

## VicForests releases social impact summary report to Mirboo North community

VicForests today released to the Mirboo North community a social impact scoping summary report that assessed concerns and support around plans to harvest coupes near the town.

VicForests' General Manager, Corporate Affairs, Alex Messina, said he has released the report to give stakeholders, including the Preserve our Forests Steering Committee, the community and Local Government a summary of feedback provided to VicForests during interviews in August 2017.

“The process, undertaken last August, was intended as an internal training and learning exercise, and included confidential comments from 22 interviewees from the Mirboo District including individuals, farmers, landowners and businesses in the town and near the three coupes.

“The independent external author was asked to prepare a summary for public release with no specific identifying details.”

Interviewee concerns included potential impact on forests, vistas, biodiversity, tourism and amenities like the Lyrebird Walk.

Interviewee support included possible local economic benefits from forestry, wildlife's capacity to move to adjacent forests, and recreational users capacity to utilise nearby areas of forest.

“We want to be transparent and open as possible to support community information and discussion, and we are happy to consider concerns and mitigations. I feel that appropriately preparing a summary for release is worthwhile and respectful of the community.” Mr Messina said.

It is not the purpose of a social impact scoping exercise to answer if harvesting should or shouldn't occur. Rather, it identifies potential impacts and suggest ways to avoid, minimise or manage these.

The report suggestions include low intensity harvesting, buffering of vistas, amenities, and wildlife areas, and supporting alternative recreational areas.

A photograph of a forest with tall, thin trees and a dense canopy of green leaves, partially obscured by a green geometric shape in the top right corner.

“The report has been shared with the Preserve of Forests Steering Committee and South Gippsland Shire council and will form part of ongoing discussions. I was pleased that PoF recently met with VicForests and allowed some of our experts to present possibilities and mitigations.

“While PoF has made no commitments, VicForests has agreed to do some further work on low intensity harvesting that could be possible in the coupes,” Mr Messina said.

“We agreed to meet and discuss matters further in about a month.”

VicForests cares about social and community values and has conducted extensive and ongoing consultation with stakeholders in the Mirboo North community to understand concerns and respond where possible.

The ‘VicForests Social Impact Assessment Development: Scoping studies, Mirboo North’ report can be downloaded <http://www.vicforests.com.au/static/uploads/files/vf-report-pilot-studies-mirboo-north-fitzgerald-wfkjkkpeeajy.pdf>

Community members can comment to VicForests via <http://www.vicforests.com.au/contact-us/melbourne>

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