delivering on much of the policy. Hundreds of thousands of hectares of old growth and other high conservation value forest are now off limits to the loggers, and areas of glorious beautiful forest – Giblett, Hawke, Peak, Ordance and many others – will soon be national parks. While things don't look so good for the public forest still available for logging (most of which will get thrashed because of the excessive and unsustainable level of sawlog extraction allowed under the Forest Management Plan), on the conservation side, we have done pretty well. In 1975, only about 5 percent of the remaining karri forest was protected in formal conservation reserves. In 2004, that figure has risen to 48 per cent, and a further 13 percent is in informal reserves, where logging is generally not permitted. The situation for jarrah is not as good, with 34 percent in formal conservation reserves and 12 percent in informal reserves.

I have paid a price for my involvement. Apart from the impacts on my health and family, in 1990 I lost my part-time job as a legal practitioner as a direct result of my conservation activities. I had studied law full time at the University of Western Australia from 1978 to 1981 with the aim of practising law to protect the environment, but it didn't work out that way. In 1994 a property of which I own one-tenth was burnt out as a result of arson, in my view because of my public criticism of current prescribed burning of bushland and forest. I have been defamed on numerous occasions but only once successfully pursued legal avenues to get an apology and legal costs. In turn I have on occasion been threatened with legal action for defamation but I have managed to avoid being sued.

2 GETTING OTHERS INVOLVED

Among the many things we did in the forests campaign, having high-profile people speak out in support was effective with the media and the community and fun for the campaigners. This strategy is one of the most successful we employed as it raised awareness about forest conservation with groups that had hitherto not been involved. It also increased the campaign's credibility with both wider and targeted audiences, as did the publication of scientific papers that supported our position on forest use and management.

2.1 *Craig Turley*

Australian rules football is a passion with very large numbers of Australians, and football stars and outstanding coaches are household names across the country. Most Western Australians, and indeed many Australians who follow the Australian Football League (AFL), will have heard of Craig Turley. From 1988 to 1995 he played with the West Coast Eagles, at the time the only WA team in the national competition, and he was in the 1992 team that won the national Premiership cup. In 1991 he was voted Best and Fairest in his team, and he was chosen for the All Australian team and voted runner-up for the top national award in the sport, the Brownlow medal. And I was a fan. Craig moved to Victoria in 1996, where he played with Melbourne until he had to retire because of a back injury. Some time after he left WA, I got a phone message from Craig Turley in Melbourne asking how the forests campaign was going. There could be only one Craig Turley in Australia interested in the WA forests campaign, so without actually speaking to him, I knew Craig was a supporter.

Giblett forest is an area of extraordinary old growth karri and she-oak forest west of the tourism and timber town of Pemberton. In 1994 I was alerted to imminent logging by one of those telephone calls, "I'm not a greenie but ...". It was a roading contractor who, having constructed in Giblett the usual superhighways that government departments require for the rapid extraction of logs, wanted to tell the Conservation Council that logging was about to begin in some of the best karri forest left in the world and to ask us what we were going to do about it. After a visit to Giblett convinced us of its great beauty and value, the Conservation Council teamed up with the WA Forest Alliance and The Wilderness Society and we decided to halt logging in Giblett for the month of August 1994.

Stage 1 of the Giblett campaign began with a month-long camp and rallies in the forest, after which a single coupe was clearfelled. This was the first time conservationists used direct action to delay clearfelling of old growth forest and it generated enormous public interest. Hundreds of people visited the forests and witnessed clearfelling for the first time, and, thanks to extensive media coverage, the ugliness of total destruction logging was brought nightly into people's living rooms.

In May 1997, when CALM began scrub rolling in preparation for the next coupe in Giblett, a group of activists moved quickly to put a platform in a big old karri tree. Chris Lee, a skilled practitioner of Non-Violent Direct Action (NVDA), climbed onto the platform and stayed there for 35 days. Thus began stage 2 of the Giblett campaign. Soon after Chris went onto the first platform, a second platform was erected, this time in a giant marri. In early June we wanted to upstage a big event being organised by the logging industry support group, the curiously named Forest Protection Society (FPS): FPS member and University of Melbourne botany professor Peter Attiwill was coming to WA to address a meeting in Pemberton. So Chris, Peter Robertson and I decided we should ask a high-profile person to get up on the second platform.

First we asked a Greens Party member of State Parliament, Dr Christine Sharp, but when she said she was afraid of heights, I suggested Craig Turley. It then became my job to find him. The Eagles kept no record of past players so there was no joy there, and as a surfer, Craig could be anywhere in the world. I happened to tell Roger Cheeseman, the formidable president of the Friends of Giblett in Pemberton, that we were looking for Craig and within hours, he rang back in great excitement: Craig

was out at the Giblett rescue camp. He had turned up of his own accord but the camp rescuers, not being footy fans, did not recognise him. When we asked him to go up onto the platform in the giant marri, he readily agreed and climbed up and spent several days there. In his interviews with journalists, he gave a sincere and moving response about his concern for the forests.

“Basically what I’m doing here is supporting what is happening in the conservation movement down in the forest. I’m not a scientist but I understand the importance of the forest and the diversity of the species that the old forests like this down here in Pemberton support,” he said. “The old growth karri and mixed karri/marri and jarrah forest that exist down here in the south-west doesn’t exist anywhere else on the planet. This is our own back yard; it’s our responsibility to look after that.”

Craig’s involvement generated a lot of interest and greatly encouraged the forest rescuers. In the years that followed he continued to support the campaign in public and in private.

2.2 *Mick Malthouse*

The West Coast Eagles won the AFL Premiership in 1992, only six years after the team was created, and again in 1994. It was the first team from outside Victoria to win this highest contest in the AFL, and Western Australians were delirious with joy. Not surprisingly, the team’s coach, Michael Malthouse, became a folk hero. In early 1998 we heard that Mick Malthouse had appeared with Craig Turley on a TV football show. When the presenter told Craig that the last time he had seen Craig, he was up in a tree, Mick chimed in that he agreed with Craig. From that comment we knew that Mick supported the campaign.

In May 1998, we decided to approach Mick to ask him to speak out publicly in support of the forests campaign and we got Eleanora Kailis, one of the many remarkable and talented people who were working with us, to ring Mick and make an appointment for Peter Robertson and me to meet him. The meeting took place in Mick’s office at Subiaco Oval, the Eagles’ home ground, on Thursday, 28th May. We said we would like to fly him down south with a TV journalist who would interview him in the karri forest. He agreed and gave us the only date he was available, Tuesday, 2nd June. The tight timeframe required immediate action.

We offered Channel 7, the football channel, exclusive coverage, and they accepted but would not fly us down as they said that would show bias. They were later very apologetic about this response. So we took our offer to Channel 9, who were more than happy to fly us down and interview Mick in return for exclusive coverage of the story. At Perth airport Mick, Eleanora and I met up with Channel 9 sports commentator Michael Thompson, who was very pleased to be able to spend a day with Mick. We then flew to Manjimup, where we managed to evade reporters and other sticky-beaks who had got wind of the trip. Everyone was expecting us to go to Giblett forest because of the active campaign there, but we decided to go to Jane, a beautiful forest near the small town of Northcliffe also threatened by logging. We asked two ‘Friends of Jane’ committee members to meet us and drive us round: John Taylor (a former faller for Bunnings who became disgusted by the waste and misuse of the magnificent karri trees he was felling), and Robert Daubney (whose dairy farm had been blockaded by unionists and some supporters of logging because he allowed forest rescuers to camp on his farm). Escorting Mick Malthouse around Jane forest was a great pleasure for these Eagles supporters.

The tour went brilliantly. Mick, ever the professional, had dressed just right for the occasion and did the interviews to perfection. He then stood beneath a giant karri looking up into the canopy and posed for the photo that was to become famous. We had lunch at the Taylors, where other Friends of Jane and Eagles supporters had gathered for the occasion. In mid-afternoon we flew back to Perth, where we delivered Mick back to his home in Mt Claremont. Then we waited.

Channel 9 ran the interview on the night of Wednesday, 3rd June. It was a sensation. “To think that’s been chopped down for woodchip and a very quick profit by someone is an indictment of the organisation and the Government that allowed it,” said Mick pointing to a huge karri log. “We are astounded at the devastation of the forests in Indonesia and Malaysia and yet, right here on our doorstep, we can take a stand and we are not doing it. ... CALM,” he declared, “is a contradiction in terms.” The next day the State’s only daily newspaper, *The West Australian*, put the story on the front page with the photo of Mick looking up into the canopy of the giant karri. What followed was a media frenzy on the radio and in the newspapers. Not surprisingly, fearing a backlash from sponsors the Eagles hierarchy were not pleased, and there was criticism and outrage from the logging lobby. Some Eagles members in Manjimup, the logging industry’s heartland, even threatened to burn their membership cards. But there were far more bouquets than brickbats, and Mick later told me that club membership actually increased. We also heard that he received more letters of congratulation after he spoke out about the forests than when the Eagles won the Premiership. The follow-up publicity went on for weeks, with scores of supportive letters to the editor and futile attempts by the logging lobby to discredit Mick and persuade him to change his mind.

There was an unpublicised sequel a year later. Beginning in 1996, the WA State Government, in collaboration with the Australian Government, attempted to develop a Regional Forest Agreement that would provide both a comprehensive, adequate and representative conservation reserve system and security for the native forest-based timber industry. However, almost all forest conservation groups in WA refused to participate in the process because of deep suspicion about it and its likely outcomes. The WA Premier, Liberal Party leader Richard Court, on the eve of signing the Regional Forest Agreement on 4th May 1999, rang Mick to offer him a briefing on the Agreement in the vain hope he would support it. It was obvious that Richard did not know Mick.

Our understanding with Mick was that we would not trouble him again, but we did ask him to speak at the momentous rally at the Perth Entertainment Centre on Sunday, 30th May 1999 (we took a very bold step and hired that venue at a cost of \$10,000 for the day). At Mick’s request we put him on first as he had to leave to go to training. That rally helped stop the Regional Forest Agreement in its tracks and it raised enough in donations to pay for hiring the Centre.

After a 25-year campaign in which we used every device we could think of, from direct action to legal action, Mick Malthouse’s speaking out marked a turning point. It provoked massive media response and community support, and public statements from a dozen other high-profile community members, including well-known fashion designer Liz Davenport and Liberal Party matriarch the late Dame Rachel Cleland, both of whom became heavily involved. It was probably the single most publicised event in the whole campaign. And for those of us who were involved it was fun.

2.3 *Dr Michael Calver*

Dr Michael Calver, now Associate Professor at Murdoch University, became involved in the forests debate when his response to a request for an opinion led to a challenge for him to express his views in the scientific literature. In 1994, a publication by Abbott and Christensen (1994), “Application of ecological and evolutionary principles to forest management in Western Australia,” purported to show that the management of WA forests was based on sound scientific principles and that these forests remain in ecologically good condition after 120 years of “timber harvesting” [sic] and 30 years of prescribed burning. I note in passing that in 1994, prescribed burning in the jarrah forest, which began in 1954, had been going on for 40, not 30, years.

We at the Conservation Council sensed that the basic premises of the paper were unsound and the logic flawed but we did not feel competent to respond. So in early 1995, one of our loyal helpers, Wendy Goodall (who with her husband had owned the Northcliffe pub), sent a copy of the paper to Dr Michael Calver, then a Senior Lecturer in Biological Sciences at Murdoch University, asking him for

his response. Wendy knew of Mike through a student who had been studying birds in the Northcliffe area for her PhD. In February 1995, Mike replied to Wendy. In his covering letter he said: "... while I strongly disagree with the substance of their argument, I have tried to restrict my comments to the science involved and not to attack the authors personally." Mike began his critique thus: "My overall assessment of this paper is that it is based principally on rhetoric and a superficial, selective reading of the research literature rather than on broad scholarship." He then went on to challenge the paper under the headings: "Building a straw man? Platitudes or principles? Standards of scholarship. Contrary views."

With Mike's permission, his paper was attached to an affidavit in the Supreme Court action taken by the South-West Forests Defence Foundation against CALM to halt logging in Jane forest. It thus came into CALM's possession. On 11th April 1995, Mike received a letter on CALM letterhead from the two authors chiding him for criticising the original paper in a covert manner. While asserting that the ideas in the original paper were intended to stimulate discussion, they asked Mike to afford them the courtesy of expressing his views publicly in the form of a letter to the Editor of *Australian Forestry* so that they would have the opportunity to reply in a scientific forum. They sent copies of this letter to the Pro-Vice Chancellor, Murdoch University; the Dean, Faculty of Science, Murdoch University; and the Director, Science and Information, CALM.

In his reply on 19th April, Mike said that academics are occasionally asked for their professional opinions; that it is appropriate and responsible for academics to respond; and that this is a service to the community that is part of the duty statement of academic staff. He pointed out that this procedure, which he had followed, is distinct from that of scientific debate, which is conducted in scientific journals. He stated that his critique was his opinion only and not necessarily the view of his colleagues or the university.

Mike received a second letter from the two authors, again on CALM letterhead, expressing disappointment that he had not responded in a letter to the Editor of *Australian Forestry*. They accused him of bias for responding only to Wendy Goodall's request. They further alleged that his bias was magnified by the use Ms Goodall subsequently made of his written opinion (i.e., as evidence in the court case), but they accepted that the opinion was his own and that "it does not necessarily reflect on your academic colleagues or the University". They again sent copies to the same three officials who had received copies of the first letter.

The next response was probably not what the authors of the letters expected. Rather than replying alone, in June 1995 Mike co-authored a paper with Dr (now Professor) Richard Hobbs, then at CSIRO, Dr (now Associate Professor) Pierre Horwitz at Edith Cowan University, and Professor Bert Main, from the University of Western Australia (Calver *et al.* 1996). It comprehensively but politely rebutted the earlier paper, which, it said, "appears to contain fundamental flaws in logic, as well as in its choice and discussion of principles, and fails to live up to the promise of its title."

The debate continued with two further exchanges in *Australian Forestry* (Abbott and Christensen 1996, Calver *et al.* 1998). Abbott and Christensen (1996) opened with what in my opinion was the false allegation that Calver and his colleagues were opposed to commercial use of native forests, and went on to repeat the unsubstantiated assertions and selective use of authorities found in their earlier paper. They also resorted to sneers and personal abuse while committing the very offences of which they accused their opponents. In contrast, I believe Calver *et al.* (1998) was conciliatory in tone and made significant concessions about forest management ("... there is presently inadequate evidence to judge whether or not the current forest use is sustainable"). It concluded by calling for open and frank debate and transparent lines of communication between, for example, the Australian Institute of Foresters and the Ecological Society of Australia, and an end to personalised attacks on integrity and motives.

This searing introduction to the forests debate aroused Mike's interest in the subject. In the following years he published 11 papers in refereed journals and spoke at several meetings and conferences on forest management and related topics. In 2000 he was promoted to Associate Professor,

to a large extent on the basis of this research and these publications. His involvement was entirely fortuitous and certainly not what was intended by the authors of the letter that started it all off. One day someone will write a PhD thesis on the treatment meted out to people who have dared to publicly challenge the received ideas, that is, received by the forestry profession, on what is euphemistically called forest management, i.e., logging and burning. It will make interesting reading.

3 A FOREST CONSCIENCE – CONSCIOUSNESS – CONSCIENCENESS

The forests debate in WA is the best example in Australia of the evolution of the community's conscience. This evolution began long ago. Over the decades, even while the forests were being stripped and plundered, individuals and groups recognised publicly that there is more to forests than wood and deplored the waste and destruction the European invaders have imposed on them. As early as 1894 the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science lobbied successfully for the creation of the 64 000 hectare South Dandalup reserve in prime jarrah forest 100 kilometres south-east of Perth, near where Pinjarra stands today. However, it was not properly vested and in 1911 it was reclassified for timber and agricultural purposes as a result of persistent lobbying by timber interests (Rundle 1996). More recently, Norton and Kirkpatrick (1995, p.247) identified "... an urgent need to put forestry on a sustainable basis in Australia, and particularly in New South Wales, if all components of forest biodiversity are to have a reasonable probability of persistence in the long term." Expressions of concern about over-exploitation are numerous, and I choose three, spaced across the 20th century:

For many years past Western Australia has been engaged in destroying an asset which is clearly the property of the nation, that is to say, the property of all future generations. Instead of regulating the cutting of timber so as to confine it to a quantity such that the forests could reproduce again, milling firms have been allowed to cut practically without restraint; in fact, they have been encouraged to cut as much as possible, and have been penalised when they did not maintain their output, with the result that the timber assets of the State have been depleted to an alarming extent. Lane Poole (1918, p. 1)

This year's production represents a far greater output than the forests of the State can maintain, and moreover, the rate of cut is still increasing. Stoaie (1953, p. 1)

It seems to the Inquiry that for much of its history the native forest sawn timber industry has been in disequilibrium with the supply of its raw material. In most years there seem to have been too many mills for the timber on offer. Milling capacity has almost always been greater than the supply of logs to the mills. Individual mills dependent on native forest, and the groups of such mills that go to make up 'timber towns', can survive only if the forest within their radius of extraction is managed on a sustained-yield basis. So far as the Inquiry is aware, this has never happened in Australia. Resource Assessment Commission (1991, p. 1)

The evolution of the community's forest conscience and consciousness gathered speed in 1975, when native forest woodchipping, that ultimate insult to all the values our forests offer us, began in WA. The majority of the community know in their gut that woodchipping native forests is wrong but in 1975 they did not know what to do to stop it. Then, beginning in 1990, guided by the WA Forest Alliance a well-organised campaign showed people how to give voice to their conscience and save the forests from logging and woodchipping, and the community responded. The strategic involvement of high profile people in the campaign and the recruitment of scientific experts contributed greatly to the wider awareness of the issues. Ultimately, Western Australians decided very consciously that while we

could keep on logging old growth forests until only museum specimens were left, and continue to use the wood and accept the money and jobs that could be derived from logging for a few more years, we could and would say, “No! No more logging of old growth forest!” and in 2001 we elected a government that would implement this decision. It is a remarkable achievement.

The tragedy is that it has taken so long to get the message to those who make the rules and persuade them to bring about change. Since 1975 50 000 hectares of mostly unlogged karri forest (a quarter of all the karri forest left in the world) and probably ten times that area of mostly old growth jarrah forest – not to mention the ancient marri, tingle and yarri – have been wastefully and needlessly despoiled. But with more than half our remaining native forests no longer available for logging, we must rejoice in what has been saved, not just mourn what has been lost.

Our Western Australian forests epitomise the beauty, the grandeur, the diversity and the complexity of nature, ever changing, awe inspiring, appealing to the senses as well as the soul. They represent the continuity and evolution of life, an unbroken link with the beginnings of life on earth. They confirm the relative insignificance of humans – they are a humbling as well as an exhilarating experience. For me, getting involved to help protect them has been well worth the effort.

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