

## **Review of the Victorian Native Vegetation Clearing Regulations – SETA Submission**

### **Introduction**

The South East Timber Association Inc (SETA) has members from timber dependent communities in East Gippsland and south east NSW. SETA is making this submission as members have seen many government decisions relating to native forests have perverse outcomes for both the forests and remote timber communities.

The perverse environmental outcomes range from slow decline in forest health, browsing and predation by feral animals to disastrous wildfires.

### **Private Native Forestry**

In NSW private native forestry harvesting operations are not required to pay for offsets. SETA members have told me that one property owner in East Gippsland may have to pay up \$1 million for each hectare that is to be harvested, based on the current offset requirements.

In NSW the harvesting of native forests on private property is regulated under the Native Vegetation Regulation 2013, which requires the preparation of a property vegetation plan (PVP) and compliance with the relevant Private Native Forest Code of Practice.

[http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/num\\_reg/nva2003nvr20132013543l19s2013606.pdf](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/num_reg/nva2003nvr20132013543l19s2013606.pdf)

The Victorian offset requirement has effectively turned most private native forests into private national parks, with no compensation from the government. For members who own native forest in East Gippsland, an immediate way to save money is to withdraw from the Southern Ark predator control program.

An increase in wild dog and fox numbers will not be a big problem for SETA members who own cattle and trees. The perverse outcome for the local ecology will be an immediate reduction in the numbers of small mammals and lyrebirds. Lyrebirds are currently preoccupied with courting, so will be easy meat for increased numbers of foxes.

Another way for forest owners to save money, so at least they can pay their rates, is to reduce expenditure on fire management, including fuel reduction burning and equipment.

The revised regulations must not impose the same cost penalties on sustainable harvesting as those applying to permanent clearing.



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There is increasing evidence that a lack of burning (disturbance) contributes to decline in forest health and loss of species that are fire adapted. Increases in ground fuels and more understorey, increase forest flammability and increases the risk of largescale wildfires and biodiversity devastation. Undisturbed forests often suffer chronic tree decline.

More details on this issue are contained in the recently published book, Firestick Ecology written by research scientist Vic Jurskis:

<http://volunteerfirefighters.org.au/firestick-ecology-by-vic-jurskis>



**Chronic Tree Decline (Epicormic Crown) in a Long Undisturbed Forest**

Regrowth forests, that are left to self-thin, are under greater water and nutrient stress than forests that have been thinned. These un-thinned forests take much longer to produce large hollow bearing trees than thinned forests and due to higher tree numbers, are more likely to suffer crown fires during wildfire events, than more open forests.

**SETA members recommend that the government adopt a similar approach to harvesting of native forests as used in NSW. Forest owners should be encouraged through a property vegetation plan to also implement ongoing predator control and fire management strategies to enhance biodiversity outcomes.**

Stephen Pope  
SETA President

