



Central West Investigation - Wellsford Submission

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Lintt Taylor

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Re: Central West Investigation

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to the Central West Investigation.

My name is Lintt Taylor and I am a commercial apiarist, living in and working from Bendigo, running over 3,000 hives and employing 5 people. Our business operates across two states, producing honey, beeswax and supplying pollination services, something that is essential to horticulture production, for example, almonds.

Our submission will concentrate on the Wellsford forest as it is an essential part of our business and I am very concerned with its ongoing health. I write to support the Wellsford forest becoming a part of the conservation reserve system as the increased protection will allow for better stewardship of this public land, which will in turn make the area more productive. For too long the continual exploitation of the Wellsford forest for low value wood products (free firewood, VicForests wanting to increase poles, logs), has degraded the areas ability to produce nectar/honey and as a consequence its usefulness in supplying bees for pollination. When an area in the Box-Ironbark is cut for timber, nectar production and as a consequence honey production declines, when it is left alone nectar/honey increases.

The monetary value from pollination services and honey production generated from the Wellsford forest is very large. Whereas firewood is free, (taxpayer subsidised) and the monetary return from VicForest activities via low value wood production is trivial.

Honey produced from Red Ironbark *E. tricarpa*, Grey Box, Yellow Gum and Red Box on my Wellsford forest bee sites is vital to the viability of my business. To cut out the very eucalypts, as VicForests plans to do, that enable our industry to survive, an industry that is important to Victoria's future food security, is a very silly thing to do, especially when sawlog production on private land is now becoming a reality with commercial production coming on stream.

VicForest has targeted seven coupes within the Wellsford forest and will allow the cutting of a significant number of summer and autumn (January to April) flowering ironbark's on my and other apiarists' leases in the Wellsford Forest along with both Grey Box and Yellow Gum. This particular type of ironbark is not only rare but is the most important honey producing eucalypt in the Bendigo district. Our fear is that if the status of Wellsford forest remains the same and VicForest decides to begin a logging operation, it will target many other important areas other than the coupes already chosen and this would be a disaster for us.

Dodder – Laurel (*Cassytha melantha*) has been a major problem throughout the Wellsford Forest since it was cut to the ground in the 18th century. “Repeated thinning of coppice in the Wellsford forest increases the opportunity for Dodder-laurel spread as coppice and seedlings are most vulnerable to attack by the spread of dodder-laurel from adjacent ground flora. In the Wellsford Forest extensive areas were treated in 1920, 1930 the 1950’ and in 1961 3,200 ha were heavily infected. In 1991 thinning operations were restricted to areas relatively free of dodder-laurel.” Also concerning past forestry regeneration practices, “ some seedling regeneration occurs and the areas subject to Dodder-Laurel infestation are rehabilitated.” *Forest Management in Australia 1991* edited by F. H. McKinnell, E. R. Hopkins & J. E. Fox.

The problem for us as with Dodder-Laurel and the forest as a whole, is that when a tree is cut whether for firewood or logs, in an area within the Wellsford forest that has previously been subject to Dodder-laurel attack there is a very high probability that the coppice will be killed by the parasite. This can be seen at the moment within coupes 151-003-0103 and 151-003-0106 where, over the last fifteen years, a few poles have been cut from summer and autumn flowering Ironbarks as well as Grey Box and Yellow Gum. The coppice is being lost to Dodder-Laurel, this loss can never be replaced and VicForest is not doing any rehabilitation on these coupes. Our understanding is that they only have to look after an area they have cut for seven years.

It is the production of firewood, not just sawlogs, poles and fence post that is damaging the Wellsford Forest. The harvesting of firewood takes out all but a few trees per hectare that may make good sawlogs. The cutting of young regenerating summer and autumn flowering ironbarks as well as yellow Gum and Grey Box, all trees of great value to us, damages future production.

Because the Box-Ironbark regenerates vigorously from coppice, firewood production leads to a crowded forest with hundreds of stems per hectare. Also the cutting of firewood within areas previously subject to Dodder-Laurel infestation will lead to a great loss of coppice many years into the future, this eventuality does not appear to have been planned for. The cutting and the uncontrolled gathering of firewood destroys much of the understory. Understory produces pollen, something that is an important component in honey production and important to the maintenance of bee health, especially within the Wellsford Forest.

As there isn’t a forester in the Bendigo FMA the firewood operations are conducted without supervision from a qualified person. It is being carried out by contractors and people from the department who usually conduct controlled burns. The collection of the fallen firewood is done without supervision and a great deal is stolen.

The production of firewood in the Wellsford forest brings up many questions such as, are they going to continue to come back on these areas for more firewood by arguing that it needs thinning again? Are they in the process of making a firewood forest out of what is one of the most important beekeeping areas in the state? It must be remembered that all this damage is just for free firewood!

In the few years leading up to 2001 forestry targeted the Wellsford forest for sawlog production and cut an enormous number from areas that had been subject to Dodder-laurel. There has been a very large loss of coppice in the area cut. During the same period 400 sawlogs were stolen from a summer and autumn flowering site and, unfortunately, firewood was cut from the same area just three years ago. They cut all of the regenerating ironbark. This is a large economic loss something that we will never see rectified in our lifetime. They did not seem to understand what they were doing.

There has been approaches made to VicForest by the beekeeping industry concerning the thinning of Box-Ironbark forests, but because of the Wellsford Forests history this is not required. The Wellsford forest is generally well spaced and would anyway be a dangerous thing to do because of the Dodder-Laurel. Any cutting within this forest necessarily requires intense rehabilitation, something that takes many years and consumes a great deal of money. Therefore rehabilitation would never happen because of the very low returns generated from wood products and of course firewood is free.

VicForest will not undertake thinning because the entity is required to return a dividend to the State and there isn’t any money in such an operation. There is a possibility though that firewood production could be promoted as a way of producing the same result. This is incorrect as it will, because of the propensity of the Box-Ironbark to coppice, produce an even more crowded forest structure.

Kindest Regards

Lintt Taylor