

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria**

Melbourne—Thursday, 26 August 2021

#### **MEMBERS**

Ms Sonja Terpstra—Chair

Mr Clifford Hayes—Deputy Chair

Dr Matthew Bach

Ms Melina Bath

Dr Catherine Cumming

Mr Stuart Grimley

Mr Andy Meddick

Mr Cesar Melhem

Dr Samantha Ratnam

Ms Nina Taylor

#### **PARTICIPATING MEMBERS**

Ms Georgie Crozier

Mr David Davis

Dr Tien Kieu

Mrs Beverley McArthur

Mr Tim Quilty

**WITNESS** (*via teleconference*)

Ms Jill Redwood, Coordinator, Environment East Gippsland.

**The CHAIR:** I declare open the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria. Please ensure that mobile phones have been switched to silent and that background noise is minimised.

I would like to begin this hearing by respectfully acknowledging the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of the various lands which we are gathered on today, and pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and families. I particularly welcome any elders or community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of this issue to the committee or who are watching the broadcast of these proceedings. I would also like to welcome any members of the public who may be watching these proceedings via the live broadcast as well.

I will take the opportunity to introduce committee members to you. My name is Sonja Terpstra. I am the Chair of the Environment and Planning Committee. Also appearing with us today via Zoom are Mr Clifford Hayes, who is the Deputy Chair; Dr Samantha Ratnam; Ms Nina Taylor; Ms Melina Bath; and Mrs Bev McArthur.

Now, all evidence that is taken today is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same thing, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded, and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

So, Jill, if you could please just for the record state your full name and the organisation you are appearing on behalf of.

**Ms REDWOOD:** Jill Redwood, and I coordinate Environment East Gippsland.

**The CHAIR:** Great. Thanks so much for that. So with that I will hand over to you now to make your opening remarks. If you could please keep your opening remarks to about 5 minutes or so, and I will give you a prompt as we get closer to the end of that time. So over to you. Thanks, Jill.

**Visual presentation.**

**Ms REDWOOD:** Okay. Thank you. I think the overarching change I would like to emphasise here is that science, evidence and an uncompromised political will must now drive environmental policies and legislation. Over the past 40 years that I have been advocating for East Gippsland's forest and natural areas I have not really witnessed this, and it now is coming to crunch time. Year after year I have seen habitat destruction and degradation, living right in the middle of the forest here, and this loss or the magnitude of the loss is largely out of sight. I have also seen funding and resources for important surveying and habitat restoration works cut back. The government's State of the Environment reports also make it clear that this is happening. It is not just something that I have witnessed.

East Gippsland, as you can see—this is an overall map of it—was once considered the stronghold for so many of our rare and endangered wildlife in Victoria, and the calculations done were that it was seven times more important as a sanctuary than anywhere else in the state because it was mostly forested and fairly intact forest. This map shows East Gippsland. It was once covered in old-growth and mixed-age mature forests with just small patches of regrowth. But now it is absolutely the opposite: regrowth covers the bulk of the region. This map also shows the extent of logging over the past decades, and the black is still to be logged. It also shows the severity of the fire that went through two years ago—almost 18 months ago—and they did not stop at the dotted lines around the parks and reserves, as you can see. So now only about 20 per cent of East Gippsland's forests remain unburnt. These high-value forests outside the burn zone are now really critically important areas for birds and wildlife. They are like refugee camps. Nobody would agree with bombing a refugee camp, I am

sure, but what is happening now is that VicForests is still bulldozing these unburnt areas and logging them. Slide two maybe now, please.

East Gippsland is mega diverse. It has got so many different ecosystems, and each one has its own assemblage of birds, frogs, insects, marsupials. But these images here—tall, lush, wet forests—are pretty much the essence of East Gippsland. That is what everybody thinks of as East Gippsland. Next slide, please.

Unfortunately logging is also targeting these forests, and the richest forests on the deepest soil with the highest rainfall. It is not coincidence that these are also the best forests for much of our wildlife that need these giants of the forest, with the large hollows and the diverse multilayered understorey and the tree ferns et cetera. So there is direct competition between the needs of wildlife and the wants of industry. Can we also have the next slide?

I want to talk about how these forests do not come back after logging. So once they are logged, they do not all grow back again, and not as the industry tries to convince us. Much of it does not come back as anything but bracken and scrub, as we see here, or at best wattle. It is good habitat for rabbits but not much more. This is basically land clearing, but no-one seems to acknowledge it. There is a serious restoration work program needed on these thousands of hectares of barren areas, to manage the regrowth for diversity and to stop the logging in these untouched forests or revert to a really extremely sensitive single-tree selection. Next slide, please.

Logged forests are subjected to intense hot management burns. The areas are often aerially sown with only one or two commercially profitable species. Then after 12 to 15 years they are thinned and the understoreys crushed down under heavy machinery again. These slides are typical of what used to be mega diverse old-growth, age-diverse forests that have been turned into industrial single-species tree crops, and they are managed as that. There is absolutely no habitat there, no biodiversity. They might as well replant palm oil crops, I reckon.

Next slide, please. I would also like to talk about forests as fire shield. Now, a lot of people just see forest as, you know, a huge threat to everybody, but this example here, this is the famous Brown Mountain, subject of our landmark court case in 2009—a wonderland of giants, healthy, diverse forest vegetation and the wildlife. The forest floor actually feeds everything that is in that forest. It is the bottom of the food chain. It has bandicoots, lyrebirds, all the native diggers and scratchers, and they are all constantly making new soil and humus by turning over the ground and the leaf litter there. That helps with the fire resistance. Burn these forests, and this natural sort of assemblage of what I call firefighters are killed, they go hungry, they are reduced, they are exposed to predation. And then—surprise, surprise—the leaf litter builds up and needs burning again.

Next slide, please. A lot of people have seen this one, and it just shows that after logging the forests are then very dense and they encourage fire. As they get older, they thin out and there is a gap between the mid-storey and the top of the forest there.

**The CHAIR:** Jill, you have about a minute left.

**Ms REDWOOD:** Okay, good. I will try and be really quick.

Next slide, please: the Brown Mountain forest, just showing that where the fire hit the forest about 2 kilometres away, it burnt really hot. It then went to about a kilometre away and the fire reduced and then when it got to Brown Mountain it stopped, and that pretty much protected the park.

Now, next one, please. I would also like to talk about the planned burns, which a lot of people have. So it is not only bushfires that take a massive toll; planned government burns also do it, and rarely are these cool. They cover thousands of hectares a year and at a massive cost of \$600 million, as I understand. Treetop photos there are not from a bushfire; they are planned burn victims. And we have so many animals that we probably never know are killed in these fires.

Lastly, if there is half a minute here, I would just like to talk about the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act*. It was meant to be a legal instrument to protect nature—an insurance policy sort of thing. It has been a massive failure from where we sit. EEG took legal action against the government in 2009 for not enforcing its own laws regarding the protection of wildlife on Brown Mountain. And again in 2013 we had to take the department to court for not doing its job regarding the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act*. Small groups should not have to do this work. There were about 700 listed species then; now there are about 2000, but nothing really has changed.

We are not even monitoring most of these. We are not updating the protection measures for them or even writing protection plans for most of those species.

**The CHAIR:** Okay, Jill, are you almost done?

**Ms REDWOOD:** Yes, just about. Just, you know, we cannot use the lack of money as an excuse not to act. If we can find \$600 million to give to forest fire management—and that is not even based on empirical peer-reviewed science—we really have to get serious about protecting our biodiversity. That will do for now. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Great. Thanks very much for your opening remarks, Jill. We will hand over now to committee members. I am sure we will have lots of questions for you. Perhaps we will start with Dr Ratnam.

**Dr RATNAM:** Thanks so much, Jill, for your presentation—it was very powerful—and for all your work over many years on the ground and your advocacy. I wanted to follow up on the point that you raised towards the end of your presentation and contained in your submission as well, talking about welcoming reforms to the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act*, but you noted that without resourcing and serious intent these are essentially window-dressing. What do you think is required in terms of resourcing and intent to strengthen the ability of the Act to actually have any effect on our biodiversity?

**Ms REDWOOD:** Well, as well as resourcing and including a lot more biodiversity staff in the department—I have seen so many lose their jobs over the years; there is just a skeleton staff left, and we need more biodiversity people in there and not foresters making a lot of these decisions—millions more put into biodiversity protection, millions more. I do not know what it would cost, but a lot more than we are actually seeing now. And we need, as I said in the opening remarks, science and evidence. We need peer-reviewed science, and we need empirical evidence that what we are doing is actually the right thing and not just what is politically expedient and, I do not know, to appease the pressure groups, I suppose, which are pretty much the extractive industries that are causing a lot of the damage we are seeing.

**Dr RATNAM:** Thank you. Just one other follow-up question regarding some of the matter you covered, again on planned burns. I think that is really important to talk about, because even throughout this inquiry we have had it presented in almost kind of black-and-white terms. You know, some corners say that planned burns will reduce the impact or severity of fire. While we know it has some role to play, we have also heard lots of evidence about the reducing conditions to do some of those planned burns, and in your presentation you talked about the biodiversity impact of planned burns themselves. That was in your submission, where you talked about feeling like DELWP has not been attuned to or strong enough in talking about the impacts of those planned burns. Have you seen any progress regarding that? Do you think there is some movement within DELWP, or do you think it is quite stuck in terms of thinking about it in a very black-and-white way? I am just interested in your thoughts on whether there has been any progress made on that front.

**Ms REDWOOD:** Yes. Sadly I can say from my experience—what I am witnessing here and what I have witnessed over the years I have lived here and in the 2003, 2014 and most recent fires—it is actually going backwards. It almost seems to be a culture. They call it ‘red gold’, a lot of people. There is an economy now based on fire management, fighting fires. It is very lucrative for so many people both in the industry and those managers—people involved in land management basically. Even though so many documents say that we must have consideration for biodiversity impact, it is always trumped by human safety. But a lot of that, as I said, does not have science behind it, and a lot of the tree clearing that is done in preparation for planned burns, tree clearing after fires—everything—seems to be targeting these old habitat trees with immense biodiversity value that are needed for these rare species now. The hollow trees, the big ones, are always targeted for cutting down and they are regarded as a hazardous. And from what I have seen, the solid trees that are not leaning over a road, that do not have branches there, are just taken down as a matter of course now because it provides so much employment, dare I say it. So it is a massive problem, and I cannot see it getting any better, I am afraid.

What I would like to see, though, is a pause and review of this fire management so that we can start questioning the effectiveness or not of planned burns, where they should be. A lot of the science that I have read by Zylstra and others says that it is only effective really within 40 to 500 metres maximum of human habitation and beyond that it really does not do anything. We have got the example of Marysville, which was burnt very

heavily—planned burns—before the fires, and it took out the town. As somebody else, I think, has already said, is not the effectiveness of planned burns, it is the intensity of the weather that drives these fires.

**Dr RATNAM:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** All right. We are going to have to move along. Mr Hayes, a question.

**Mr HAYES:** Yes. Thanks, Chair, and thanks, Jill. Look, my question is a bit far ranging, but I am very interested in what you said about resourcing. I would like to see a lot more resourcing and focus going into ecological burns and cultural burning and Indigenous people leading the way in that sort of management. Restoration of logged areas should really be a priority, I think, to try and get some funding and employment in these areas. But everyone points at a cultural problem, and there is a lot of criticism of DELWP. I often pick up on the problem that the same minister who is in charge of planning and development is also in charge of looking after the ecology as well. It sort of tends to create a conflict. But what can you say about the leadership at the highest levels? What really needs to change to start implementing this cultural revolution right down through the system?

**Ms REDWOOD:** Great question. It seems that there are some influences within government or outside of government that seem to drive policy and decision-making. I mean, we have taken some of these issues that I raised earlier to the highest level, and nothing is done, even though it is written in law, in plain English language. I have been trying to work out where the problem lies. I think some of the influences could be coming from the union, the CFMEU, vested interests, political donors—all of that stuff that we are all very aware of that we rarely speak about, but it is there and it is an influence. I would also like to see a very distinct division between VicForests, forest fire management and DELWP. At the moment they all seem to be one big boys club, dare I say it. I do not know how you do that, but it is certainly a problem; the culture within the fire management and logging is definitely a problem. It seems to be a brick wall, and they almost appear to be unaccountable, even in law. We have got the OCR set up now, but how many prosecutions have there been? Yes, we certainly need to have an inquiry into that, or a royal commission even. But, sorry, I do not know how to—it is a problem the government has to solve.

**Mr HAYES:** It is huge. Okay. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks. Ms Taylor, a question? Ms Bath, a question?

**Ms BATH:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you for appearing in voice, Ms Redwood. I am trying to get my head around all the different groups, and in this committee we often hear of many different organisations. You are appearing on behalf of Environment East Gippsland, and that is your submission.

**Ms REDWOOD:** Yes.

**Ms BATH:** And then you are also involved in the Goongerah Landcare group. Is that right?

**Ms REDWOOD:** Yes.

**Ms BATH:** And you hold a role in that?

**Ms REDWOOD:** Yes.

**Ms BATH:** And then are you involved in the Goongerah Environment Centre, or GECO as it is known on Facebook?

**Ms REDWOOD:** No.

**Ms BATH:** You are not involved in that?

**Ms REDWOOD:** We network, but I am not a member of it.

**Ms BATH:** Okay. So do you have activities that you would share together in that group?

**Ms REDWOOD:** No.

**Ms BATH:** Right. So when you say you network, what does that mean?

**Ms REDWOOD:** Well, we talk to each other, we share information, as I do with other groups. Yes, all of the forest campaign groups around Victoria basically share information and talk with each other.

**Ms BATH:** That is good. And I note that the Goongerah Landcare group received some funding from Landcare and some grants for various activities.

**Ms REDWOOD:** Yes. I am not up with that; I am not the treasurer. But I think we have been receiving some grants to do work on weeds—inkweed and honeysuckle removal, that type of thing.

**Ms BATH:** Okay. Do you hold a role in the executive?

**Ms REDWOOD:** Yes, I am president of the Landcare group.

**Ms BATH:** Right. Okay. It is interesting, and that is why I am trying to get my head around everything, because the GECO Facebook had a Facebook activity in their activity section of ‘Errinundra Forest Defenders Skillshare’—and I was really interested to see and understand what that was—on Saturday, 13 February. It sounds quite—I will not say interesting, but perplexing. I was wondering whether or not you knew if it was a training camp for non-violent action. ‘Forest defenders skillshare’—it seemed to me to be something that you would do if you wanted to hold a protest or include tree-sits or how to lock on to various equipment. I am wondering if you know about this, because it is quite interesting—and I am not saying interesting in a positive way, I am actually saying concerning.

**Ms REDWOOD:** Yes. You would have to ask GECO what the details of that were. I am not sure. I was not involved in organising that, but I know GECO have held camps before. They are called ‘skillshares’, but from what I understand of past camps, they also take people out into the forest and show them how to survey, show them how to measure the carbon-carrying capacity of an old forest, a lot of ecology and probably also a bit of, you know, how you can protect forests. So whether that is by legal means, by trying to stop logging by peaceful means, you would probably have to ask GECO that.

**Ms BATH:** That is right—or illegal means, in terms of tree sits and protests?

**Ms REDWOOD:** Oh, and other means, yes—suing the government.

**Ms BATH:** Thank you. I will move on to just something that you said before, Ms Redwood. I was trying to remember it, but it was like when forestry harvests their native timber and they are replanted in single species. Is that what you were referring to?

**Ms REDWOOD:** Yes, that is what I have witnessed. It is aerially sown. There is only the commercially valuable species that are put back, and the rest of the forest just has to fend for itself. But with the thinning operations it is as I showed in those photos—it becomes a single-species, evenly spaced, same-aged crop.

**Ms BATH:** Well, I can certainly understand the same age because it has been harvested, unless now we know that there is in effect selective harvesting or there is a retention rate there. But my understanding is that VicForests is required to put back into those small coupes the same trees that were taken out in the first place, so it would be interesting to see where you are referencing those particular coupes. You maybe would be able to take that on notice and provide that to the committee, because you are making some serious allegations, so it would be good to be able to ascertain the local specific areas or coupes that you are relating to. I am also interested—I thought you referenced bulldozing, and I just wanted to understand what you meant by that.

**Ms REDWOOD:** Chainsaws and bulldozing are the two tools that are usually used in logging. What is chainsawed down is then bulldozed out of the way. The ground is churned up. There is a lot of bulldozer movement. It is not all done with helicopters. They do need the heavy machinery on the ground.

**Ms BATH:** Right. So are you saying that there is anything that is being done that is not already in the regulations? Are you identifying that, or are you just creating a conversation around it?

**Ms REDWOOD:** There have been a lot of things that VicForests have done that are not within the regulations. It has been documented. I think *Lawless Logging* was a document that was put out. Documents that detailed all of these reports have been put in to the government. There is endless evidence of that.

**Ms BATH:** But the OCR has not found anything, Ms Redwood. The OCR is charged with making sure that all regulations are adhered to, so if you are making those allegations that should be at the hands of the OCR and various DELWP entities to have oversight.

**Ms REDWOOD:** Yes, we have. Other people have made complaints to the OCR. We recently also put in a complaint to the OCR because we were not getting any information from another source, and that took weeks and weeks to get a simple answer. We have had to go to the Ombudsman in the end. The OCR seems for a lot of people to be a bit of a brick wall, so we do not all have the confidence that you would like us to have, I think.

**Ms BATH:** Or they are actually doing their job. That is the alternate position.

**Ms REDWOOD:** Yes, well, that is debatable.

**Ms BATH:** Thanks, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Ms Bath. Mrs McArthur, a question?

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Thank you, Chair. Ms Redwood, I am interested in your organisation, Environment East Gippsland. Can you tell us when it was formed and how many members you have? Are you a registered not-for-profit organisation? Where do you get funding? Tell me about its level of accountability and transparency—your last AGM? Do you submit annual reports?

**Ms REDWOOD:** Yes, all there. We are all above board. We are accountable. It is all on our website. We started in the early 1980s as another group name. It was called Concerned Residents of East Gippsland. We changed that name to reflect more clearly what we were doing. We are incorporated. We are registered for tax deductibility and donations. We have an executive. We have AGMs; we put in reports. Anything else you would like to know? Our membership—we have about 350 members. We have about 1000 on our list that receive our information, our e-bulletins, and our Facebook page has about 11 000 or 12 000 followers. Anything else?

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Ms Redwood, where would you say the majority of your funding comes from?

**Ms REDWOOD:** Donations.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** From individuals, Ms Redwood?

**Ms REDWOOD:** Yes.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Not organisations?

**Ms REDWOOD:** No.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Now, you mentioned a Facebook page. Now, I have seen some of the Facebook material. You seem to be applauding a fire that was burning down a timber mill.

**Ms REDWOOD:** Is this relevant to species decline?

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Yes, it is, because you are a protester; we know that.

**Ms REDWOOD:** I am not a protester; I have never protested—please, for the record.

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, Mrs McArthur. Could we just have a question for the witness that is based on some of the evidence?

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Yes. How many jobs were lost in that fire that burnt down a timber mill and that you applauded on social media?

**Dr RATNAM:** On a point of order, Chair, I am not sure this is relevant to the terms of reference of the inquiry.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** It goes to the credibility of the witness, thank you, Dr Ratnam.

**The CHAIR:** If we could just have a question for the witness that is relevant to the terms of reference but also some of the evidence that has been given today—I understand you might have an interest in Ms Redwood’s organisation and the like, but if you could please move on with your line of questioning to something that is particularly more relevant, that would be appreciated.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Well, it is very relevant if you want to close down the timber industry, which I think Ms Redwood is suggesting would be the appropriate way to handle ecosystem preservation. I am just going to her public comments about applauding fires burning down facilities, and I am just wondering if she is familiar with how many jobs were lost in that situation.

**The CHAIR:** Well, I am not sure that is actually relevant to the terms of reference though. I understand you might have concerns about public statements, but again, can we get a question that is particularly relevant to the terms of reference, Mrs McArthur?

**Mrs McARTHUR:** If we have no logging in Victoria, are you comfortable with the fact that we might import timbers from other rainforest areas in countries that are less compliant with our ecological aspirations?

**Ms REDWOOD:** I think this is a misunderstanding by a lot of people: that if we did not log our own forests—and I must say that you could put a clear-felling in Victoria next to a clear-felling in Malaysia and you would not be able to tell the difference—does not mean that it would be replaced with overseas, illegally logged rainforest timbers. It would be replaced by pine, because that takes about 85 per cent of our current use of building timbers, which is plantation based now. It just needs to have that extra push along and I think there would be the same amount of jobs, the same amount of supply. We would not have to import timber from overseas. There is only a very tiny percentage of timber used in Australia now that comes from overseas sources.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Well, Ms Redwood, you would have to accept that softwood does not replace hardwood.

**Ms REDWOOD:** I did not say pine plantations—plantations per se, and that includes hardwood plantations. You might not be able to make a floorboard from a 500-year-old tree—

**Mrs McARTHUR:** You did say pine.

**Ms REDWOOD:** Well, pine is used in a lot of applications now. We do have hardwood plantations. They can be used for supplying Australian Paper with its resource; they just have to come from western Victoria. We can sell our native forests that can sail halfway around the world to Japan and Taiwan and China and that seems to be economic. I do not know why we cannot just use the blue gum plantations from western Victoria to supply the needs of industry.

**The CHAIR:** Mrs McArthur, have you got any other questions before we move on?

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** I have not had one yet, and I am the Chair.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Well, you go ahead.

**The CHAIR:** No, no. You finish up on your line of questioning and then I will have the last comment.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** So let us talk about the blue gum plantations of western Victoria. Most of that area has actually not proved suitable for growing blue gums. It has also taken away very valuable productive farmland, and it creates its own biodiversity problems. And we have learned earlier—today, I think it was—the amount of acreage that would be required if we were to plant out the required amount of land into eucalypt plantations; it



would be extraordinary. But, you know, such a very small percentage of our land is used for logging. So you are happy with the agricultural land being used for timber plantations?

**Ms REDWOOD:** Timber plantations are a crop. It is an agricultural crop, just as cabbages or wheat or anything else is. Is how they are managed that is the problem. And no, it is not just a tiny percent of the forest that is logged; it is the absolute jewels in the crown that are being targeted by industry, as I explained. So I do not think you can compare one with the other.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** You might want to talk about that with actual farmers.

**The CHAIR:** All right. Thanks, Mrs McArthur. Ms Redwood, it is Sonja here. I will just ask a question if I can, just referring to your submission. And I just want to thank you for your work that you have been doing in your local community as well and the volunteer work that you have done. But I wonder: do you have any professional qualifications in this area? I mean, you obviously have extensive experience as a campaigner of 40 years or so, but do you have any formal qualifications or training as an ecologist or a scientist or any of those sorts of things?

**Ms REDWOOD:** No tertiary education, no. But I have a lot of friends that are scientists and biologists, and I suppose I have absorbed a lot of their knowledge through osmosis—

**The CHAIR:** Sure, thank you.

**Ms REDWOOD:** and just being out with them.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. There seems to be an interesting theme that is running through this inquiry where we do hear individuals talking about their disappointment with various government departments and perhaps their view of the actions of some government departments but it does not necessarily align with what we are being presented in evidence. For example, the conservation regulator is one organisation you mentioned, but I am aware that it is quite active in terms of prosecutions and the monitoring of some coupes and those sorts of things. I am just wondering why you seem to have a different overview about them being sort of active in this space, because quite clearly they have done quite a lot of work. They have also done forest protection surveys and got that program going. So I am just wondering if you are aware of those things, and I am also wondering whether you are aware of the *Biodiversity 2037* plan. Are you aware of any of those things at all?

**Ms REDWOOD:** I am aware of some of those things, yes. I am also aware of, I think it was, an FOI that was done to ask how many reports they had had and how many prosecutions there were, and there were an awful lot more reports and evidence of what they reported as illegal logging than what was actually acted on. I think mostly they just get a smack on the wrist.

**The CHAIR:** But there is a big gap, though, because obviously there is a legal threshold that needs to be met to have a successful prosecution. So I do not know that we can necessarily make an assumption about the effectiveness of an organisation based on that. So I am just challenging, I guess, your view of some of these organisations. All of us might have particular personal views about the effectiveness of various things, but again an inquiry like this will have a great degree of difficulty getting into the weeds of both sides of those arguments. So I am just concerned, because some of the evidence that we have been seeing is kind of contrary to what your views might present. So I am just interested in why. And that is why I asked the question around whether you are aware of the forest protection survey program that has been conducted, whether you are aware of the successful prosecutions of the conservation regulator and whether you are aware of the work that DELWP is doing on *Biodiversity 2037*. So it seems you said that you have some awareness but not an in-depth awareness.

**Ms REDWOOD:** I am aware of the FPSP, which is great. There needs to be more done on that, I think. There needs to be a lot more staff in there. I am hearing that they are not able to cope with the level of work that comes into them. *Biodiversity 2037* is not showing up on the ground, even if there are supposed to be things done there. It needs to be more than lip-service. I do not know whether it is just not visible.

**The CHAIR:** Well, we have had expert evidence presented that said it has been quite groundbreaking and welcomed by the scientific community as well. It is an overarching framework, and there is a lot more work to be done in that regard. But I just also wonder about your interaction with or views about our First Nations

people and some of the evidence that they have presented to the inquiry on their views about managing the landscape, and I am wondering whether your organisation integrates with First Nations peoples particularly as well. Have you got a view about that?

**Ms REDWOOD:** Yes. It is a tricky area to get involved with. Our organisation does not want to use Indigenous people for our own uses. If Indigenous people are happy to go and campaign for forests or changing fire regimes et cetera, that is fantastic. We will support them there. But we do not work immediately with Indigenous people of the local area, although we do know them and we do speak to them. But we are not working side by side, I suppose, all the time with them.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. But you do not sort of talk to them about their knowledge about what might be best for forests or the flora or fauna within the forests—do you talk with them about that, or not?

**Ms REDWOOD:** There are certain people that we talk with, yes—Marj Thorpe, Lidia Thorpe. There are quite a few people that we do share a lot in common with and talk about how they see the forests. We share our opinion with them, but we are not working as a unit, I suppose.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. So you do not incorporate any of their views into perhaps how you or your organisation might form your viewpoints around these things—you do not necessarily take account of their views. Is that what you are saying?

**Ms REDWOOD:** No. We do, and in fact we do share a lot. But even within the Indigenous community there is also diversity of opinion. Wayne Thorpe, for instance, has very interesting observations on fire and the myth of Aboriginal fire management evidence. There is also another linguist, Joel Wright, who has got very good information on his history, and he is an Indigenous elder. There is such diversity within the Indigenous communities, too, that—

**The CHAIR:** Yes, I am aware of the diversity, but my question was more about your organisation and your interaction with the Indigenous First Nations peoples, who are the traditional custodians of the land and have millennia of experience with forest and flora and fauna, so I thought it was important to explore that point.

But look, we are just about out of time, so, Jill, I just want to thank you very much for your contribution and evidence that you have given to the hearing today.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Could I just ask something, Chair, just before you end?

**The CHAIR:** Perhaps you can ask it on notice, Mrs McArthur, because we have got the next witness—

**Mrs McARTHUR:** No, it is of you, Chair. I am just wondering if the Lidia Thorpe that has been referred to would be the same Lidia Thorpe who I understand is a senator?

**The CHAIR:** Well, I would say that is the case, yes.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Okay. Thank you. The Greens senator—yes, right. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. Thanks again, Ms Redwood.

**Ms REDWOOD:** Thank you.

**Witness withdrew.**