

GIPPSLAND FOREST DIALOGUE

Orbost 'Healthy Forests' Co-Chairs Report



Engage • Explore • Change



“For country to heal, we need to tell the truth.” - Guest speaker

**“Forests are a reflection of us - we need to reimagine forests for the future” - GFD
Orbost Dialogue participant**

**“You can’t preserve what you can’t understand and you can’t understand what you don’t
know.” - Orbost Dialogue participant referencing a quote**

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.

CONTENTS

| | | | |
|--|----|--------------------------------|----|
| Focus | 1 | Fracture Lines | 15 |
| | | • Fire | 15 |
| About the initiative | 1 | • Healthy forest structure | 15 |
| About this report | 2 | Section 3 - Reflections | |
| | | Learnings for future dialogues | 16 |
| | | Participant feedback | 16 |
| Section 1 - Scoping Dialogue | | | |
| Summary | | Acknowledgements | |
| Dialogue context | 3 | Appendix | |
| Aims and objectives | 3 | Healthy Forests Scorecard | 17 |
| Dialogue process and limitations | 4 | Participants list | 18 |
| Overarching Co-Chair synthesis | 6 | • participants | 18 |
| Opportunities for change | 6 | • guests | 18 |
| Strategies for action | 7 | Event overview | |
| • Future directions | 7 | • Agenda- Friday 24th | 19 |
| Next steps | 8 | March | |
| | | • Agenda- Saturday 25th | 20 |
| | | March | |
| Section 2 - Exploration of Key Themes | | Mudmap of field trip | 20 |
| Exploration of themes | 9 | | |
| • Fire | 9 | | |
| • Biodiversity | 10 | | |
| • Water | 12 | | |
| • Traditional Custodian cultural landscapes | 13 | | |
| • Community-led governance | 13 | | |

FOCUS



What is healthy forest?

ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

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.

In early 2023, the GFD convened a regionally specific 'Healthy Forests' Dialogue to explore a range of stakeholder perspectives on forest values, management and use in Orbost, East Gippsland. The aim of this Dialogue was to further explore questions raised in the scoping dialogue, including a focus on the theme of 'Healthy Forests' and what they might look like for the people, wildlife and landscapes of East Gippsland. In addition to this focus on forest health and what this means to different stakeholders and communities, this Dialogue also aimed to explore fire and forest regeneration, and worked to engage more deeply with the Traditional Custodians of the region.

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

This Co-Chairs report synthesises the process, discussion points and key themes arising from the Orbost 'Healthy Forests' Dialogue. The report content was compiled from presentations made by guest speakers, and notes taken by the co-chairs and appointed rapporteurs throughout the dialogue process.

The content of this report should not be taken as points of collective agreement by all Orbost 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.



Northern view from the Mount Buck peak

SECTION 1: ORBOST 'HEALTHY FORESTS' DIALOGUE SUMMARY



Dialogue context

As part of the dialogue process, the GFD established a working group to coordinate the dialogue and determine its thematic focus, and provide dialogue participants with a baseline understanding of some of the major elements that influence and shape the health of East Gippsland's forests—fire, regeneration, the cultural landscapes of traditional custodians, industry, and biodiversity. Through a Scoping Paper, the working group presented brief information on these elements and provided further reading for each from a range of sources.

The Scoping Paper outlined how East 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 Dialogue.

Aims and objectives

The aims of the 'Healthy Forests' Dialogue were to:

- Build a collective understanding of what healthy forests could/should look like from a range of stakeholder perspectives and explore priorities and concerns, and areas of agreement and disagreement, in order to find new ways forward in repairing, restoring and preserving Gippsland's forests for future generations;
- 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

The Orbost 'Healthy Forests' Dialogue was held over two days, comprising: a field trip taking in five significant local forest sites (including Coulsons Road, Mt Buck, Wood Point, South Boundary Rd and Moogji Aboriginal Council Nursery Enterprise); and the dialogue itself, which comprised a series of presentations and discussions on the themes of forest health. A full event overview is provided in the Appendix.

The Field Dialogue set out to put the key themes into context through site visits, brief presentations from a variety of experienced guest speakers and subsequent group discussion.

The Welcome to Country at the first stop on Coulson's Road was given by Uncle Paul Write, Phil and Rod of the Bidwell and Gunditjmara clans, and the ceremony and subsequent truth-telling discussion had a strong impact on the entirety of the dialogue, emphasising the need for 'respect and support' and 'listen and learn' philosophies within the GFD and its stakeholders. Other speakers at Coulson's Road included Marc Perri, from DEECA, who discussed the Southern Ark conservation project and deer control measures, and Beekeeper and Orbost Dialogue Co-chair, Ian Cane, who introduced the proposed 'Healthy Forests Scorecard' (see appendices) that would guide reflections on the forest sites throughout the field trip.

The route to the second stop at the Mt Buck fire tower took the group through some of the forests affected by the Black Summer fires, culminating in a view of the landscape that illustrated the extent of the fires around the Orbost district in 2019-20. Graeme Dear from the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority discussed integrated management strategies and the impact of large landscape fires on rivers and water, while Co-chair Tom Crook led a conversation on fire extent, intensity and frequency. There was then general discussion on the future of these forests, the failure of ideology and existing management strategies to provide for a range of forest values they may demonstrate and the steps that the GFD could take to remedy this, including community advocacy in the form of a local forest board.

The third stop took the group to one of the largest remaining stands of Warm Temperate Rainforest in Victoria, and the stronghold of the Buff Hazelwood (*Symplocos thwaitesii*) tree. Kerry Seaton and Tom Crook guided the group through this threatened species' recent history and ecology, and the co-operative efforts to preserve the tree species across different land tenures between different groups and stakeholders.

At the fourth stop - a patch of forest on the outskirts of Orbost near the DEECA depot that is subject to frequent fuel reduction burning - there was a general discussion of fire frequency, and the interplay between prescribed fire and different forest values. Co-chair Alena Walmsley also led a discussion on forest soil biology, and some of the impacts of fire on soils. The final stop took the group to Moogji Aboriginal Council Nursery Enterprise, where a range of locally sourced indigenous plants are being cultivated for revegetation and conservation projects.

After reviewing the previous day's activities and discussions, the Dialogue sessions on day two began with a presentation from Tom Crook on rainforest management. He emphasised the importance of a long term, systems approach, with catchment units an appropriate scale of focus, the management of known and existing threats, and the necessity of working together to bring about transformative change in how these values are managed.



Overarching Co-Chair synthesis

Major takeaways from the Orbost 'Healthy Forests' Dialogue included:

- The importance of including diverse voices and sharing knowledge within the GFD process, and the need to increase our understanding, trust and agreement on forest issues in order to make progress. As one participant said, “you can’t preserve what you can’t understand and you can’t understand what you don’t know.”
- Desire to grow the GFD initiative within local communities in order to speak with a powerful, collective, multigenerational, grassroots voice, and better connect Gippslanders to forests through communal agency and action.
- A need to rethink what we’ve been doing, rather than continuing to do the same things we’ve always done in the forest policy and management spheres. “Forests are a reflection of us - we need to reimagine forests for the future” - GFD Orbost Dialogue participant.
- Agreement on many common points of what constitutes healthy forest and understanding that East Gippsland’s forests are in a bad state when measured by these values. Concurrence that a focus on the health and resilience of the forest (through the use of the forest scorecard) and ecosystem integrity, rather than the uses of forest, or subjective individual views on forest, will be a valuable way to generate balanced discussion and action about how Gippsland’s forests are managed into the future.
- 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.).

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

Several opportunities for change were mooted, including:

The establishment of a Gippsland Forest Board to provide local representation in forest management decisions, including the necessity of maintaining investment in forests after native forest logging ends in 2030.

The wider promotion and use of the ‘Healthy Forests Scorecard’ as a tool to contextualise and visualise values ‘trade-offs’ in forest management

- Continuing and strengthening engagement with underrepresented stakeholders, including Traditional Custodians, women, and young people.
- Increasing GFD membership to amplify voice in government and agency decisions, and influence positive change. Possibility for GFD to collaborate with other local groups to increase impact.
- Commissioning, undertaking or partnering in studies focused on novel forest restoration and management activities and the valuation/quantification of Australian forest ecosystem services

Strategies for action

The broader role of the GFD, its long-term directions and key next steps for action were discussed during the final session on day two of the Orbost Dialogue.

Future directions

Overall, broader discussions around the future directions for the Gippsland Forest Dialogue fell into three main categories.

Ongoing use of the 'Healthy Forests Scorecard'

The 'Healthy Forests Scorecard' was agreed on as a key plank in GFD outreach and engagement activities, and as a valuable tool for future forest management decision making that recognises all uses and values in perpetuity, recognises the opportunity costs for different management interventions, and defines what a healthy forest could look like. Participants reflected on the importance of connecting the concept to local communities and ensuring that there is agreement on quantifying scores and providing examples of what each step on the scale should look like for each value.

Support for new ways of thinking about and managing Gippsland's forests, centred on local perspectives, knowledge and futures

There was keen interest in establishing and implementing a local Gippsland Forest Board, composed of a range of diverse, multigenerational stakeholders from across the region, who could represent the interests of local people and forests in decision making around forest management. There was also a desire to focus upcoming dialogues, discussions and actions on long-term forest restoration issues and questions such as "How do we protect places like Woods Point for next 500 years? How do we repair places like Mt Buck for our kids and future generations?"

Communication, networking and knowledge sharing

Continuing on from the Rawson Dialogue, participants in the Orbost event 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 in order to explore different ways of doing things, with a particular focus on engaging young and school-aged people was agreed on as a priority.

Next Steps

Key priority next steps for the GFD were identified as:

- Continued Traditional Custodian engagement through informal visits and outreach
- Establish 'resources' section on GFD website as a community forest info hub to showcase GFD learnings and the 'Healthy forests scorecard'
- Discuss possibility of a supplementary field trip around Orbost area for interested people unable to attend the Dialogue
- Co-Chairs report drafted ready for circulation and feedback in early May
- Regional dialogue in South Gippsland to be held in mid-2023 and Dargo in Spring 2023.
- Advisory Group to discuss convening a Gippsland Forest Board
- Investigation of opportunities / applications for grants and funding, including within schools
- 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. Aim to address GFD structural deficits by connecting with agencies, locals, young people, and deepen links with the Orbost region rather than abandon it. Foster local voice, have coffees, start talking.
- Research opportunities to influence policies to reformulate and look to next 100 years of forest management and foster localisation
- Encourage GFD members to present on the initiative at events through production of a generic presentation available to all participants.

Overall, participants were keen to move quickly towards expanding the membership and impact of the initiative and capitalising on the momentum built by the Rawson and Orbost dialogues to continue pushing for real, positive change in the management of Gippsland's forests.

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 Orbost Dialogue process.

Exploration of themes

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.

Fire

Key Insights

Fire dominated discussions on both days of the Orbost Dialogue, and the impacts that the Black Summer fires wreaked on local forests was evident almost everywhere during the field trip. Participants discussed how more frequent and intense fires, combined with logging and mechanical disturbance, has turned forests such as those around Mt Buck into something more akin to thickly stacked kindling, destroyed the forest's diversity, and changed the structure and composition of the forest itself, making it more vulnerable to future fires and possibly eliminating its resilience and capacity to naturally reproduce. There was extensive discussion (but a lack of agreement) about the impacts of regular and prescribed burning, the extent of grasslands prior and post European colonisation, their impact on fire frequency and conflicting research into what the pollen and ash/charcoal records show, and unresolved questions around whether repeated burning is keeping humans safer, and whether prescribed burns are too hot. Cultural burning was also interrogated, and it was noted that these low intensity, mosaic patterned burns likely occurred in a range of forest types, open forests, with soil and undergrowth structures vastly different to today. Rainforest was another topic of discussion, and it was noted that these ecosystems require long periods between severe fire events to persist, and that what happens in the broader landscape impacts rainforests and their likelihood of persisting. New technology and fire detection and suppression were touched on, including the use of drones and satellites to find ignition sites, lightning apps to follow lightning strikes and the use of carbon dioxide bombs from drones to extinguish fires before they become too large.

Concerns

There were widespread concerns among the group that some of East Gippsland's forests have been damaged so repeatedly by recent fires and industrial logging that they have lost their reproductive capacity and will not regenerate naturally to their pre-existing state if another fire affects them in the coming decades (if this new disturbance regime continues), and that the problem is "overwhelmingly difficult and overwhelmingly large". It was noted that when the grow/bud/flower/seed cycle of eucalypts is disturbed it creates 30-40 year gaps in the reproductive process, and by harvesting and changing structure so much regrowth is killed outright when fire comes through. There was also concern that some of Victoria's post-fire practices (e.g. scalping and salvage logging) are exacerbating this lack of reproductive capacity. Similarly, the 'overstocking' of trees per hectare post fire was listed as a concern by some participants, as was the need for management practices available to address these issues (e.g. through mechanical thinning). The impact of logging and burning on rainforests and the broader landscape is another issue, and there was some division in how to best manage and protect these forests - eg. whether regular burning in surrounding landscapes would provide protection, or if this 'resets the clock' on vegetation structure/succession making it more fire prone. Community concerns were discussed, especially the shared dread that years of good rain and growth, coupled with drought under climate change, mean that more fires are just around the corner, while concerns around the use of technology included its high cost, its efficacy in catastrophic fire seasons and whether the level of investment is high enough.

Knowledge gaps

There are many knowledge gaps on how to live with and manage fire in Gippsland's forests, exacerbated by the disputed and fractious nature of what constitutes best practice fire management to preserve a range of forest values. Questions raised by the group include: how to regenerate forests if fires kill off reproductive capacity; how to balance the benefits and deficits/impacts of prescribed burning (and what they are); how to manage and protect rainforests in state forests and the broader landscape; and how technology can be best used in fire management.

Biodiversity

Key Insights

Discussions around biodiversity focused on the management and biology of rainforests and threatened species within rainforests, especially in relation to fire, disturbance and its impacts on these ecosystems; large scale conservation projects, such as the Southern Ark; landscape level pest control measures for deer and foxes, and the soil biology of Gippsland forests. Participants agreed on the importance of integrating strategy and actions when a diverse range of groups and agencies is involved in managing threatened ecosystems, and discussed whole-of-country plans, and increasing connectivity between different bodies managing different parts of the landscape, emphasising 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. It was also noted that large-scale conservation projects, such as Southern Ark, deliver excellent value for money predator control at under \$1 per ha, compared to around \$100 per ha for smaller programs, while revegetation nursery projects, such as that at Moogji, are a great example of Traditional Custodians taking the lead in forest management initiatives. Finally, participants discussed the importance of acting now – and not dwelling on how the landscape looked in the past, but rather on looking towards what we want it to look like in future, and working with nature as the climate changes.

Concerns

Fire, pests, and inadequate management and funding were the major threats to biodiversity discussed by the group during the Orbost dialogue. The Black Summer fires severely impacted almost all the warm temperate rainforest in East Gippsland, and the protection of remaining areas through fire management in the surrounding landscape was a discussion point that generated differences of opinion and indicated knowledge gaps (or, a new need for greater clarity), in how to best tackle this issue. Other concerns relating to biodiversity and fire included the issue of deer control, and how large scale fires create good conditions for these pests to spread over the landscape, damaging natural regenerative processes and causing erosion, and the organisational challenges associated with this, especially the lack of government (and other) funding and investment in control, as well as the unreliable, stop-start nature of funding cycles. Post-fire 'salvage' logging, soil ripping, stump burning, and the decline of soil-disturbing keystone mammals were also noted as concerning developments in efforts to maintain healthy soil biodiversity within forests, which is important for forest health and regrowth (for example increased nitrogen levels after fire). Finally, there were concerns about the lack of regulatory oversight in managing biodiversity in public land tenures, lack of investment in the reserve estate (especially Parks) and the reliance on scrutiny and litigation from community and environmental groups to ensure rules are applied.

Knowledge gaps

How to best apply fire in different landscapes and ecosystems to preserve biodiversity in Gippsland forests requires further research, assessment and clarity as this issue was contested within the group. The absence of stakeholders representing specific industry values also meant that there was little discussion about integrated and sustainable approaches to producing native timber (and non-timber forest products, including values of ecosystem services, the visitor and restoration economies) while also providing for biodiversity. 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.

Water

Key insights

Most of the information discussed around this topic stemmed from Graeme Dear's presentation on Day 1 of the dialogue and focused on the relationship between fire and water quality and yield in forests of the region. He identified an urgent need to integrate different natural resource management approaches to address the total task problem of large landscape events like the Black Summer fires, but noted that funding pathways can create silos that prevent holistic thinking and collaboration, even though agencies informally work together to focus on priority areas. There was also discussion of the links between river health and land and biodiversity management, and it was noted that connectivity and interdependence needs to be considered more. Large landscape burns and post-fire sediment can harm rivers beyond their existing ability to maintain a healthy state and solutions such as sustainable water strategies need to be developed and importantly implemented. Finally, Graeme discussed how the current state of natural resources requires forward-thinking approaches that address the reality of the situation, contending that the reference point for management should be the present, not the past, and a focus on where to go and how to get there is needed.

Concerns

In terms of biodiversity, repeated landscape events such as Black Summer were flagged as making river and catchment recovery increasingly difficult, particularly for species dependent on specific microhabitats or pebble-dependent species that cannot live in ash affected water, algal blooms or sediment slugs created by big fires, the latter of which can sometimes take decades to dissipate. Inadequate management and siloed funding were also raised as concerning issues, limiting collaboration and innovative and holistic thinking in natural resource management, particularly in the face of events such as droughts and large-scale fires that significantly reduce water flows and have long-term impacts on river health.

Knowledge Gaps

Areas that were flagged as requiring further information included the need for further research on the impact of large-scale fires on river health, particularly in terms of sediment and water flow, and the need for more research and collaboration on sustainable water strategies to help mitigate the impact of fires, drought, flood, other cumulative disturbances and climate change on our forests.

Traditional Custodian cultural landscapes

Key insights

Members of the Bidwall clan welcomed Orbost Dialogue participants to Country at the first stop on Day 1, leading a valuable discussion about respect and collaboration, and the group later visited the Moogji Aboriginal Council Nursery Enterprise and saw some of the important revegetation and conservation work happening there. The messages passed on by the Bidwall custodians echoed throughout the dialogue - how we share one heartbeat with each other and the earth, and the importance of respect and listening set against a loss of respect for the whole forest system and the indigenous cultures within. Paul also emphasised the importance of respecting the land and preserving it for future generations, how non-Indigenous people need to understand that the inclusion of Aboriginal people in discussions and decision-making processes should be more than just a 'tick box', and that Australia needs to work towards being a better place for all people, and that this requires acknowledging past wrongdoings - as Paul said, "for country to heal, we need to tell the truth." It was a brutal and confronting discussion for many participants, however the Bidwall custodians showed enthusiasm for the GFD initiative and a willingness to continue their involvement in the process. The Moogji Aboriginal Council Nursery Enterprise was noted as an effective and organic example of Caring for Country and forest management. One participant remarked that the two visits provided significant bookends to the dialogue: "we started with pain and devastation, we ended with hope."

Concerns

Echoing the Rawson Dialogue, there was ongoing concern that the lack of Indigenous representation at the dialogue hindered the group's capacity to reflect the interests of Traditional Custodians in discussions, and to explore the cultural landscapes' thematic area in sufficient depth, respectfully and with authority. It was noted that there are many barriers preventing stakeholders from local communities from being involved in decision-making about their environment, such as cost and scheduling conflicts.

Knowledge gaps

The social, economic and cultural barriers to TO participation were noted as a significant knowledge gap for the GFD, while also acknowledging that TO groups have multiple competing priorities and that their active participation in all dialogues may not be feasible.

Community-led governance

Key insights

The importance of community-led decision making in forest management was a strong focus of the Orbost Dialogue, with participants noting that decentralised and locally-driven forest governance is key to connecting people and communities to the forest. Several participants also noted that there are historical and ongoing issues of land theft and disenfranchisement of Indigenous and local communities, and that setting people against each other is a colonial tactic that creates blame and division within communities.

Other insights emphasised the importance of diversity within community-led decision making, and how concepts such as 'the commons' can help dissolve the binary between public and private and help communities reclaim their agency. An extension of this discussion involved the possibility of forming a community leadership group, in the form of a 'Gippsland Forest Board', which could be conceived of as a diverse group of Gippslanders adapting to common challenges together, influencing forest management decisions, sharing and disseminating knowledge, sharing decision making, and democratising the forests.

Concerns

Participants emphasised a need for local communities to unite and claim agency to take back power in forest governance, but acknowledged the difficulty of doing this within current management structures, noting that the current regulatory system is too rigid and doesn't provide a mechanism for ongoing community involvement in decision-making. The neoliberal government model was also discussed as a failed system that has led to the privatisation and commodification of the forest, similar to the aged care industry. There was also a concern about the lack of intergenerational responsibility for the forest and the potential for decisions to be made through a political lens.

Knowledge gaps

The 'Gippsland Forest Board' proposal requires further discussion among the wider GFD membership as to its feasibility and suitability as a possible GFD initiative.



*A *Symplocos thwaitesii* seedling at the Moogji nursery*

Fracture Lines

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 Orbost 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.

Fire

Fire, and particularly its application by humans to forests, was a contentious topic throughout the dialogue, with differing opinions emerging around prescribed fire strategies and their effects on forest health and values. Some participants believed that fire had been inappropriately excluded from the landscape and that insufficient burning was leading to unmanageable fuel loads and reduction in human safety, while others contended that current fuel reduction burning and fire management practices were detrimental in some forest types and were making them and the broader forested landscape increasingly prone to more frequent and intense fires. Evidence for these opposing positions is provided by a range of research and studies that report differing results on the benefits or detriments of fire on forests, which did not help clarify the muddy waters of this contentious but important issue.

Healthy forest structure

Although there was relatively widespread agreement among the group on what constitutes healthy and unhealthy forest, especially when viewed through the lens of the ‘forest scorecard’ with its values and age-based matrix, there was some debate on what a healthy forest structure should look like during the field trips, reflecting the differing backgrounds of the participants. This led to discussion of whether we can or should try and achieve high scores for all forest values in every forest, or if a mosaic of forests can serve different purposes, with trade-offs a necessary part of forest management. For example, a patch of bush near a town can have high community and recreational values, but this may negatively impact other values.

SECTION 3: REFLECTIONS



Gippsland's people and its forests have been, 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

The Gippsland Forest Dialogue offers 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. Our second dialogue built on learnings from the first, with the involvement of co-chairs early on in the organisation process (allowing more time to prepare and focus facilitation) and a narrower dialogue theme, guided by specific structures such as the healthy forests scorecard, as well as a more formally structured field day featuring locals who could speak with authority about the sites that were visited. However, the co-chairs felt that future dialogues could be even more focused, with extra time for in-depth exploration of key, priority issues and fracture lines, perhaps restructuring the format to focus on discussion and debate on the second day, rather than individual presentations. There was also concern about the small group size, and a lack of representation from key stakeholder groups, which are difficult but important hurdles to overcome.

Participant feedback

Feedback was solicited through a survey completed after the conclusion of the Dialogue and was viewed by the ten respondents as a successful, well-planned, positive and engaging experience, especially valuable for the field day discussions and presentations, the healthy forest focus and the opportunity to gather and have respectful conversations and listen to one another. All participants indicated they would attend future dialogues. Feedback emphasised the need to involve more people in the GFD process, and as well as the need for more voices, a diversity of views and open talk, with one participant remarking, "we need early notification and clear dates so people can attend. Local community engagement and participation", while another said, "Need to encourage more to attend. A lot of work goes into setting up each Dialogue and members need to be there." Examples of stakeholders that could be included in the next dialogue included schools, university students, more people representing communities and traditional custodians, 4WD clubs, bush walkers, shooters, fishers, small timber operators, bird observers, and locals, among others.

Suggestions for future dialogues included a focus on how to achieve healthy forests on the ground through active management and restoration; connectedness and wellbeing of people and country; community, transitioning, and finding common ground; how to bring local needs for the forest into focus and involve locals in decision making; and working out if there is a future for small scale wood use and what to do with the logging regrowth.

Acknowledgements

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 - Aly Nichol and Cara Schultz. The dialogue and the creation of this report would not have been possible without leadership and financial support from EcoGipps.



Field trip group view rainforest on the banks of the Snowy River

APPENDICES

Healthy Forests Scorecard

INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT MATRIX HEALTHY FOREST/FUNCTIONAL ECOSYSTEM

LOCATION _____

SCORE OUT OF 10 (0= very poor - 10 = excellent)

| YEAR | 0 | 5 | 10 | 20 | 50 | 100 |
|--|---|---|----|----|----|-----|
| WATER VALUES | | | | | | |
| CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTIVE | | | | | | |
| FIRE INTENSITY | | | | | | |
| BIODIVERSITY | | | | | | |
| EUCALYPT REPRODUCTIVE CAPACITY | | | | | | |
| TIMBER VALUE | | | | | | |
| FUEL REDUCTION BURNING SUITABILITY | | | | | | |
| COMMUNITY VALUES | | | | | | |
| TOURISM / RECREATION | | | | | | |
| CARBON STORAGE | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| TOTAL SCORE | | | | | | |

Comments:

Participants list

Participants

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Jane Greacen | Community health, biodiversity |
| Ian Cane | Beekeeping |
| Ewan Waller | Community, forest management |
| Alena Walmsley | Soil scientist |
| Peter Gell | Biodiversity and ecological restoration |
| James Kidman | Ecological Services and Selective Luthier Timber Supplier |
| Jim Phillipson | Strategic director for biodiversity legacy |
| Isaac Carne | Videographer |
| Neil Barraclough | Beekeeping |
| Tom Crook | Ecological restoration practitioner |
| Heather Phillipson (GFD) | On Country Manager |
| Paul Haar | Architecture and sustainable timber |
| Cara Schultz (GFD) | Communications |
| Aly Nichol (GFD) | Administration and Operations Support |
| Tuffy Morwitzer | Goongerah Environment Centre |

Guests

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Marc Perri | Biodiversity, DEECA |
| Graeme Dear | CEO, East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority |
| Rodney Harrison | CEO, Moogji Aboriginal Corporation |
| Kerry Seaton | Fire Surveyor, Forest Fire Management |
| Phil | Moogji Aboriginal Corporation |
| Uncle Paul | Moogji Aboriginal Corporation |

Event overview

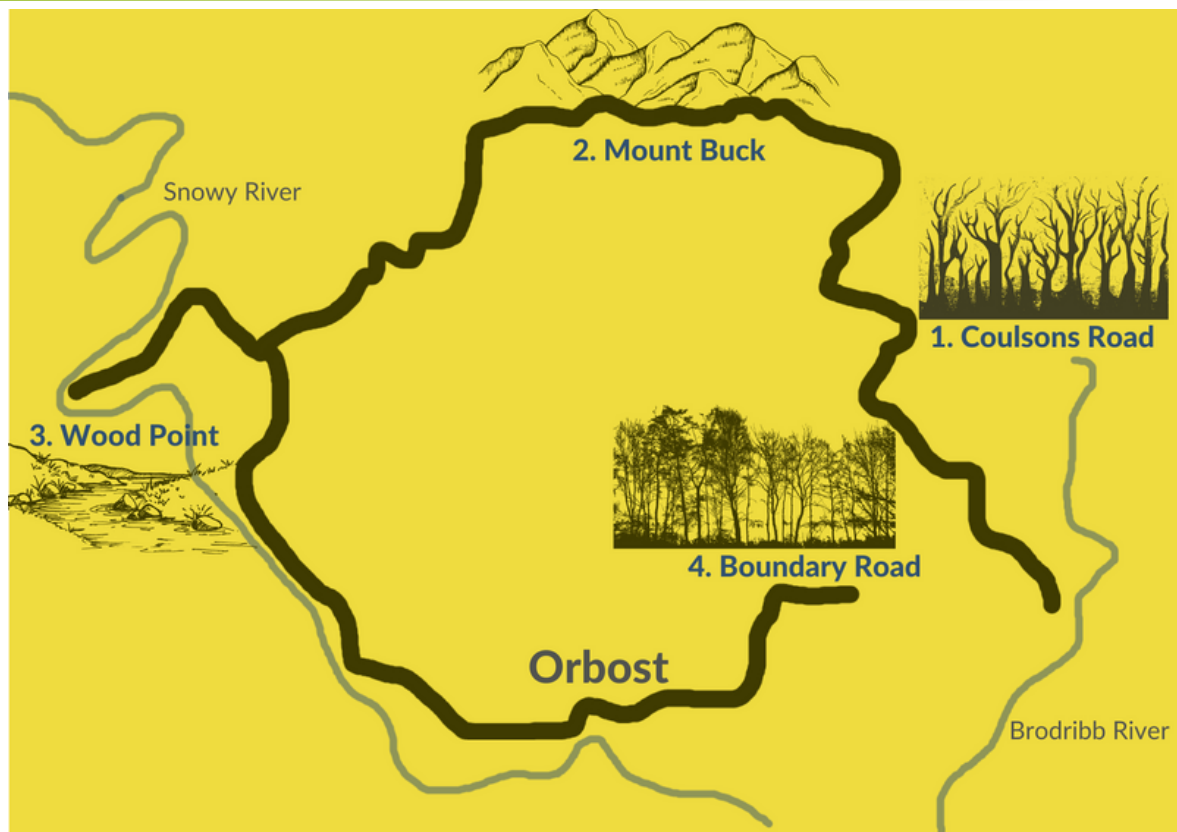
Agenda- Friday 24th March

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| 8.30am | Meet in Orbost at the Orbost Exhibition Centre (8 Clarke Street, Orbost) |
| 8.45am | Bus drive from Orbost to Coulsons Road (15 mins) |
| 9.15am 9.30am 10.00am | Stop 1 - Coulsons Road (near Brodribb Flora Reserve) Welcome to Country (Gunaikurnai/Bidwel elder) Healthy Country- Healthy Forests Custodian talk- vision for the future 2014 heavy logging Scorecard introduction Orbost local, Southern Ark (Marc Perri) |
| 10.30am | Bus drive from Coulsons Road to Mount Buck (30 mins) |
| 11.00am 11.30am 12.00pm | Stop 2 - Mt Buck Morning tea (catered) Rainforest presentation (Tom Crook and Kerry Seaton) Catchment Management (Graeme Dear) Prescribed Fire program (Ross Cutlack) |
| 12.30pm | Bus drive from Mount Buck to Wood point (35 mins) |
| 1.05pm 1.30pm 2.00pm 2.30pm | Stop 3 - Wood Point Lunch (catered) Buff Hazelwood (<i>Symplocos thwaitesii</i>) and integrated management (Tom Crook, Marc Perri and Chris Anderson) Policies- from old gated policies to contemporary/future policies - regional forest agreements etc (Ian Cane) Healthier perspective |
| 3.00pm | Bus drive from Wood Point to South Boundary Road (45 mins) |
| 3.40pm | Stop 4 - South Boundary Road Mature forest- mixture of shrubs & burnt understorey What is a healthy forest? |
| 4.30pm | Bus drive from South Boundary Road to Orbost (15 mins) |
| 5.00pm | Members- free time in Orbost for Co-chairs and note takers - meet & collate days info |
| 6pm | Dinner |

Agenda- Saturday 25th March

| | |
|---------|--|
| 9am | Summary of field trip |
| 9.15am | Any feedback, questions, discussion points arising from field trip |
| 9.45am | Local Management examples Tom to present on Mount Buck and Wood Point sites and their rainforest significance |
| 10.15am | Morning tea |
| 10.30am | Healthy forest Community/people Policy and management Common points on healthy forest Studies- pioneer, regrowth Health of forest for future generations |
| 11.45pm | Healthy Country Plan /Long term vision/ scorecard review Where is our leadership in Gippsland? |
| 12.30pm | Lunch |
| 2pm | Summary & Close |

Mudmap of field trip





**For more information about the
Gippsland Forest Dialogue visit:**

www.gfd.org.au



Engage • Explore • Change