



Harvesting operations in Sylvania Creek Rd, Toolangi

VicForests' harvesting operations in Sylvania Creek Rd (in a coupe known as 'Gun Barrel') have been the focus of protest action in recent weeks.

VicForests would like to assure the community that detailed assessments of this forest have been undertaken. These assessments have confirmed the area planned for harvest contains:

- No forest which meets the criteria for Leadbeater's Possum habitat
- No 'old growth' forest.

How is Leadbeater's Possum habitat identified and protected?

The Leadbeater's Possum is a listed endangered species and its best known habitat is protected in National Parks and conservation reserves.

In addition to the reserve system, the Department of Sustainability and Environment has developed a specific Leadbeater's Possum Action Statement to assist with the animal's ongoing protection.

This Action Statement was reviewed by an independent Scientific Advisory Committee and identifies two types of forest which should also be reserved if located within areas planned for timber harvesting, known as Leadbeater's Possum Zone 1A and Zone 1B habitat.

The criteria used to determine both Zone 1A and 1B forest refer to the presence of hollow bearing Ash trees which can be used as habitat by Leadbeater's Possum, as well as the presence of wattle understorey as a food source.

All areas which meet the criteria as Zone 1A or 1B Leadbeater's Possum habitat are excluded from timber harvesting operations.

How was 'Gun Barrel' coupe assessed by VicForests prior to harvesting operations?

VicForests inspects all areas prior to harvesting to identify any pre-1900 Ash trees and forest which meets the criteria for Leadbeater's Possum habitat.

VicForests' staff performed a pre-harvest assessment of 'Gun Barrel' to identify and protect all pre-1900 Mountain Ash trees. This assessment determined that the area planned for harvest did not meet the criteria for Leadbeater's Possum habitat.

An additional assessment of the coupe was also undertaken by VicForests' Forest Scientist and eight foresters on July 20th 2011. These staff used GPS technology to record the location of all hollow bearing and pre-1900 trees.

This assessment, by forestry staff with a collective experience of almost 100 years, confirmed the area planned for harvest did not meet the criteria for Zone 1A or Zone 1B Leadbeater's Possum habitat.

Is there Leadbeater's Possum habitat in the area planned to be harvested?

Pre-harvest assessments conducted by VicForests found no forest which meets the criteria as Zone 1A or Zone 1B Leadbeater's Possum habitat within the area planned to be harvested in 'Gun Barrel'.

This finding has been supported by further assessments carried out by VicForests and independently by the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE).

There is a patch of Leadbeater's Possum habitat located adjacent to the coupe. This forest is protected from harvesting in a Special Protection Zone.

The habitat is outside the area planned to be harvested by VicForests and was identified during the planning processes. This area was not approved by DSE for harvest and VicForests never planned to harvest this habitat.

Is there 'old growth' forest in the area planned to be harvested?

Assessment by both VicForests and DSE has confirmed there is no old growth forest in 'Gun Barrel'.

There are a range of forest age classes within the area planned for harvest including some individual trees which pre-date 1900. These pre-1900 trees have been identified and were never intended to be harvested.

The existence of individual pre-1900 trees in a mixed age forest does not constitute 'old growth'.

VicForests has excluded all trees which pre-date 1900 from harvesting operations as required by the Central Highlands Forest Management Plan.

Has and independent Investigation been undertaken?

The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) carried out an independent inspection of the coupe on July 18th 2011.

This followed claims by the local environment groups regarding the existence of Leadbeater's habitat within this area.

This independent investigation did not identify any forest which met the criteria for Zone 1A or Zone 1 B Leadbeater's Possum habitat within area planned for harvesting within Gun Barrel.

How has VicForests responded to community concerns?

VicForests has chosen to exclude an additional three hectares of forest on the western side of 'Gun Barrel' from harvesting in order to address the concerns expressed by some conservationists.

This area does not meet the criteria for Zone 1A or Zone 1B Leadbeater's Possum habitat and does not require protection under legislation.

However, VicForests' decision to exclude this area provides further protection and compliments the range of measures already in place to protect habitat and biodiversity.

In addition to the area reserved, all trees which pre-date 1900 have been identified and will be excluded from harvesting operations to provide future habitat for native fauna.

A 60m buffer where no harvesting will take place has also been placed around a gully in the coupe which contains rainforest.

Forty habitat trees will be retained for every ten hectares harvested on this coupe as per the Central Highlands Forest Management Plan.

Are buffers required along Sylvia Creek Rd?

The Central Highlands Forest Management Plan recognises Sylvia Creek Rd as part of the Toolangi-Black Range Forest Drive.

Buffers are not placed on harvesting operations along this drive in order to display multiple uses of forests which balance commercial timber production with conservation objectives. This includes activities such as harvesting, regeneration and regrowing forests of various ages.

What timber products will be produced from these operations?

Harvesting operations in 'Gun Barrel' will generate some of the most sought-after timber produced in Australia.

This will include a higher than average yield of sawlog for use in appearance grade products such as furniture.

However, all harvesting operations produce timber a by-product which is not suitable for use as sawlog. Rather than letting this timber go to waste, VicForests sells these logs to customers as pulpwood for the production of quality writing and office paper.