

## **A way forward for CFM – to get things going (again)**

- 1. ISC (via Tim) to negotiate with RUG and other key user/interest groups on the composition of a Council of Stewards comprising:**
  - A. A Chairperson, preferably from the local community, with knowledge of forest management and a commitment to community forest management.
  - B. Forest Management Experts – members with specific expertise in:
    - Forest ecology
    - Forest silviculture
    - Catchment management (including forest hydrology)
    - Other forms of expertise relevant to the management of the Wombat State forest.
  - C. Forest Users and Stakeholders – members with interest and experience in:
    - Active/motorised recreation
    - Passive forms of forest recreation
    - Flora and fauna conservation
    - Water resources and hydrology
    - Timber production
    - Beekeeping or other non timber forest products
  - D. Local Residents
    - Four seats for residents of Hepburn, Moorabool or Macedon Ranges Shires, who are able to demonstrate an interest or involvement in the management of the Wombat forest, strong networks in the local community and a capacity to contribute through a Council of Stewards.
  - E. Indigenous community
    - Up to 3 seats for representatives of traditional owners or cultural heritage cooperatives.

This totals between 15 and 18, depending on indigenous community participation. This is big, but not impossible. Four seats are specifically reserved for local residents, but locals are not disqualified from filling any other seat. That is, local representation would be at least four, but up to 18 places.

The Council of Stewards is to act as a Board – that is to adopt collegiate behaviours and individual members are appointed in their own right, not as representatives of any particular stakeholder.

The Council of Stewards would probably meet monthly. Sitting fees would be payable. Any potential conflicts of interest would need to be declared in advance of appointment.

**2. The local community selects the Council of Stewards, following wider advertisement, and provides a recommendation to the Minister.**

Recommendation to be made by a selection committee of 4 residents of the Shires of Hepburn, Moorabool or Golden Plains, comprising:

- A nominee of 1
- A nominee of 2
- A nominee of 3
- A nominee of 4

These nominees would be permanently ineligible for appointment to this or any future Council of Stewards.

(Alternatively the ISC could be the selection committee as a last act before dissolving itself – maybe with some supplementary members to ensure the confidence of all stakeholders)

**3. The Minister will formally appoint the recommended council of stewards.**

- This provides the Council of Stewards with a mandate, without the need for a local community election.
- The selection committee will need to put forward a panel of names that will have the confidence of the Minister – threshold tests are likely to be competence, capacity, responsibility and so on.
- The Minister will specify any pre-conditions of appointment. These would be available prior to selection so potential applicants go in with their eyes open.
- The Minister could sack a non-performing Council of Stewards. He will know if it is non-performing if there is substantial community concern about its performance and it has failed to respond to this.

**4. In the first instance, the Council of Stewards will have the following responsibilities:**

Executive Responsibilities (ie, the Minister will hold the Council accountable for these matters)

- Location and conduct of timber harvesting operations, subject to meeting all pre-existing licence commitments
- Location and conduct of firewood harvesting operations and other forms of forest utilisation, subject to all pre-existing licence commitments
- Provision of forest recreation services
- Control of pest plants and animals
- Monitoring and reporting on the condition of the forest and the determination of management performance indicators
- Establishment of strategic management priorities for the forest
- Conduct of community information and engagement activities

Advisory Responsibilities (ie, the Minister will hold DSE accountable for these matters but will require consultation with the Council of Stewards)

- Fire prevention activities
- Road maintenance priorities and the conduct of road maintenance operations
- DSE budget development for the Wombat forest

- Any other forest management matter.

This list of responsibilities could be expanded into a Memorandum of Understanding, or protocol between DSE and the Council of Stewards. In the absence of any agreed alternative management requirements, DSE will continue to determine the management arrangements for the forest (a saving power to ensure continuity of effective management while any new arrangements are debated).

The Council of Stewards will be required to manage the forest in accordance with the Forests Act and any other relevant legislation. For example, it would not be able to arbitrarily close roads.

DSE will support and advise the Council of Stewards and implement its decisions. DSE staff will remain accountable to the Secretary of Sustainability and Environment. DSE support is contingent on resources available.

5. **A network of "Working Groups" and the ISC will provide mutual support.**
  - These groups would pay particular attention to aspects of forest management, providing a focus for consultation and a source of volunteers for planning, programming and implementation. Working Groups would not have any formal accountability for forest management.
  - Participation in working groups will be voluntary.
  - Implementation of this model is not contingent on the existence of working groups.
6. **The Government will reserve the Wombat Forest as a "community forest" under Section 50 of the Forests Act.**
  - This would enable the Minister to appoint the Council of Stewards to be the Committee of Management for the Forest. (The Council could still function without this formal appointment through an MOU with DSE or some similar instrument)
  - CoM arrangements are well established and understood and well supported by DSE (in matters such as insurance etc.)
  - The Act provides mechanisms for revenue retention in S. 50 Forest Reserves.
  - It would recognise the special status of the forest.
7. **These arrangements will be applied until 30 June 2008.**
  - This coincides with the end of the last of the major sawlog licences in the forest.
  - It provides enough lead time for the process to bed down.
  - It indicates the extent of the Government's commitment.
  - The Minister would invite the Council of Stewards to develop a recommendation for post 2008 arrangements.