

The editor

It seems that Chris McEvoy (Decked out to cut woodchips - WT 3 November) wants to rewrite the governments Timber Industry Strategy, which was only released last November.

His suggestion of moving log harvesting from native forests to plantations may sound like a good idea to those unfamiliar with the industry but it does not stand up to scrutiny. Chris suggests that 8000h of plantation of the durable (class 1 and 2) species of yellow stringybark, silvertop and mahogany need to be established. What he does not spell out is who would establish the plantations and on whose land. Victorian government policies would prevent the plantations being established on public land or on currently forested private land and so the only option would be buying land which is currently used for agriculture.

Chris also suggests that the trees could be harvested after 20 years. The fact is that the companies with large plantation areas can grow trees to pulpwood size in 20 years, but it will take 30-40 years, on land of average site quality, for trees to achieve sawlog diameters. If there were an investor willing to buy the land and start putting the trees in the ground then this additional plantation area should be regarded as another business option not an alternative to native forests logging.

The native forest industry is a key component of the economic fabric of many towns in Victoria. In East Gippsland, a recent detailed survey indicates that the logs harvested from native forests generate over 600 direct jobs and a similar number of indirect jobs. Thats a lot of rural families reliant on the native forest timber industry. In some small towns the numbers are a high percentage of the total jobs. For instance there are 196 direct jobs in the Orbost/Marlo/Newmerella area and an estimated 200 indirect jobs reliant on the timber industry, out of a population of about 2500. This represents a large percentage of families directly or indirectly reliant on the native forests of East Gippsland.

The 2009 Timber Industry Strategy sets out the basis for Victorias forest industry to go forward on a sustainable basis . It includes a strategy on plantations and concludes that “the market should be able to source timber from publicly owned native forests, privately owned native forests and timber plantations.” Let government get on with implementing its strategy rather than confusing the situation with a new set of proposals

Garry Squires
Orbost