



Media release

From the Minister for Environment

Thursday December 1, 2005

ENVIRONMENTAL INVESTIGATION INTO GOOLENGOOK

A formal environmental investigation into Victoria's iconic Goolengook Forest in East Gippsland will commence soon with the release of final Terms of Reference, the Minister for Environment, John Thwaites, announced today.

Mr Thwaites said the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) would commence an investigation into the potential for all or part of the Goolengook Forest to be added to the Errinundra National Park.

"Final Terms of Reference have been developed, taking into account previously received public submissions on the draft Terms of Reference as well as discussions held with a range of stakeholders and community groups," Mr Thwaites said.

"The priority is to balance environmental and sustainable forest development.

"I will ask VEAC to look at how we can protect the iconic Goolengook forest block. VEAC will also take into consideration the impact on communities in the region in its investigation."

The new Terms of Reference, in line with the majority of submissions, remove the requirement for the timber from the Goolengook block to be substituted with timber from the Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CAR) Reserve System, or from within the Special Management Zone that is not currently available for timber production.

The change also includes a requirement that there be no overall loss of timber resource from the East Gippsland Forest Management Area as a result of the investigation.

There has been a moratorium on logging in Goolengook for three years, and this will continue while the investigation is conducted. VEAC will investigate all of the forests in the Goolengook Forest Management Block, not just old growth forest, and the full range of values in the area.

"The well being of endangered species like the Tiger (Spotted) Quoll, the Long Footed Potoroo, the Sooty Owl and the Slender Tree-fern will be taken into account in considering whether to add Goolengook to the Errinundra National Park," Mr Thwaites said.

VEAC will undertake extensive consultation and call for public comment on the issues it intends to explore during the Goolengook investigation. This investigation will be undertaken in parallel with VEAC's investigation into River Red Gum Forests along the Murray.

"I will request that VEAC undertake an 18 month investigation into the Goolengook forest, and provide a report to me by July 2007. I look forward to a thorough investigation by VEAC into how best to manage this important environmental asset." said Mr Thwaites.

Attached: Final Terms of Reference for the VEAC Goolengook investigation.

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Terms of Reference for VEAC Goolengook Forest Investigation

Pursuant to Section 15 of the *Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001*, the Minister for Environment hereby requests the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) to carry out an investigation of public land within the Goolengook Forest Management Block in East Gippsland.

The purposes of the investigation are to:

1. Examine the Goolengook Forest Management Block for its potential for all or part to be added to the Errinundra National Park, with particular reference to the need to protect old growth forest¹.
2. Provide advice on the costs, benefits and implications, in terms of biodiversity, timber resource and other values, of options under 1 above.
3. Ensure that there is no net deterioration in timber production capacity.
4. Recommend preferred options and advise on implementation requirements to achieve the preferred option.

Note: ¹Old growth, for the purposes of this investigation, is forest that meets the definition specified in the Nationally Agreed Criteria for the Establishment of a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative Reserve System for Forests in Australia.

In addition to the considerations specified in Section 18 of the *Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001*, the Council must also take into consideration the following matters:

- Policies, programs and reports, as well as obligations, resulting from International, Commonwealth-State agreements or arrangements, as they relate to the investigation;
- Existing State Government policies, programs, strategies and Ministerial Statements, as they relate to the investigation; and
- Regional programs, strategies and plans, as they relate to the investigation.

The Council is required to prepare a Draft Proposals Paper and must submit a Final Report on the results of its investigation within 18 months of the request.

There must be submission periods before the preparation of the Draft Proposals Paper and after its release, and each submission period is to be a minimum of 60 days.