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Independent investigation clears VicForests

Independent, expert analysis has confirmed VicForests' harvesting operations near Toolangi did not breach the Central Highlands Forest Management Plan.

Nathan Trushell, VicForests' Director, Strategy and Corporate Affairs, said an independent report determined that no old growth forest, no Leadbeater's Possum habitat and no pre-1900 trees have been harvested.

"Experts engaged by the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) have verified VicForests' operations complied with the Forest Management Plan," Mr Trushell said.

"The investigation found no evidence to support allegations by a community group that breaches of the Forest Management Plan had occurred.

"VicForests takes its responsibilities in relation to the protection of flora and fauna very seriously.

"As part of this investigation, DSE assessed the area in question and determined it did not meet the criteria for Leadbeater's Possum habitat.

"An analysis of tree age was also conducted by an expert dendrochronologist which showed the trees harvested were not old growth.

"This outcome highlights that VicForests' has systems and procedures in place to help us care for areas of important environmental value when undertaking our operations," he said.

Mr Trushell said VicForests' is continually aiming to improve its level of compliance with the comprehensive legislative framework which governs sustainable timber harvesting in Victoria.

"VicForests implements a number of measures to protect crucial environmental, historical and recreational areas," he said.

"These include retaining habitat trees to allow for nesting, retaining buffer zones alongside creeks, rivers and other key environmental features, and creating Special Protection Zones to minimise the potential for impact on endangered species.

"VicForests welcomes community input and third party scrutiny of our operations by experts in this field as we understand the importance of caring for our environment.

"It was disappointing on this occasion that a community group chose to seek publicity in relation to their unproven allegations before an independent assessment had been completed," Mr Trushell said.

DSE's investigation included a full audit of VicForests' operations in the coupe and found two minor non-compliances relating to paperwork and drainage. These issues have now been addressed.

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