

# Wood Utilization Plans – Portland FMA 2001

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We are disappointed that NRE foresters have apparently learned nothing from the RFA process and the community response to the forestry plans revealed through that process. The WUP for 2001 shows, instead, intent to pursue a devastating clear-felling regime in this region, despite the opposition that was shown in the press and RFA submissions. This intent is buried in minute print ("Seed tree") on the bottom left hand corner of the captions in the map of Portland FMA proposed WUP for 2001-2004. A 10x magnifying glass was required to detect this intent; nowhere else is it shown or the terminology explained. .

"Seed tree" – The Portland WUP have proposed "Seed tree" – first year, second year and third year. This means clear-felling, leaving a small number of "desirable " trees (between 2-30/ha). Florence (1996) states on p. 225 *"The classic clear-felling method may be modified to the extent that a small number of mature trees are retained on the site for the specific purposes of supplying seed (the 'seed tree method')."* In usual practice, the retained seed trees would be cut down too, but after the new seedlings established. HFNC saw examples in Cobobboonee area in 1999, where only a handful of trees were retained per hectare over a forest block of tens of hectares. All the habitat trees and other vegetation had been eliminated, with the exception of a narrow strip along a forest road.

"Group selection" is also proposed – of course this is much to be preferred, although they need to ensure that the habitat trees are not removed. "Group selection", as defined by Florence (1996), is used in uneven-aged stands. It is intended to create specific regeneration openings within the stands. The method was introduced in Australia in the 1950s, particularly in coastal NSW, with openings 40-60 m wide. The remainder of the forest between the openings would be logged on a conventional diameter-limit basis. The "Australian Group Selection" method was an attempt to conserve growing stock for later cutting, to promote regeneration of preferred species, and to provide an alternative to economic, technical and popular objections to clear-felling.

The original prescription was not founded on biodiversity concerns, although Florence (1996) makes the point on p. 245 that *"an unduly large regeneration gap may not be compatible with other objectives of management, including the retention of as many trees as possible for later harvest, and the conservation of natural environments. In this case it may be necessary to seek an appropriate balance between these objectives, for example by varying the size of the gaps created through the forest"*. Florence gives an example from NSW where canopy openings of about 0.5 ha cover some 20% of the forest area logged at each cutting cycle where there is useful advance growth or reasonable prospects for seedling regeneration. Up to 5 mature or "overmature" trees/ha may be retained in these openings.

There is no indication as to the type of group selection that will be used in the Portland FMA. How large are the cleared blocks to be within the forest area? What proportion of the forest will be left intact after each cutting cycle? What habitat trees will be retained in each opening? Will the habitat trees and other forest vegetation in the areas outside of the "group selection" plots be left undisturbed in the interim between cutting cycles? Will some parts of the forest area be permanently excluded from clearing to make these openings? We need to have an undertaking on these matters before we will accept any plan. The WUP, as published, does not address these important matters and is an insult to the public. We are asked to ratify a process where the operational details and proposed outcomes are not revealed.

**We have a fundamental objection to this WUP. Since the Portland FMA plans have not been released, this WUP should not contain any plans which will preclude consideration of a range of alternatives for future long-term management of the forest for wood production, biodiversity and landscape issues.**

To do otherwise is to pre-empt public participation in deciding the long-term plans. We believe that the present WUP is in breach of the RFA guidelines. The WUP should *follow* the release of the plan. Clearly, biodiversity and conservation principles have not been adequately addressed in this WUP. The only issue comprehensively addressed has been the production of wood.

The following quotes will indicate, by contrast with present policies, the failure of NRE Portland foresters to consider biodiversity matters. They will also indicate how ignorant practicing foresters are in regards to what is known and written of such matters elsewhere! And how resistant they are to changes that give biodiversity planning real emphasis. This attitude is not exclusive to Australia. A recent quote by JC Bliss (2000) in an international forestry journal [Journal of Forestry 98 (12): 4-9], "Perceptions of clearcutting" is very telling in regard to community demands in America:

*"Despite widespread opposition to clearcutting, even among forestland owners, some foresters continue to think that lack of understanding is the source of public disapproval. To the American citizens today, the forest is not just a fibre factory, to be manipulated to produce wood products for human consumption in an efficient and rational way, and trees are not just a crop. Now that the forest is no longer the exclusive domain of professional foresters, forest practices will not be acceptable unless they are compatible with prevailing beliefs and values – and until public trust in forestry is restored".*

**"Ecology and Silviculture of Eucalypt Forests" (1996) by RG Florence - CSIRO Publishing.**

The Chapters 9-12 deal with these selection methods and their history. Florence also deals with biodiversity aspects and how these must be accounted for. Some quotes will indicate the sort of compromises that foresters must make if they are to take account of biodiversity factors:

p. 298 – *"Principles of sustainable development now require the creation of a nature reserve system that is comprehensive, adequate and representative in its approach to conservation and biodiversity... it is highly unlikely that all elements of forest diversity can be protected in large nature reserves representing, say, 15% of the total forest area. It follows that sustainable development may be achieved only where the wood production forest makes a significant contribution to a regional conservation strategy".*

p. 298 – *"Environmental objectives might be achieved by abandoning clear-felling altogether, and using only selection and shelterwood regimes...these methods have their place within an environmentally significant forest, but a single-minded emphasis on them could be just as inappropriate as a single-minded emphasis on clear-felling. It follows that a more diverse and flexible approach to silvicultural practice will be needed".*

p.298-299 – *"Planning for structural and biological diversity...Where there are sound reasons for retaining the clear-felling method...careful pre-harvest planning for each coupe will be the key to achieving a satisfying balance between wood production and environmental conservation...start the planning process by recognizing sites of environmental interest or significance...where the forest has good wildlife potential, any significant habitat units might be identified and protected within the coupe, vegetation strips along gullies might be widened, and uncut corridors maintained between them. Other ecosystem units might be demarcated for retention within the harvested forest, including, for example, old trees with hollows together with the surrounding tree and understorey vegetation. This might be done to help service the shelter and food requirements of target wildlife species, or ensure their rapid recolonization as regrowth develops. In this way, up*

*to, say, 40% of the canopy might be left uncut more or less permanently, with the future commercial wood yield coming primarily from the even-aged regrowth developing within the larger open patches distributed through the forest. It will be necessary, of course, to accept a trade-off between wood production and environmental conservation. Where mature overwood trees are retained there will not only be a reduction in immediate and future wood yield, but the stocking and vigour of the regrowth may be affected to some extent".*

p. 303 – *"Inevitably, modifications of clear-felling on environmental grounds will reduce the essential operational efficiency of the method and increase the costs of forest management"... "Nevertheless, trade-offs between operational efficiencies and environmental conservation will be essential in order to maintain access to a resource which might otherwise be denied on environmental grounds".*

p. 296 – *"...dry sclerophyll forests...are often characterised by a high level of species diversity, and an uneven-aged structure. They were subject to conventional clear-felling from the 1970s [in Tasmania]...but are now managed more flexibly". [This appears to be the closest example that could relate to Portland forests].*

p. 261 – *"Maintaining biological, structural and environmental diversity. The wider use of selection silviculture is commonly advocated by community groups opposed to clear-felling native forest. Certainly, the uneven-aged forest offers the best scope for taking into account within one stand, a range of management objectives. While classical selection practice has no place among the intolerant, large-crowned, aggressive trees of the eucalypt forest, it is possible, nevertheless, to develop an approach which takes the underlying concepts of the system and adapts them to the biological and economic reality of eucalypt forest management...thinking on the future of the forests should not be constrained by immediate demands on the forest and current management philosophies".*

p. 291 – *"...the modern forester may need to be concerned with wood production, conservation of biological and structural diversity, and maintenance of landscape qualities - all within the one forest area".*

p.291 – *"...the most common reasons for clear-felling are those relating to the ecological characteristics of fast-growing eucalypt species, the typical condition of old-growth forests, the operational efficiency of the methods, and the need to expand the wood resource for future industries".*

On the basis of information that was forthcoming from the RFA process, particularly relating to future markets for the chipped that this forest mainly produces, the condition of the forest resource, the employment opportunities associated with the new methods of forestry and the alternatives of eco-tourism, we seriously question whether there is any case to be made for the clear-felling that has been proposed in this WUP.

**We urge NRE to provide the Forest Management Plan for discussion prior to formalising any WUP for the future. To do otherwise is to make a farce of the entire process. It will also result in continuing neglect and decline in biodiversity values of this unique forest system. Biodiversity issues must be adequately accounted for in any plans for future wood production - and NRE must be prepared to compromise on wood production in order to satisfy biodiversity issues.**