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## Media release - Radical Change from Environmentalist Welcomed by Timber Supporters

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# MEDIA RELEASE

16 November 2009

## RADICAL CHANGE FROM ENVIRONMENTALIST WELCOMED BY TIMBER SUPPORTERS

National community organisation Timber Communities Australia has welcomed comments made by an environmental activist concerning harvesting of East Gippsland's native forests. Simon Birrell's comments, aired on ABC Gippsland radio news on Monday 16 November, reinforced the view of Timber Communities Australia and that the East Gippsland economy was heavily reliant on native timber harvesting and should remain into the future.

TCA's comments follow criticisms from the Australian Conservation Foundation and two other environmental groups against planned legislation to add a further 26,700 hectares of hardwood forests and crown land to the extensive National Parks network in the region. The groups oppose logging of old-growth forests which will continue despite the extension to the parks and reserves network. Mr Birrell, of the Victorian Rainforest Network, offered a differing view:

*"There is limited employment prospects in East Gippsland so I think it's a bit simplistic to simply say that we need to be you know shutting down logging in a place like East Gippsland when a lot of work needs to be done on creating more I suppose some economic diversity and employment prospects for local residents"* Mr Birrell stated.

"We agree wholeheartedly with Simon's comments and applaud the fact that an environmental group finally acknowledges the impacts it's lobbying and beliefs are having on timber communities. While TCA remains opposed to the loss of more productive forest to parks it was refreshing to listen to Mr Birrell stating the facts as he sees them rather than reciting the green ideological mantras we have become attuned to" said TCA's regional coordinator Trevor Brown.

"For too long, timber communities have been on the receiving end of flawed government policy. Simon Birrell previously campaigned to close down the viable Otways timber industry. The Otway Ranges are now largely national park and acknowledged by the Government as a major fire hazard for the coming summer" said Mr Brown.

"The legislation for the extensions to the national parks results from promises made prior to the

2006 elections. Of course, this promise was made prior to the disastrous bushfires of 2006/07 and 2009 and does not account for the loss of valuable timber resources and future impacts on the timber industry in Victoria. It is crazy that the Government goes through with the legislation given the changed circumstances” he added.

“East Gippsland cannot afford to lose a single job in the timber industry and Simon Birrell’s comments reinforce that view. For too long successive governments have announced new national parks with a rider of how many jobs will be created through supposed tourism. Simon’s comments demonstrate that timber jobs are real jobs in timber communities throughout East Gippsland”.

The second reading of the bill to create the additions to the national parks and reserves in East Gippsland was introduced to Parliament on 10 November and proposes a total of 45,585 hectares be added to National Parks and Conservation Reserves. It includes additional state forest in the Brown Mountain area to link the Errinundra and Snowy National Parks, but excludes the 47 hectares of old-growth forest which was planned for harvesting but is now the subject of Supreme Court action undertaken by Environment East Gippsland against VicForests.

**ENDS**

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