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Dear Editor,

Forestry Facts Dispel Myths and Untruths

Free speech continues to go unimpeded in Australia when blatant exaggerations and wrongful claims can be printed such as those made by Stewart Kerr (Mail, 2 December).

Given that seven weeks production was lost due to the February bushfires (a loss of \$3 million revenue); destruction of a major log storage dump (a further \$2 million) and the substantial increase in rehabilitation of logged coupes (\$3.4 million) where major contributors to VicForests' loss of \$5.024 million after tax for the past financial year. On top of this there was the Global Financial Crisis, which accounted for a significant downturn in sales.

Check your latest superannuation statement if you need to understand the impact of the GFC (make sure you are sitting down). All of these facts are in the 2008/09 VicForests Annual Report. VicForests, a state-owned business enterprise (not a government department), also commenced the major salvage operation of dead native timber for which it received \$1.459 million as part payment of a grant from its "parent company" the Victorian Government.

So how does Mr Kerr come up with his statement that Australian native forestry is subsidized to the tune of \$500 million? Or that native forestry operations accounts for 20% of Australia's greenhouse gas emissions when it is Australia's only carbon neutral industry that actually reduces greenhouse emissions? Certainly, these figures did not come from any credible or factual source.

Mr Kerr's biggest whopper, however, is his statement that the timber industry "is costing Melbourne 1000 litres a second in lost water yield". Do the maths yourself; if Mr Kerr is correct this amounts to the equivalent of 9.3 times the full capacity of Lake Eildon per year! Pure fantasy by a professional nuisance activist.

He also states that VicForests undertakes "mass poisoning of wildlife", a popular line amongst the deluded anti-timber movement. The "wildlife" Mr Kerr refers is actually "vermin" or foxes and wild dogs. Cute, cuddly herbivores and marsupials do not dig up and eat liver baits. Vermin control is not carried out by VicForests but the Department of

Sustainability and Environment as the department with overall responsibility for forests, vermin control and wildlife.

Mr Kerr also says that only 5% of harvested native timber when the actual figure is about 36%. It should be remembered that only about 5,500 hectares of forested land is harvested annually. Given that there is 8.3 million hectares of forested land in Victoria, more than half of which is National Parks and reserves, this equates to less than 0.067% annually. It is the equivalent of a 3.6m x 3.6m square on the MCG, which indicates Victoria's timber industry is environmentally sustainable.

Mr Kerr's lack of knowledge and dislike of the timber industry was shared by another anti-timber activist in Sarah Rees (Stop the Chop, 2 December). Like Mr Kerr, she wrongfully blames timber production for bushfires, displays her anti-timber traits by bashing Gunns Ltd and also shows her anti-Japanese, anti-export beliefs.

Like Mr Kerr she sees herself as an environmental activist when they are really anti-timber, anti-industry, and anti-jobs activists.

The true environmentalists are people that manage our forests for their current and future health for all to enjoy. Perhaps these facts will go some way to answering Mr Kerr's question "as to exactly what Kersten Gentle is proud of".

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