



Locked Bag 3, Orbost
Victoria 3888 AUSTRALIA
eeg@eastgippsland.net.au
ABN: 30 865 568 417
www.eastgippsland.net.au

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Submission
Development Application (10-2020-81-1)
Timber Optimisation Hub

Via email: council@begavalley.nsw.gov.au

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our objection to this Development Application.

EEG has been working to protect the forests and environment of East Gippsland since the early 80s. We have a membership of 350, a supporter base of over 1,000 and a social media following of over 11,000.

We appreciate the good work that the Bega Valley Shire Council has been doing in regards to numerous environmental issues. It has shown the way forward for many other councils, including those across the border in Gippsland.

As you would know, the chipmill at Eden has been responsible for a huge loss of our natural forests across the SE of NSW as well as into East Gippsland since the early 70s. Its lucrative export of millions of tonnes of incredibly valuable forests has driven the destruction for half a century.

Right now the entire east coast is suffering the consequences of drought, climate change, decades of clearfelling, invasive species, bad land management, wildlife losses and ecosystem collapse. That was before the bushfires.

In SE NSW, we understand 80% of the forests available for logging have burnt. That will add greater pressure on the forests of Victoria. Here in East Gippsland, half of our forests have burned.

Massive environmental impacts

EEG's concern is of the environmental consequences if the sawmill, briquet plant and the pallet operations go ahead. It will demand the ongoing and intensive clearfelling of every available native forest within viable trucking distance.

East Gippsland's forests are considered an 'ark' of what SE Australia's forests would once have looked like and the wildlife it would have supported.

Now, forest dependent wildlife is increasingly under threat of extinction. More have been uplisted than downlisted under the state's Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act list of threatened species. The [Greater Glider](#) being the most recent addition.

Unless this proposal is based on 100% plantation wood, it spells ongoing forest conflicts and worse, species extinction and ecosystem collapse.

A leaked state [government report in early January](#) estimated that 31% of Victoria's rainforests has already been burnt, as well as 24% of wet or damp forests, and 34% of lowland forests. These figures are likely to now be greater as the fires burnt for another two months after this report was done.

This catastrophic loss of habitat is pushing species such as the Greater Glider, Sooty Owl, Powerful Owl and Smoky mouse towards extinction in the wild.

Predictions by biologists and scientists are dire and the full extent of the damage is still uncertain until surveys are carried out over the next few years. Until this time we urge the Bega Valley Council to adopt a precautionary approach towards this development application.

Given native forest logging in Victoria is mostly driven by the demand for the so called 'waste' product, we strongly believe that this mill's current and future operations and product lines should be sourced *only* from plantations which have been purpose grown on private land. This should be verifiable. If not feasible, the application should be considered for rejection.

We believe this DA if approved could fuel species extinction and more forest destruction, at a time when so much forest is now in recovery and could take decades to return to the biodiverse areas that existed and support a similar suite of wildlife. The few remaining green areas must be protected wherever possible as refuges.

Add to this scenario the impacts of escalating climate chaos and loss of stored forest carbon and we believe any development which relies on forest logging is an obsolete enterprise, extremely inappropriate and damaging to our environment and communities.

Biomass as energy

As the world turns away from biomass burning, and many countries are now shutting down wood burning electricity generators (forest furnaces), the Bega Shire could be hosting a facility which goes against this pattern. It would be moving backwards to a technology which rightly belongs in the 15th century. Forests should be used and valued as carbon stores, for water production and climate moderators, not 'waste' to be burnt. This industry would be at odds with the region's move to acknowledge and work towards a climate friendly future.

We believe the sawmill proposal could be little more than a fig leaf to hide the bigger plan for biomass production.

Logged forests far more flammable

Regenerating forests after being logged burn more intensely. This [article](#) explains the science. It cites a [piece](#) published in the journal *Nature Ecology and Evolution*, where scientists call for a clearer discussion about how land management and forestry practices contribute to fire risk.

The article by the scientists David Lindenmayer, Robert Kooyman, Chris Taylor, Michelle Ward and James Watson comes amid intense debate about the [resumption of logging](#) in [Victoria](#) and [New South Wales](#) in bushfire hit regions.

As both East Gippsland and SE NSW have thousands of ha of intensely logged areas with uniform regrowth, we believe our fires' ferocity was in part due to being fed by so much regrowth fuel created by clearfell management across the landscape.

To approve this development would be perpetuating a shroud of regrowth across this SE corner of the country. It would indirectly encourage ongoing clearfell logging which creates the wood 'waste', which the proposed facilities would demand. It would be a serious fire threat to communities.

Tourism and community

East Gippsland and the SE Coast share some wonderful natural areas which draw in tourists from near and far. The blot on the landscape in SE NSW are the huge woodchip piles at Twofold Bay and the miles of forests which have been converted to woodchip production areas. We do not need more visual ugliness and destructive land management but a new direction towards forest restoration and appreciation.

After the summer of incineration on a scale never before seen, there needs to be a more considered recovery phase. One small development could escalate the destruction across both regions, rather than allow our natural areas to heal and more environmentally sympathetic industries emerge.

EEG urges the BVSC to reject this development application.



Elizabeth Ingham
Secretary, Environment East Gippsland
