

Better outcomes through consultation

VicForests is protecting an additional area of forest as part of harvesting operations in the Toolangi State forest.

Nathan Trushell, VicForests' General Manager, Stakeholders and Planning, said the coupe was a good example of how input from stakeholders is considered in planning harvesting operations.

"The area is being harvested using world class retention harvesting techniques to retain additional areas and exclude a group of older trees from harvesting," Mr Trushell said.

"We have also been talking with local community members regarding this operation and have added an additional buffer.

"This additional buffer retains more forest and provides a corridor between forest above and below the area being harvested.

"The change has been made as a direct result of discussions with the community and highlights our commitment to continuing to look at a different ways to plan harvesting operations at a local level.

"Retention harvesting results in at least 50% of the area planned for harvest being within one tree length of retained habitat that is more than 50 years old.

"The timber from this operation will help us to meet the current high demand for Mixed Species sawlog which is used to for a range of purposes including flooring, furniture, construction material and high quality office paper.

"Supplying this timber from our own local and sustainably managed forests reduces the pressure on imports to meet our growing needs for renewable timber," he said.

Mr Trushell said as part of the initial planning for the operation a 50 metre buffer was been placed on Dunstan's Track to reduce visual impact on the walk and 50 metre buffers are also in place around a long term monitoring site. No harvesting will take place within these buffers.

"There are a number of old, large mixed species trees which we aim to protect as part of the timber harvesting operation with many of the largest trees incorporated into a one hectare retained 'island' which has been excluded from harvesting," he said

"No old growth forest is being harvested as part of this operation with the majority of the area forest having regrown following the 1939 bushfires.

"The area also underwent a detailed survey prior to harvesting which confirmed it does not meet the criteria for Leadbeater's Possum habitat. The mix of species on the site is not the Possum's preferred habitat.

“Despite the area not meeting the criteria as habitat for Leadbeater’s Possum, the high levels of retained forest provides additional habitat and connectivity for native species and ensures the operation meets the requirements for retention harvesting.

“Following two years of planning we have made significant changes to the way we are harvesting this area for timber. This has been the result of consultation with a range of stakeholders and demonstrates that good outcomes can be achieved through constructive dialogue,” Mr Trushell said.

Retention harvesting is being implemented by VicForests as part of the recommendations developed by the Leadbeater’s Possum Advisory Group and endorsed by the Minister for Environment and Climate Change and the Minister for Agriculture and Food Security in April.