

# GIPPSLAND FOREST DIALOGUE

## Scoping Dialogue Co-Chairs Report



Engage • Explore • Change



"The Gippsland Forest Dialogue is the single most important forestry initiative in Australia. This is of, by and for the community. This is not experts paid for by the government telling people what to do."—Dialogue participant

"This experience has shown me that we can come together and walk away with consensus."—Dialogue participant

The Gippsland Forest Dialogue is conducted across the Traditional Lands of the Gunaikurnai, Bunurong, Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung, Taungurung peoples, and into the lands of the First Nations of far East Gippsland, the Moogji, Bidhawal/Bidwell/Bidwall and Monero peoples. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded. We acknowledge Traditional Owners on whose land we tread as the original custodians of Country, their enduring rights, and that many of the issues we will discuss are the product of settlement. We open the door to hear and respond, to listen and learn, to understand and acknowledge their individual and collective voice. We aspire to strengthen partnerships and acknowledge that increasing agency for traditional owners comes through ongoing conversations and working together.

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# FOCUS

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Meeting the challenges facing Gippsland's forests, together.

## ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

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The Gippsland Forest Dialogue (GFD) was launched in early 2022 and aims to build understanding and agreement among stakeholders around the opportunities, challenges and knowledge gaps related to [the management and lack of management of] forests in Gippsland. The GFD creates a space for diverse stakeholders to come together to talk about how best to look after the region's forests, for people and planet, and to explore, agree on and facilitate collaborative actions that bring about these positive changes. The emphasis is always on creating a safe environment to discuss issues and opportunities, and a diversity of comments are welcomed.

As an integral part of the initiative's development, the GFD convened a Scoping Dialogue to explore a range of stakeholder perspectives on forest values, management and use in Gippsland. The aim of this Scoping Dialogue was to foster collaboration, build trust, and to generate collective understanding of the key challenges and opportunities for enhancing the social, economic and environmental values of forests. To help develop and implement this dialogue-based initiative, the GFD brought together a group of individuals with experience in industry, conservation, academic, and civil society, among other sectors. The process is based on and supported by The Forests Dialogue (TFD), an international organisation based at Yale University that brings together and supports groups of forest stakeholders to learn from each other, to trust each other, and to implement collaborative and adaptive land management.

# ABOUT THIS REPORT

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This Co-Chairs report synthesises the process, discussion points and key themes arising from the GFD inaugural Scoping Dialogue. The report content was compiled from a combination of participant-generated information during a series of breakout discussions (written notes on butcher's paper), along with written notes maintained by the Co-Chairs and appointed rapporteurs throughout the dialogue process.

While content generated during breakout sessions was reported back to the group, there was limited opportunity for broader group discussion and/or critical evaluation of the information presented. Furthermore, Co-Chair and rapporteur written notes captured dialogue discussions in a variety of forms, including issues touched on and talked about in whole of group discussions, as well as isolated comments, and formal and informal interchanges between two or more participants. Thus, although Co-Chairs have ensured to only report on content that was generated in some form during the GFD Scoping Dialogue (as reflected in Co-Chair notes from discussions and/or butchers paper), there is likely to be information captured in this report which some participants may not have witnessed first hand, or otherwise have opportunity to comment on.

In light of this, the content of this report should not be taken as points of collective agreement by all GFD Scoping Dialogue participants, but rather interpreted as a synthesis of the diversity of discussions held in various forms during the process. It is the hope of the Co-Chairs that this report serves to document the various, often differing, comments and opinions voiced by participants, which can be used as a reference point to facilitate more in-depth discussion of the issues raised, address conflicts, and ultimately (hopefully) build trust and agreement, through ensuing dialogues.



# SECTION 1: SCOPING PAPER SUMMARY



# Dialogue context

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As part of the scoping process, the GFD established an Advisory Group to provide dialogue participants with a baseline understanding of six intertwined elements (thematic areas) that influence and shape Gippsland's forests—climate change, fire, cultural landscapes, water, industry, and biodiversity. Through a Scoping Paper, the GFD Advisory Group presented information on why each element is important, the different values that shape our understanding of these elements, and the existing and future tools, policy and strategies that surround their management.

Our thematic areas combined to tell the story about how Gippsland's forested landscapes are shaped by culture, land use and management decisions, including the effects that these have on forest health and associated human and community well-being. They were used to help guide and prompt discussions during the Scoping Dialogue.

## Aims and objectives

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The aims of the GFD Scoping Dialogue were to:

- Build a collective understanding of stakeholder perspectives, priorities and concerns, areas of agreement and disagreement, and knowledge and research gaps relating to ALL Gippsland's forests (conservation zones, national parks, state multi-use including production forests, private land, softwood and hardwood plantations, and farm forestry);
- Foster collaboration among stakeholders, allowing forest managers, community members, conservationists, wood product producers, policy makers, academics, and other interested parties to learn from one another, trust each other, and synthesise current knowledge; and,
- Co-create an actionable plan that presents a path forward to mobilise stakeholder networks and advocate and influence positive changes for our forests and forest users.

# Dialogue process and limitations

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The GFD Scoping Dialogue was held over four days, comprising: a welcome dinner and introductory session (in the evening of day one); field dialogue (day two); scoping dialogue, including a series of plenary and breakout sessions (day three); and, Co-Chair presentation and closing plenary (the morning on day four). A full event overview is provided in the Appendix.

Unlike traditional Scoping Dialogues following the TFD model, which generally focus on a single challenge which has been identified as having potential to be resolved through dialogue, the GFD Scoping Dialogue set out to cover much more ground, including broad exploration of six themes - climate change, fire, cultural landscapes, water, industry, and biodiversity - identified by the Advisory Group and outlined in the Scoping Paper. While valuable, this broad outlook meant that there was limited opportunity to have detailed group discussions into particular topics of importance and/or contention among participants. Instead, the dialogue broadly explored all themes, predominantly through breakout group exercises, and there was limited opportunity to explore key issues in depth.



*Field visit to Micah Track*

While the inaugural GFD Scoping Dialogue group was diverse, there were significant gaps in stakeholder representation which are referenced throughout this report. For example, while Traditional Owners (TOs) were consulted by GFD in the process leading up to the dialogue, there were no TO participants present over the four days. The absence of participants with specific expertise in the thematic area, water and forests, was also cited as a hindrance to discussions on this topic, and the under-representation of direct forest users, including recreational users, native forest managers and harvesters of native forest products, was noted.

The Field Dialogue set out to put the key themes into context through site visits. However, again due to time but also weather constraints, participants were not able to reach and/or to have productive group discussions at sites that were representative of all themes. Notably, opportunities to put into context the themes of water and fire were limited, having a probable impact on the prominence of these topics in group discussions. The Scoping Dialogue sessions started out with two participant presentations on fire management and community-based forest management in Nepal. These presentations set the scene for the day and, notably, decentralised/community-driven forest governance emerged as a theme cross-cutting multiple discussions. The degree to which this theme would have emerged in the absence of inspiration from the Nepalese example is unknown, but the potential link has been acknowledged as a learning for future dialogues. Scoping Dialogue sessions comprised a series of predominantly breakout group discussions (a useful tool for covering a lot of ground in a short period) and to a lesser extent plenary discussions. These sessions were used to brainstorm opportunities for change in the way we interact with forests under each thematic area. Outputs were reported back to the group, prioritised and subject to further exploration of knowledge gaps and barriers to change. Feedback from participants suggests the need for more whole-group discussions to voice opinions (individually and collectively), to address conflicts, build trust, and ultimately (hopefully) seek agreement on key issues.

## Overarching Co-Chair synthesis

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The Co-Chairs convened before, during, and after the Scoping Dialogue. During the event, Co-Chairs and note-takers maintained written records of discussions and key themes arising. The intention was for Co-Chairs to prepare and report to the group a synthesis between each session to maintain continuity between the four days. However, this was not achieved to the degree that the Co-Chairs would have liked, and was also reflected in Participant feedback. Nonetheless, notes taken during the dialogue provided an opportunity to assess the rich data from multiple plenary and breakout group discussions, as well as informal participant comments, which has fed into this Summary document.

Major takeaways included:

- Urgency of action required given the current state of Gippsland forests, which are massively impacted by climate, social and biodiversity crises, exacerbated by megafires and unsustainable forest extraction (though there are points of difference in opinion on this issue which need to be resolved through further dialogue).
- A general, palpable frustration with business as usual, and top-down, centralised, siloed management approaches was evident, coupled with enthusiasm around opportunities to find new, more integrated, local and connected ways of working.
- There was an identified need for multiple cross-cutting forest functions, uses and values (biodiversity, fire, climate change, water, carbon, timber products, etc.) to be appropriately considered as part of holistic management.



Desire to explore decentralised / community-based models of forest management set against the need for integrated, whole-of-landscape approaches to tackle big issues (e.g. climate change, fire management, habitat connectivity, etc.).

Optimism around potential for innovative pilot projects / case studies to develop and refine more sustainable, integrated and scalable forest management approaches.

Need to voice and listen to different perceptions, experiences and opinions on forest biodiversity and industry / production values, conservation and management, and desire to make progress by establishing better understanding, trust and agreement on this issue.

Importance of ensuring that additional missing voices and stakeholders are represented in future discussions and dialogues.

Creating a better future for Gippsland's forests will involve overcoming global and local challenges. Identifying bridges and points of communication between stakeholders, managers and communities; advocating for change on multiple fronts; and, providing examples of positive, scalable actions will be central to successfully living with and limiting negative impacts on our forests, ensuring that they remain functional and provide for future generations.

## Opportunities for change

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During Scoping Dialogue sessions held on day three, participants engaged in a series of breakout sessions to explore opportunities for positive change under six themes associated with Gippsland forests: biodiversity, fire, industry, climate change, water, TO cultural landscapes, and social/governance. This was an exploratory exercise intended to foster creative thinking, knowledge sharing and build trust among participants. The key topics discussed during these brainstorming sessions are summarised below, in a word cloud created from participant notes.

After initial brainstorming sessions and group work, participants came together and indicated through a prioritisation process four opportunities that were investigated in greater detail, including an analysis of the key knowledge gaps and barriers to change. Three of the four opportunities explored involved pilot projects to test different approaches to forest management in the region (including community-based models, new approaches to forest industry, and decentralised TO management) for upscaling and broader application. The fourth involved an investigation of how the GFD could create connections, share knowledge and communicate to better advocate for Gippsland's forests and people.

Detailed accounts of these projects and ideas are outlined in full in the appendices.



for key issues including timber security transition, fire, and water. It was also seen as a potential model for TO groups, with support from GFD representatives as appropriate.

#### Communication, networking and knowledge sharing

Participants emphasised the importance of educating, changing and communicating different views and perspectives on forests through the GFD process, with a focus on engaging under-represented people, communities and stakeholders in future discussions and dialogues. This focus will aid the GFD in addressing current gaps in knowledge, participation and understanding, as well as foster networking and connections that may enable pilots through partnerships with different groups and communities. The importance of facilitating knowledge sharing – international, national, local – in order to explore different ways of doing things without reinventing the wheel was also a priority, with several international fellowship funding opportunities identified.

### Next Steps

Key priority next steps for the GFD were identified as:

- Advisory Group meeting on Friday 2nd December 2022.
- Co-Chairs report drafted ready for circulation and feedback in early December.
- Establishment of working groups on communications, projects, and key issues dialogues.
- Themed dialogue on native logging / timber industry and biodiversity conservation to be held in East Gippsland in early 2023.
- Investigation of opportunities / applications for grants and funding for sharing of international perspectives on forest management.
- Prioritisation of communications, engagement and advocacy - GFD members to network and pass on the message so that the movement can expand, facilitate understanding and participation from missing stakeholder groups, and better advocate for Gippsland's forests.

Overall, GFD participants were keen to move quickly towards a thematic and place-based follow-up dialogue that could serve as a next step towards deeper assessments and the development of strategies to realise identified potential benefits while avoiding harm.

# SECTION 2: EXPLORATION OF KEY THEMES



This section of the Co-Chairs report comprises an exploration of key themes that arose leading up to and during the inaugural Scoping Dialogue process. It is based on a synthesis of the various interactions that took place during the dialogue (including whole and breakout group discussions, as well as informal comments and remarks by participants across the four days), rather than the output of in-depth group discussions on any one issue. Opportunities for detailed discussions into key issues were restricted by time constraints and the broad-reaching suite of topics that were the focus of this initial dialogue (see Dialogue process and limitations). The content in this section therefore does not encapsulate a comprehensive summary of the views and opinions of all participants; there may be additional themes, fracture lines and opinions which are not reflected. Nonetheless, the topics covered will provide useful considerations for feeding into future dialogues (see Next steps), and serve as useful building blocks from which to work towards a more comprehensive understanding of the varying perspectives pertaining to Gippsland forests. Key sections include: Exploration of themes, Cross-cutting themes, and Fracture lines.

## Exploration of themes

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During the Scoping Dialogue, the six themes identified by the GFD Advisory Group and outlined in a Scoping Paper were explored to varying degrees by participants. Two additional themes: (1) Social/community/governance, and (2) 'People and the bush' (broadly meaning, in the GFD context, the interactions between people and forests), were also identified and explored during Opportunities for change breakout sessions on day three. These latter two themes are summarised together under 'Social and governance' in our exploration of key themes below.

Key Insights, Concerns, and Knowledge Gaps are presented for each thematic area. Key Insights are intended to provide context, perceived opportunities, and central challenges. Concerns reflect shared and individual doubts as well as points of disagreement or misunderstanding between participants. Knowledge Gaps capture data, network, and communication limitations. Much of the content in this section is derived from breakout group notes from a brainstorming session exploring each thematic area.

### *Biodiversity*

#### Key Insights

Participants agreed on the need to increase public awareness and education on the importance, values, and benefits associated with healthy forest biodiversity. There was discussion about the importance of restoration of ecological function and biodiversity at a landscape level, the need for greater public investment in this, and the opportunities (economic, social, environmental) that may arise from redefining how ecosystem services

are valued and the potential flow on effects in relation to local job creation. Participants also emphasised the importance of biodiversity in plantations and on private land, as well as the opportunities to improve landscape connectivity (including to connect fractured habitats to aid species migration and adaptation in the warming climate) and overall ecosystem health through better management on these tenures.

### Concerns

There was a general concern around the lack of government (and other) funding and investment in biodiversity, especially around pest plant, animal and fire management in conservation tenures, as well as the unreliable, stop-start nature of funding cycles. The need for urgent action was expressed within the group, especially to prevent species extinctions ('extinction crisis') by curtailing processes that threaten biodiversity. 'Lock it up and leave it' approaches to national park management were seen by some as insufficient in terms of positive biodiversity and threatened species outcomes. However, this assertion also raised some tensions in the group as it was perceived to detract from efforts to conserve threatened species and ecosystems, many of which are arguably in a better state within versus outside conservation areas. Additional unresolved or otherwise contentious issues included: (a) the pros and cons of species-focused and whole-of-country management in different contexts, and (b) the questioned sustainability and negative impacts of current and future planned logging in threatened species habitat. The latter raised tensions within the group as it was perceived by some that logging was being incorrectly held responsible as a major contributor to biodiversity disturbance and decline, while more pressing contributors occurring across forest tenures were being overlooked.

### Knowledge gaps

How to best reach agreement and prioritise management of perceived and actual biodiversity threats (megafire, invasive species, logging, etc.) and enhancements (nest boxes, restoration, feral species management, supplementary feed, cultural fire, etc) in Gippsland forests requires further research and assessment. Furthermore, the role of disturbance in maintaining biodiversity is not well understood and is also contested within the group. Integrated and sustainable approaches to producing native timber (and non-timber forest products, including payments for ecosystem services) while also providing for biodiversity, including through alternative forestry models (e.g. Nepalese Community Forests, private land conservation/agroforestry), were provisionally explored but no consensus was reached. Although gaps exist in understanding whether, how and in what contexts these models/approaches might be appropriate and work in Gippsland's forests, and indeed their applicability in general, the opportunity exists for the GFD to explore them further, including through future dialogues. The absence of Indigenous voices was noted as a significant knowledge gap in this conversation.

## Fire

### Key Insights

An underlying theme of participant discussions on fire included opportunities for empowering local communities to manage the forested landscapes around them, including possible allocation of fire-management decision-making authority and resources. There were also points made about providing opportunities to change the culture of fire management agencies from 'suppression and asset protection' to 'holistic preparation, enhancement and prevention'. These approaches combined might help take into account what dialogue participants generated in terms of some of the issues surrounding fire and forests in Gippsland, including: decentralising and localising fire management to allowing for effective application of fire to enhance multiple forest values (including biodiversity and industry); providing opportunities for Indigenous groups to reconnect with Country; increasing flexibility of fire management through local decision making and implementation; increasing effective communication between communities and agencies; capturing the knowledge of experienced fire managers for the next generation to learn and apply; and, respecting and understanding that rural communities are stressed and worried how their bush is managed/unmanaged, and that the science and risk reduction benefits of landscape-scale burning is a highly contested space and requires further discussion. Participants suggested opportunities for landscape-scale catchments (e.g. the Avon Wilderness Area and the Tambo River catchment) to be selected as pioneers of novel community fire management approaches.

### Concerns

Most of the forests of central and east Gippsland have been severely damaged by, in some cases repeated, high intensity fires. Comments were made that the structure of the forest in these areas has changed and are now overstocked with young trees and shrubs. More repeated high intensity fires are to be expected, aggravated by the expected hotter and drier climate and there are no obvious or easy answers to this vexing and highly threatening problem. Participants expressed concern that politics and social pressure too often informed fire management in Gippsland, rather than evidence-based science, and that the research community itself is divided on how we can best live with fire in harmony with other forest and community values. This included discussion of how to define 'healthy' forest and the difficulty of reaching agreement on this in order to then plan fire management to enhance/achieve healthy and resilient forests. The top-down, disempowering, one-size-fits-all nature of fire management in the state was also discussed, with reference to the disproportionate impact that fire has on Gippsland communities compared with their ability to engage in decision making and planning. The relationship between increased fire risk and logging was raised as well.

## Knowledge gaps

Current evidence on best practice fire management is disputed and fractious and more data is needed to understand how best to manage fire in Gippsland's forests as a regenerative force in the landscape, and use timing and/or avoid fire to improve forest carbon and biodiversity. Unfortunately, it was acknowledged that time is not on our side and there is a real need to adapt to try to at least mitigate the impacts from this continuing threat. There is also a need to clarify, and perhaps broaden and redefine, what is regarded as an 'asset' in fire management (e.g. are ecological values included in our definition of assets?) and how this affects fire management strategies and policy. The absence of Indigenous voices speaking with authority on cultural burning practices (acknowledging that there is a diversity of voices and opinions therein) was experienced as a significant knowledge gap during the discussion. The absence of opportunity to visit recent megafire-impacted forest sites or to have an all-in group discussion on this issue was not conducive to critical evaluation of current fire management practices (and proposed improvements) and hindered development of shared knowledge and understanding of this topic.

## Industry

### Key Insights

Participants explored a wide range of ideas for how current forest industries could diversify, lessen impact on, and enhance other forest values. These included: questioning how we can supply the volume of timber to communities that need it; an exploration of a flexible and adaptive forest model; the possibilities for expanding agroforestry in the region, and its potential benefits for ecosystem function and biodiversity; timber supply from smaller-scale milling operations; carbon storage and stock production; and, water capture and purification.

Potential prioritisation of high-value and/or longer-term timber applications (e.g. hardwood furniture) over low-value uses (e.g. woodchip and pulp) was touched on during the field dialogue, as was using proceeds to help fund the improvement of other ecological values in native forests. For example, opportunities for leveraging the timber industry to accelerate regenerating stands of trees towards a more 'natural' climax state (e.g. through ecological thinning) and/or to better restore degraded forests to benefit a range of values were put forward. Whether there needs to be a role for harvesting at all within native forests, including selective harvesting, was questioned by some.

It was mooted that the health of the forest is a central consideration that should be factored into all decision making and activities. The potential for a Gippsland care economy focusing on ecosystem repair, water rehabilitation, feral and invasive species management, and Indigenous stewardship was mooted during breakouts, as was the establishment of working models to demonstrate the feasibility of these ideas. The opportunity to use the GFD platform to support communities towards new types of local industries was discussed.



## Concerns

There were a range of concerns and tensions raised during discussions around forest industry in Gippsland, including: (a) how to address issues of embedded mistrust among forest stakeholders, and (b) a general avoidance of productive discussion and debate about the sustainability of forestry and reasons underpinning the legislated decision to end native forest logging by 2030. This made it unclear as to where participants stood (individually and collectively) on this issue, including in relation to clear-fell, industrial-scale forestry practices. Corporate and government accountability (or lack thereof) to communities and forests was alluded to in the context of: (a) the establishment of supply agreements that guarantee logs to one company at the expense of others, and which is contributing to the ongoing logging of post-Black Summer unburnt refuges with high biodiversity values in East Gippsland, threatened species habitat, as well as fire-recovering forests; and, (b) the absence of an adequate public statement from the state government outlining (to timber communities and stakeholders) the reasons for the decision to end native logging by 2030. Some participants put forward the need to be respectful of the timber industry - that they are hard working, innovative, 'can do' risk takers, fire fighters, and disliked unfairly - while others suggested that the industry needs to acknowledge the damage caused to native forests and biodiversity as a result of its actions. Claims that the superficial and unbalanced treatment of the industry by the media has not helped informed and mature discussion on this important issue were made. Select participants agreed on room for improvement in relation to short-term funding cycles and politics on forest policy and forest values (versus long-term nature of forest growth cycles, etc.). The lack of financial and logistical commitment and support over long timespans, especially in regards to agroforestry projects, was an additional concern.

## Knowledge gaps

It is as yet not understood how current demand for timber will continue to be met with current injunctions halting all native forest production in Victoria at present, as well as with the end native forest logging in 2030. This supply gap has not been addressed either by the government or any other parties. The avoidance of fracture lines during the weekend and absence of representation and contributions from diverse industry sectors, such as apiarists and tourism operators, as well as Indigenous communities, and logging contractors was acknowledged as a major gap in forest industry discussions.

## *Climate change*

### Key Insights

Dialogue participants explored ideas around how to create healthier and more resilient forests to mitigate the effects of climate change, better sequester and store carbon and enhance and maintain biodiversity, water and other forest values. These included: increasing local community education on the benefits of forests as a part of the climate change solution; financing improved forest fire management to reduce CO2 emissions, improve forest health and carbon stocks (potentially linked to marketable carbon offsets),

and to protect people and assets; promoting local opportunities for adaptation strategies, such as green fire walls, to help communities prevent, mitigate and recover from climate-induced fire; growing more resilient and stable carbon stocks by increasing trees and forest area, better managing existing forests (native and plantation), and establishing a more transparent and easy-to-use carbon credit system; and, exploring and deploying fossil fuel alternatives from forest industry by-products that can reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and climate change.

'Learning landscapes' were also highlighted as a way to experiment with different climate management options, through monitoring outcomes and adjusting strategies and policy in consultation with communities. It was noted that with an increase in local, federal and state funding for these projects, there would be a commensurate rise in local employment opportunities associated with climate mitigation measures.

### Concerns

Participants expressed scepticism and disappointment around international and federal mechanisms to produce real action on climate change. The recent COP in Egypt, and the Labour government's failure to halt new investment in fossil fuels projects were put forward as two examples of failures to produce meaningful results at the highest levels that will have cascading impacts on Gippsland's forests. Closer to home, there were comments made around the necessity of protecting unburnt climate refuges for biodiversity following the catastrophic Black Summer fires.

### Knowledge gaps

It was noted that the impacts of climate change on Gippsland forest values, including biodiversity, water catchments and tree growth rates was still difficult to gauge, but that there were opportunities to pilot scalable models and approaches to forest-based climate change mitigation and adaptation.

## Water

### Key Insights

Outputs from brainstorming sessions on this topic centred on: the undervalued role of forests in providing clean water and regulating flows; the increased variability of rainfall in the changing climate; the potential impacts of fire on water supply and quality, including drinking water and downstream environmental effects such as in the Gippsland Lakes; the impacts of agricultural practices on water supplies; and, the impacts of forests on the water cycle at regional and continental scales. Ideas for improving the water-forest interface included: increasing tree cover in the landscape to improve water retention, reduce flood risks, and prevent erosion and siltation; investment in the development of payments for these (water-related) ecosystem services provided by trees, which are currently unvalued; and, increasing trees in urban landscapes for water retention and

improved aquatic habitats. The need for increased investment in catchment management across the whole of Gippsland, and better coordination between agencies and communities in looking after water resources, was also noted.

### Concerns

There was discussion of the role of fire and forestry in catchment management, and emphasis from several parties on the need for these to be guided by evidence-based research on their impacts on water storage and flows. The relationship between biodiversity, old growth forests and water retention was also touched upon, with some participants drawing attention to the links between forest architect species such as lyrebirds, and the importance of older, intact forests, and how these elements create/constitute damper environments with enhanced water retention and reduced fire risks. There appears to be a direct correlation between high intensity large fires and algal blooms resulting from the flush of nutrient laden sediment from burnt landscapes.

### Knowledge gaps

Participants noted the lack of Indigenous representation and water experts present at the dialogue and felt restricted in discussions on this topic due to lack of specific experience and knowledge. How to frame a stronger and more integrated catchment management across agencies and the community was acknowledged as an area that required more investigation.

## *Traditional Owner cultural landscapes*

### Key Insights

Among the first insights made by participants was the lack of Traditional Owner (TO) representation during the first dialogue. There was discussion around how to create more opportunities to engage TOs and First Nations peoples in the GFD process and, more broadly, how to make the GFD a safer and more welcoming space for all stakeholders. Suggestions for enhancing participation and engagement included developing strategies to allow and compensate for differences in social and economic capacity, increased GFD participation on Country and the improvement of First Nations capacity and engagement in decision making around Gippsland's forests. The Gunaikurnai 'Whole of Country Plan' is a simple but excellent reference and conveys their holistic approach to caring for Country.

A range of possible projects were discussed (with the caveat that they would need to align with aspirations and occur in true partnership with TOs), including: the founding of a community forest management model on Country, with Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust, where there is privately owned forest, including plantation, put forward as a potential pilot for such an approach; the immersion of GFD into a First Nations space with a concurrent commitment to resourcing community managed forestry; and, advocacy for the greater empowerment of TOs to manage Country (e.g. through Indigenous Protected Areas, IPAs,

or other means) and higher levels of participation in decision making at all levels of land management.

### Concerns

It was acknowledged that GFD had actively engaged with TO representatives in processes leading up to the Scoping Dialogue. However, there was concern that the lack of Indigenous representation at the dialogue hindered the group's capacity to reflect the interests of TOs in discussions, and to explore the TO cultural landscapes thematic area in sufficient depth, respectfully and with authority.

The social, economic and cultural barriers to TO participation, as well as whether these had been sufficiently addressed in the context of this dialogue, were discussed, while also acknowledging that TO groups have multiple competing priorities and that their active participation in all dialogues may not be feasible. Discussion centred around feedback from TOs (though the GFD process and more broadly) that widespread desire for their participation in forums such as the GFD can be draining when “everyone wants a piece, everyone wants the knowledge and the answers”, that there is sometimes an assumption that TOs can cure all ills - “help us heal ourselves and Country” - especially in relation to land management issues, and that invitations to engage are often perceived as transactional rather than genuine and relational. Participants discussed a decolonisation framework of engagement in order to better move towards a pragmatic, adaptive and intuitive approach to bush management, one which conforms to the desires, needs and outcomes of community and does not centre or push western-centric models or timelines.

### Knowledge gaps

Aside from the lack of TO representation in the room, conversations around knowledge gaps included uncertainty on how to build new circular investment models to support long-term management. This was considered preferable to the stop-start, top-down funding that mostly occurs now. Furthermore, how community forest management models could apply in the Gippsland context, operate according to TO needs, and deliver outcomes desired by TOs requires further interrogation.

## *Social and governance*

### Key insights

Although it was not included in the initial scoping paper, it became clear early in the dialogue that the social and governance aspect of all Gippsland forest management and lack of management was a central theme, and so it was included in the exploration of forest values held on Day Three. Many of the key insights from dialogue participants revolved around the idea of decentralised, community forms of forest governance and management, with several people emphasising the importance of locals as long-term land stewards and identifying opportunities for mutually beneficial symbiotic relationships

between locals and the forests they live near, or among (i.e. earning a living from/ in the forest).

The concept of explicit governance systems defined and operated by local people and agencies through local land management committees with real engagement and accountabilities to get things done was agreed on as a positive way forward in Gippsland forest management. Hybrid Traditional Owner and community forest management models, community-based forest and fire management and the empowering of communities through grassroots management with TO and government support were all mooted as innovative approaches worthy of further exploration, and the GFD was understood as a powerful tool to facilitate dialogue, and identify opportunities, gaps, and connections with and between existing social and community movements. Potential sites identified for community-based management included the Avon Wilderness, Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust and the Tambo River catchment. Agroforestry models were noted as positive methods to engage landowners using peer-to-peer mentoring.

### Concerns

Participants raised concerns around the limited opportunities for managing the forest in the large areas of land that are beyond the reach and scope of community-driven management (eg the backcountry), and the apparent dissonance between locally-led initiatives, and a broad-scale, catchment-wide (or wider) approach to landscape management that many participants discussed as being more suitable for the challenges surrounding fire, water and climate change. There was also discussion around how in Victoria, the majority of the forests are currently managed/unmanaged by the government, which are largely elected by people in the city, and the subsequent necessity of educating and lifting the understanding of city people. Additionally, it was noted that city-based media coverage of rural issues is often superficial yet highly influential on policy outcomes, and that there is real and long standing anxiety in many rural communities especially concerning fires and pests and economic security that is affecting their mental health.

### Knowledge gaps

Significant knowledge gaps that were identified around social governance included the lack of TO presence and contributions, especially around ideas for pilot projects in community forest management that often involved Indigenous land and groups. Other gaps that require further investigation include best practices around multi-generational knowledge sharing and perpetual engagement, how best to engage expert support and coordination from regional, federal and global leaders in community forest management and support international learning, and the inclusion of more diverse community voices, including those of women, in the process.

# Cross-cutting themes

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This section explores emergent dialogue themes that cut across the six previously identified pillars of biodiversity, fire, industry, climate change, water and TO cultural landscapes, plus social/governance. They reflect topics and/or overarching themes that arose regularly in discussions among participants and were subsequently documented by Co-Chairs during the dialogue process. Cross-cutting themes that emerged during the GFD Scoping Dialogue include:

- a need for more integrated, holistic and adaptive forest governance and management;
- a desire to learn from and to trial decentralised, community-based models in Gippsland; and,
- the potential to establish pilot projects/sites to test and refine alternative forest management approaches for broader application and upscaling.

These themes are expanded on in detail below. The importance of TO engagement at multiple levels (see TO cultural landscapes) and the need for communications, connections and knowledge sharing were also acknowledged as key themes. These are covered under Strategies for action.

## *Decentralised/community-driven forest governance*

There was a generally negative perception of current top-down approaches to forest management within the group (though absence of critical discussion of the pros and cons of centralised management, or why it came about), coupled with a desire for exploration of bottom-up, community-based forest governance models. This was reflected in regular speculation around historical TO land management practices, especially pertaining to fire, during the field dialogue, and a participant presentation on Nepalese community forests in the morning of the scoping dialogue sessions on day three further sparked discussions on this topic. In subsequent sessions exploring opportunities for change under seven thematic areas, terms “community” and “local” featured prominently alongside “forests” and “management”. The potential for community-based approaches to contribute to TO empowerment was discussed, as was a caveat that, in the Australian context, much of society has moved away from directly relying on forests for subsistence and livelihoods, potentially compromising the applicability of this approach. Nonetheless, decentralised models of forest management were of clear interest to the group (potentially inspired by an opening presentation on Nepalese community-based forest management, see Learnings for future dialogues), and were prioritised as warranting further exploration of opportunities and challenges for forest management in the Gippsland context (see Dialogue outputs).

## *Scalable case studies/pilot projects*

As the group began to explore alternative ways of interacting with and managing Gippsland forests, this led to an exploration of potential pilot projects to test and refine novel methods, including the application of decentralised/community-based models, in the Australian context. Pilot studies featured prominently across multiple themes and were prioritised by participants for further exploration of challenges and opportunities for taking forward. The role of pilot sites/projects in testing novel approaches to fire management, sustainable native forest industries (including extraction and ecosystem-services-based), and for enhancement of biodiversity values was explored. This was reiterated as a means to test and refine novel forest management approaches, which may then be taken to government, advocated for, or otherwise upscaled through alternative means. The potential role of GFD in facilitating pilots, e.g. through identifying sites, fostering networking opportunities, and/or leveraging funding, was discussed.

## *Holistic management*

From day one of the Scoping Dialogue, there was reference to the inadequacy and inability of 'siloes' management approaches to accommodate for multiple, interacting forest components, values, uses and processes. This emerged as a key theme for the dialogue duration. Participants considered it important that multiple cross-cutting forest functions and values, as well as the context in which these operate, be appropriately considered as part of holistic management. There was a recognised need to move towards more integrated, holistic and adaptive forest management and governance approaches, both geographically (e.g. across tenure, forest types etc.) and thematically, i.e. recognising that different forest constituents, values and processes, such as biodiversity, water, industry, fire, cultural landscapes, climate change, and society, are interrelated and interdependent. It was considered that decentralised approaches may better create the enabling conditions for holistic management for multiple forest values at local levels. However, the need for coordinated and integrated landscape-scale in addition to locally-specific (e.g. site and community-based) approaches to tackle big issues (e.g. connectivity, climate change, fire management, etc.), and how to effectively achieve this balance, remains a key area worthy of further exploration.

# Fracture Lines

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The Co-Chairs identified the following 'fracture lines' – defined as sources of points of disagreement and uncertainty between stakeholders – which came through in discussions during the inaugural GFD Scoping Dialogue. This is not an exhaustive list, or comprehensive analysis of the varying views and opinions underpinning each fracture line

described. It is acknowledged that additional fracture lines will likely emerge during ensuing dialogue discussions.

Although the issues presented in this section are contentious and risk alienating participants from the GFD process, there is a greater risk of leaving these topics unresolved; it will be more important to bring these tensions to the surface, where they may be respectfully addressed, for the group to progress in a meaningful way. It is hoped that a respected and knowledgeable GFD will have influence on the forming up and carriage of these critical discussions moving forward.

### *Whether timber harvesting should end in native Gippsland forests*

Many participants expressed frustration that the issue of timber harvesting in native forests, “the elephant in the room”, was not sufficiently explored, either in the Scoping Paper or during the dialogue itself. This bubbled to the surface on the final morning of the scoping dialogue and was identified as a priority area for addressing through future dialogues.

Some opposing views were flagged. For example, including: on the one hand, the reluctance of the timber industry to acknowledge that the decision to end native forest logging was made for valid reasons (including to protect biodiversity); and, on the other hand, the lack of public information provided by the state government to justify its decision to end native forest logging by 2030. Participants agreed that there are many unresolved tensions around this topic, including whether some form of commercial timber harvesting in native forests should be allowed moving forward.

### *Language use and agreement on common terms*

Definitions and language-use were interrogated across the four days of the dialogue. Unresolved questions included: what do we mean by ‘forest assets’? What defines a ‘healthy forest’? What is ‘old growth’ forest, and are current definitions adequate? Why ‘management’, and is this how we should be conceptualising our relationship with forests? This discussion on our use (and intended/unintended meaning) of terminology when talking about forests was triggered by a word cloud, generated from the written outputs of a dialogue breakout session (see Opportunities for change) and used as part of the Co-Chairs’ summary presentation. The prominence of the term ‘management’, in particular, raised debate among participants, who noted that it is an ambiguous, loaded but important and many-faceted word. Some suggested that it was too top-down and unidirectional to describe a healthy and holistic way of living with and caring for forests, and did not encompass the mutual dependence, ownership, responsibility and care required to participate in and interact with our natural systems in a sustainable way. Others were wary of dismissing a word that may accurately describe our interactions with forests, and which has a (flawed but common) shared understanding in society. There was agreement that further discussion on agreed definitions of disputed terms would be a key element of



GFD advocacy, communication and engagement strategies going forward.

“Lock it up and leave it”

This tension arose late in the dialogue following use of the term during the closing plenary. Views were expressed that sweeping claims that “lock it up and leave it” approaches applied in conservation areas are ineffective and undermine important efforts to protect forests and biodiversity from external pressures. On the other hand, there were opinions voiced that there is a need to actively manage forests in these areas to maintain their health and ecological function. Time was insufficient to allow for detailed debate on this topic, but it was acknowledged as a point of difference requiring further attention.

# SECTION 3: REFLECTIONS



Gippsland's people and its forests have, are and will always be intimately connected and this was evident in the passion expressed by participants during the GFD. Key outcomes and takeaways from the Dialogue are outlined here and the themes are explored at length here, but we also include learnings from the facilitation process and reflections from the participants in this section, in order to both aid future dialogues and record responses to the event.

## Learnings for future dialogues

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The Gippsland Forest Dialogue offered a unique opportunity for participants to recognise and reflect on a suite of factors that are negatively impacting Gippsland's forests, through the lens of an optimistic, solutions-based focus. This focus had both positive and negative aspects and during the facilitation of the dialogue we learned firsthand about the challenges associated with holding an event of this kind. Some of our observations and reflections include:

- The need to allow more time for Co-Chairs to meet (ideally in-person) to prepare a facilitation plan with GFD ahead of future dialogues. While the TFD training sessions were useful, the application of learnings from these sessions to development of a facilitation plan for the Scoping Dialogue felt somewhat rushed.
- The need to communicate the facilitation plan to participants (with the proviso that it is subject to change based on the content of the discussions) and provide opportunity for their inputs / feedback at multiple stages in the dialogue process. Many participants felt in the dark as to what form the dialogue was going to take and where it was going, as reflected in the feedback survey.
- Be mindful that the context set by GFD and Co-Chairs can have a significant impact on the direction and content of discussions and there is a need to ensure all perspectives are reflected for unbiased themed dialogue sessions. This was evidenced by:
  - The field dialogue's focus on production and timber industry;
  - The dialogue session's focus on community models following Nepalese forestry presentation;
  - Low content on forests and water;
  - Shift in perspective from Day 2 to Day 4 – industry -> enabling (community); and
  - A proactive focus on opportunities that may not have explored existing fracture lines.

The strong desire within the group to address key points of difference / “fracture lines”, which will be tackled through future themed dialogue sessions. Did we shy away from challenges too much in our efforts to ‘reset’ the group on Day 3? Or was this important to build trust among participants before moving forward? The fact that

- key issues (e.g. native logging and biodiversity) surfaced in closing discussion is a clear indication that there is still work to do in this space.
- Aim for future dialogues to be more focused, with less ground to cover allowing time for in-depth exploration of key, priority issues and fracture lines.

Ideally, aim for additional Co-Chairs and note-takers to be available to support future dialogues. This, along with a well-developed facilitation plan that is communicated with participants ahead of time, should allow more opportunity for Co-Chairs to review and plan for upcoming sessions, and to provide regular summaries for feedback by participants.

## Participant feedback

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Feedback from participants was solicited both during the dialogue process and through a feedback survey completed after the conclusion of the Scoping Dialogue. On day one, participants were asked what they hoped to get out of the Scoping Dialogue. Responses to this opening question could be broadly characterised into four categories, as follows:

### *Resolve issues*

"Siloed governance, management"  
 "Climate and biodiversity emergency"  
 "Forest conflict, forest war"  
 "Manage for fire mitigation"

### *Affect change*

"Make a difference"  
 "Influence policy"  
 "Explore new ways of doing things"

### *Gain knowledge & Connect*

"Connect with people"  
 "Listen, learn"  
 "Have a chat about forests"  
 "Embrace process"  
 "Establish better understanding and trust"

## Goals

"Protect forests for future generations"  
"Continue to use timber / derive value from forests in beneficial way"  
"Centre biodiversity"  
"Hope"  
"Establish common understanding"  
"More diverse participation"

Twelve people responded to the post-dialogue survey, and all indicated that the dialogue helped to advance their thinking on the challenges and opportunities related to the scoping paper and that they would participate in furthering the process. The most valuable outcome for most was the opportunity to connect with other forest stakeholders and understand and discuss different viewpoints on forest management and explore opportunities for change.

Feedback on the field day emphasised the importance of providing participants with suitable background information and site histories, and expert onsite briefings and many felt that the sites chosen had a skewed focus on forestry values (though many also acknowledged that the bad weather meant that two final sites couldn't be accessed).

Most indicated that the presentations during the plenary sessions were helpful, though several pointed out the lack of opportunities for discussion afterwards, and requested an increased focus on fracture lines. Suggestions for improvement revolved around better pre-dialogue planning, input and information sharing, and the broadening of stakeholder diversity within the group.

Overall, participants found the process a positive and engaging experience, and valued the opportunity to build trust and make connections, although there was widespread agreement that many of the most divisive issues facing the forests (and the group) had yet to be addressed.

## Acknowledgements

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The GFD Co-chairs would like to thank all the dialogue participants who so generously donated their time and resources to making the weekend a success, the members of the GFD who were unable to attend the dialogue in person but have contributed significantly and generously to the ongoing process, and the support staff on the ground - Scott McArdle, Aly Nichol and Cara Schultz. The GFD would also like to acknowledge The Forests Dialogue team, extending particular thanks to Liz Felker, who supported the facilitation of the process. The initial scoping dialogue and the creation of this report would not have been possible without leadership and financial support from EcoGipps.

# APPENDICES

## Participants list

Participant name	Sector/area of expertise	Participation in Scoping Dialogue
Abigail Wills	Not-for-profit, environment, ecological restoration, community development	Participant, Co-Chair, present for all days
Ewan Waller	Community, forest management	Participant, Co-Chair, present for days 1 to 3
Rodney Keenan	Forestry academic	Participant, present for all days
Alastair Woodard	Structural materials consultant	Participant, present for all days
Santosh Bhattarai	Forest PhD student	Participant, present for all days
Chris McEvoy	Forest products and processing and hardwood plantation owner	Participant, present for days 1 to 3
Steb Fisher	Experienced forest community member	Participant, present for all days
Daniel Wright	Forest products, manufacturing, supply chain and timber communities	Participant, present for all days
Tom Crook	Ecological restoration practitioner	Participant, present for all days
Tom Fairman	Forest and wildfire academic	Participant, present for all days
Tuffy Morwitzer	Goongerah Environment Centre	Participant, present for all days
Wendy Wright	Conservation biology academic	Participant, present for all days
James Kidman	Ecological Services and Selective Luthier Timber Supplier	Participant, present for all days
John Mitchell	Regional leader and executive	Participant, present for days 1 and 2
Paul Haar	Sustainable architecture	Participant, present for all days
Jim Phillipson	Community conservation and biodiversity	Participant, present for all days
Cara Schultz	Science and environment writer, Impact Collective	Participant, rapporteur, present for all days
Scott McArdle	Executive Officer, GFD	Participant, facilitator, present for all days
Alyson Nichol	Admin & Ops Support, GFD	Participant, rapporteur, present for all days

# Event overview

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*Day 1 – Welcome Dinner and Introductory Session, Thursday 10th November, 6pm – 9:30pm*

Informal meet and greet with dinner  
Overview of GFD Scoping Dialogue process  
Presentation from The Forests Dialogue  
Ground Rules established  
Individual introductions, including:  
What is your connection to Gippsland forests?  
What do you hope to get out of this Scoping Dialogue?

*Day 2 – Field Dialogue, Friday 11th November  
Field Trips, 8:30am – 5pm*

Stop 1 – Peterson’s Lookout (MORNING TEA)  
Stop 2 – W11/12 Tracks  
(LUNCH: Coopers Creek Campground)  
Stop 3 – Micah Track  
Stop 4 – Thompson Reservoir Park  
(GROUP DINNER)  
Evening Session, 8pm – 10pm  
Reflections on Field Dialogue, including:  
What did you hear?  
What did you learn?  
What did you see?

*Day 3 – Scoping Dialogue Sessions, Saturday 12th November, 8:30am – 5pm*

Opening Plenary  
Two participant presentations:  
Fire management + challenges  
Community Based Forest Management – Nepal  
Group Discussion  
Carousel Breakout – Opportunities for Change (Brainstorm Session)  
What are the opportunities for change under each of the key themes outlined in the Scoping Paper (plus one more)?  
Biodiversity  
Fire  
Industry  
Climate change

Water  
TO cultural landscapes  
Social/community/governance  
People and the bush  
(MORNING TEA – interim, with group returning to finalise carousel exercise)  
Report Back  
(GROUP LUNCH)  
Paired Breakout – Opportunities for Change (Prioritisation 1)  
Pair up and decide on 2 priority areas / initiatives for GFD to progress  
Report Back  
Plenary – Opportunities for Change (Prioritisation 2)  
Individual prioritization – three ticks per participant assigned to initiative(s)  
Top 4 initiatives selected for further interrogation  
(AFTERNOON TEA)  
Group Breakout – Opportunities for Change (Deep Dive)  
For each of the four top-ranked initiatives brought forward:  
What are the unknowns / knowledge gaps / missing voices?  
What are the barriers to change?  
Report Back  
Plenary – Group Discussion  
(GROUP DINNER)  
Day 4 – Co-Chair Presentation and Closing Plenary, Sunday 13th November, 8am – 10am  
Co-Chair Presentation  
Closing Plenary  
Group Discussion  
Individual Reflections, including:  
What would you like to see the GFD achieve in 12-months from now?  
(DIALOGUE CLOSE)

## Dialogue outputs

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### *Day 3 – Scoping Dialogue Sessions, Saturday 12th November, 8:30am – 5pm*

Carousel Breakout – Opportunities for Change (Brainstorm Session)

Below is a write-up of outputs of a brainstorming session whereby participants explored opportunities for positive change under each of the six thematic areas explored relating to Gippsland forests. The opportunities listed reflect ideas and/or points of view generated by individual participants, working in small groups, during the session, and thus do not necessarily reflect the position of the broader group.



## Biodiversity

- Better public education
  - Who and processes
  - Benefits to people: water, fire and mitigation
- Ecological restoration and function
  - Valued appropriately (e.g. secure and decent paid)
  - Greater public investment
  - A vision for what 'restoration' is in Gippsland in 2050 (whole region)
- Improved connectivity
  - Stop logging in threatened species habitat (current and future)
  - Habitat enhancement (e.g.) nest boxes, supplemented feed
- Improve understanding of the role of disturbance in maintaining biodiversity
- Valuing forest biodiversity as a source of medicines
- Can biodiversity be self-funding? Revenue sources?
- Landscape connectivity
- Covenant land – private to community
- Ownership and responsibility and care
- We don't manage natural systems || We participate with them, fundamental participation shift
- Shift in what is 'valuable'
- Work out ways of producing timber and other products and providing for threatened species – integrated approaches
- Take a whole of landscape approach, e.g. moving from species focus to ecosystem and whole of Country recognising future climate change
- Sustainable use of native species
- Open, trustful conversation on biodiversity
- Recognise biodiversity is not static, temporal and spatial change
- Seriously manage and fund our "conservation zones" and forests for the best biodiversity and threatened species outcomes. Don't just lock them up and leave them.
  - Legacy for our grandkids
- Prioritise management of threats to biodiversity (e.g.) land learning, invasive species, feral animals, fire etc.
- Opportunities for funding to better manage biodiversity

## Fire

- How fire can be used as a regenerative force in the landscape
- An opportunity for indigenous groups to re-connect with country
- Broaden and re-define assets in fire management (e.g. ecological assets)
- Opportunity for using fire to improve biodiversity
- Opportunities for fire mitigation and preparation
- Opportunity to recognise change that will come with future fires
- Using timing and/or avoiding fire to improve forest carbon and biodiversity

- To grieve collectively
- Evidence-based science informs practice, not community pressure.
  - Conflicting science – fracture line
  - Needs resolving/ majority based
- Fire both destructive and regenerative – can we tip the balance of these forces?
- Fire impacts community but community not able to engage in decision-making planning
- Define /agree healthy forest and then plan fire to enhance toward/ achieve healthy forest
- Capturing the “knowledge” of experienced people for next generation to learn and apply.
- Select landscape scale catchments for pioneer “community” fire directed management (e.g. Avon wilderness catchment)
- Change culture of fire management agencies from ‘suppression and asset protection’ to ‘holistic preparation and prevention’
- Understanding there will be some impacts from planned burning – and site benefits
- Empower local communities to manage the landscapes around them, including decision-making authority and resources
- Respect and understand rural communities are stressed and worried how their bush is managed
- Decentralised/local fire management integrated in broader landscape context to allow for effective management for multiple values
- Increase flexibility for local decisions and implementation of fire management

## Industry

- Agro-forestry – multi-use
  - Biodiversity – ecosystem function
  - Timber
  - Carbon
  - Education
  - Stock production
  - Water – creek rehabilitation
  - Long-term practical incentives for landowners (e.g. carbon stores)
  - Logistic support for Agro-forestry
- Care economy
  - Ecosystem repair
  - Conservation industry – identifying and growth
  - Water rehabilitation
  - Public investment – state and federal
  - Feral and invasive species management
  - Indigenous stewardship
  - Cultural burning where appropriate
- Reconsider existing supply agreements

- Establish working models to demonstrate the following with potential to learn, adapt and scale where appropriate
  - Leveraging industry to achieve forest health outcomes; win-wins; profit back to forest
  - Biodiversity-centred industry
  - Put health of forest at centre – go from there
  - Localised extraction and value-add for forest resources (Agro-forestry)
  - Pricing wood yield from native forest much higher to help fund improvement of other ecological values
- How do we address issues of mistrust - now so embedded. Ex history of native forest industry
- End clear-fell logging. Investment in small scale milling operations (plantation)
- Accepting that we need/want timber. How do we provide (and where from) current volumes of timber?
- Utilise GFD to support and be a conduit to support community and employee changes (forced change and willing change)
- Corporate accountability to communities
- Use the timber industry to accelerate the regeneration stands towards a more natural state by thinning
- Be respectful of the timber industry – hard working, innovative, ‘can do’, risk takers, fire fighters, disliked unfairly often

### **Climate change**

- Pilot scalable models/approaches?
- More healthy, resilient forests to sequester and store carbon and enhance and maintain biodiversity, water, etc.
- Role of community forest model in this increase
- More community education of the benefits of forests as a part of the climate change solution
- Improved forest fire management linked to reduces CO2 emissions
- Mitigate climate change, finance forest fire management, improve forest health and carbon, asset and people protection
- Look for and identify holistic solutions that bring benefits to all areas
- Promote adaptation opportunities through green fire walls
- Local opportunities for prevention, mitigation and recovery. Fireguard groups – before, during, after
- Opportunities to increase policy flexibility to address impacts from climate change (e.g. control burning)
- SPICE – stratospheric particle injection for climate engineering
- COP – is it going to work?
- Forest carbon stability – building resilient carbon stock in forests
- Explore and deploy fossil fuel alternatives from forest bi-product that can reduce CO2 emissions and climate change

- Creating 'learning landscapes' in which we are trying different management options, monitoring outcomes and adjusting management in consultation with community
- Identify priority options to increase forest carbon stocks – increase trees and forest area, better manage existing forests (native and plantation) – carbon credits, fire management
- Increase jobs in climate adaptation and mitigation, crisis
  - Federal and state funding
  - Increase funds to local government
- Greater connectivity for species migration and adaptation
  - Reduce fractured landscapes
  - invest in rehabilitation and restore
- International connection to learn from international frameworks and resources
- Protection of all unburnt refuges
- Build a greater local climate literacy in and through our education programs
- Support local networks for sharing information on climate change among agencies, industry sectors and community and developing integrated responses

## Water

- Context
  - Value of forests in providing clean water and regulating flows
  - Greenhouse gases driving climate, increasing variability
  - Potential impacts of fire on water supply
  - Impacts of agricultural practices on water
- Greater role for trees in the landscape for water retention and reducing flood risks, prevent erosion and siltation
- More investment in trees in landscape for water outcomes through payments for ecosystem services models
- Trees in urban landscapes for water retention and improved aquatic habitats
- More investment in catchment health improvement
- Role of fire in catchment management – needs to be evidence-based
- Role of clear-fell logging in water catchments – siltation
- Strong integrated catchment management across agencies and the community ||
- Rehabilitation of logged water catchments
- Enhancing relationship between biodiversity and water retention
- Water integrates – it connects everything
- Catchments = communities
- In-tact forests generally damper forests
- Biodiversity contributes to keeping forests damp e.g. lyrebirds
- Water permeates everything – Mountains/ rivers/lakes/ocean
- Impact of forests on water cycle at continental scale

## **Traditional Owner cultural landscapes**

- Improve First Nation peoples capacity and engagement in decision making around Gippsland forests (macro view)
- Immersion of GFD (currently small representation) into First Nations space (Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust) with long commitment to resourcing community managed forestry
- Recognise diversity of views in First Nations voices/people
- Create connections and pathways with Traditional Owner groups in forest engagement
- Working with and facilitating aspirations of TAE to management strategy
- Walk with Traditional Owners on Country
- Opportunities to engage Traditional Owners and First Nations in GFD process
- Work together to find a new pathway for forest management
- Advocate for greater empowerment of Traditional Owners to manage Country. (e.g. through IPA's)
- New investment models to support long-term management – more form grants to blended finance
- Show us how to manage Country better – whole of Country approach
- Help us heal ourselves and Country
- Help us move to more grounded approach in bush management – pragmatic, adaptive, intuitive
- Decolonisation framework – not assimilation
  - Conforms to desires, needs and outcomes of community
  - Not pushing our models or timelines on aboriginal people
- Adaptive models according to community needs (e.g. community forest management)
- Voice – a seat at the table
- Treaty – actively support indigenous aspirations
- Listen
- Whole community approach – relational not transactional
  - Issues aren't siloed. Multi-layered and connected. Need a whole .../ community approach
- Traditional Owners to provide explanation on what is “healthy Country” and how might this be achieved

## **Social/community/governance**

- Only local people living in area
- Stewards for longer term
- Commons – caring for the commons
- Engage expert support and coordination from external agencies/ regional, federal, global
- Fundamental – local people engaged in mutual beneficial symbiotic relationships (i.e. earning a living from/ in the forest)
- Explicit governance systems defined / and operated by local people
- Opportunities for change

- Set up prototypes – at local landscape e.g. catchment scale but must include back country focus
- Opportunity is the chaos
- Traditional owner leadership and culture
- Multi-generation knowledge sharing and perpetual engagement
- International cross learning
  - Nepal
  - Solomons
  - PNG
  - Tanzania
- Women in forestry care
- “pathway” for community leaders to progress to regional/ state leadership
- GFD facilitate dialogue, opportunities, gaps
- Identify and connect with existing social and community movements
- Agree/set work towards long-term goals
- In Victoria, majority forests currently managed by government; elected by people in the city. So, educate city folk
- Can GFD identify/map potential sites for community -based management? – YES! (Avon Wilderness, Lake Tyres Aboriginal Trust Steve Matthews)
- What are the opportunities for managing the forest beyond the community area? (back-country)
- Hybrid traditional owner and community management model
- Community-based forest and fire management
- Empower community through grassroots management with traditional owner and government support. Flip the management pyramid!
- Get some phd candidates

## **People and the Bush**

- Meaning
  - Bush users
  - Community
  - Media
  - Management
- Changing the relationship with the bush – deeper understanding and connection
- Trust through involvement in the governance and the bush as one
- Allowing/encouraging participatory approach
- Traditional owner leadership
- Local management direct involvement – push accountability and mutual respect
- Bush learning form early childhood onwards/ ‘healthy Country’ centre – build understanding
- Bringing the bush/forest into agriculture
- Listen to locals. Traditional and ecological knowledge
- Increase percent of local people employed in bush management

- Decrease staff turnover in NRM agencies
- Make the case of why people in the bush is important
- Telling stories – better education of wider community and treat generations – value and experience of life outside the city
- Where might be an existing doorway for GFD to provide early support for initiatives that bring people and bush together locally and meaningfully
- Investment in tourism/ recreation
  - Regional economies
  - Mental health
- Connecting livelihoods with forests
- Opportunities for recreational stewardship

### *Paired Breakout – Opportunities for Change (Prioritisation Sessions)*

From a series of prioritisation exercises, the following four initiatives / work areas were selected for further exploration and interrogation by GFD and through the scoping dialogue. Crosses ('X') indicate the number of ticks assigned to each initiative by participants. High priority initiatives (those with the most crosses, highlighted bold below) were taken forward to the next session.

- Pilot project that blends all themes (Traditional Owners, biodiversity, water...) that involves thinning and ecological burning (Traditional Owner) and high value timber production development (self-funded by revenue) - **XXXX**
- Place-based dialogues, e.g. Yarram Forest Dialogue
- Water quality credits, including carbon credits – low intensity burning
- Traditional Owner knowledge transfer
- Potential to apply community-managed (inc. TO) forests model in Gippsland - **XXXXX**
- Explore novel forest fire models which could be focused on carbon and biodiversity credits - **XXX**
- Lake Tyers Community in existing forest reserves. Community forest management approach including Nepalese perspectives - **XXXXXX**
- Partner with industry to facilitate experimental pilot. Better productivity, multi-strata, multi-species, multi- benefit. Recently clear-felled – early regeneration **X**
- Care economy forest resilience under climate change. Trial sites and partners – evaluate status against benchmark, management actions driven by status, to develop healthy ecosystems. Effort required to bring back forests to good health. Cost: benefit and employment **XXXX**
- Community 'GFD' model for each different community e.g. Bruthen – post fire and management options including fire management and Traditional Owner practices and safe! - **XX**

- Community based management pilot. Balancing forest health and industry. What do we mean: forest health and restoration. Leveraging on our connections here – participatory decisions. Aligning economic benefit with environmental outcome.
- Constructive outreach: one-on-one next conversation by all, building local momentum, building diversity - XX
- Building international connections. International fellowship grant – Nepalese community forest experts. Brazilian forest dialogue - XX
- ‘Gippsland Community Forests Dialogue’. Communication, audiences, specific language, local vision, purpose, stories – ours and elsewhere. What alliances do we want to form? Franchise model, what do we need to tell our stories?- XXXXX
- Kitchen table conversations about forests (e.g. VWT “our watermark”) - XX
- Work up the pilot project concept for GFD - XXXXXXXX

### *Group Breakout – Opportunities for Change (Deep Dive)*

Four breakout groups were formed to take a detailed look into each of the four top-ranked initiatives brought forward from prioritisation sessions, with the following questions explored:

- What are the unknowns / knowledge gaps / missing voices?
- What are the barriers to change?

Outputs from these sessions are as follows:

#### **Potential to apply community-managed (inc. TO) forests model in Gippsland**

Missing voices

- Traditional Owners
- Other community stakeholders
- (Precedents)

Unknowns

- Other community forest models (CFM)
- Level of interest from community and capacity
- Applicability/ appropriate for community context
- Public or private estate?

Knowledge gaps

- Role of forest stewards here
- Mechanisms for identification and dispersal of community benefit
- Identify which environmental values are being enhanced and applied

Barriers to be addressed

- Public forests managed by parks, DELWP and local government
- Acts and agreements
- Lack of policy and establish mechanisms
- ‘community forests, forest communities’



## **Lake Tyers Community in existing forest reserves. Community forest management approach including Nepalese perspectives.**

### Missing voices

- Traditional Owner engagement – lack of traditional owner presence in first dialogue, hesitant to take/ explore further without consultation. Leveraging connection with forest manager and CEO at Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust: connect as a priority

### Knowledge gaps

- Is there interest?

### Unknowns

- what are the priorities?
- Forest values mapping
- Will GFD concept and process be welcomed?

### Barriers

- Conflicting collective and individual community aspirations/opinions
- GFD engage and identify trust priorities and how we might assist versus have community model/ concept and gauge interest in applying?
- Build relationship and trust over time
- Funding

## **'Gippsland Community Forests Dialogue'. Communication, audiences, specific language, local vision, purpose, stories – ours and elsewhere. What alliances do we want to form? Franchise model, what do we need to tell our stories?**

### Barriers

- Time
- Resources
- Awareness (best kept secret)
- Vehicle and platforms (not yet chosen)
- Audience understanding and buy-in
- Naysayers
- Existing assumptions

### Unknowns/gaps/missing voices

- How video content might be used
- Missing voices – all the gaps identified (young people, workers, tourism, etc.)
- International experience, stories and learnings
- Audience participation triggers and hopes
- Effective pathways to engagement
- Articulation of values and vision

## **Work up the pilot project concept for GFD**

Key elements (absence of a barrier)

- Place-based. Where?
- Scalable
- Inclusive community involvement
- At least 3-4 key themes
- Future-orientated, innovative
- Representative of the local culture
- Supporting and empowering Traditional Owners
- Strong community connection to forest – interest in caring for forests
- Multiple and widespread forest types (including plantation and farm trees)
- Aim to improve forest health and resilience to climate change
- Clear leadership and community commitment and local government support/alignment
- Quick wins

Unknowns

- Politics
- Major event
- Who pays and how much



For more information about the  
Gippsland Forest Dialogue visit:

[www.gfd.org.au](http://www.gfd.org.au)



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