

Protectors of Public Lands Victoria Inc.

The Chair
Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Parliament House
Melbourne 3002

19 September 2008

Dear Sir,

Inquiry into Melbourne's Future Water Supply

I make this submission as President of Protectors of Public Lands Inc, a coalition of over 80 environment, heritage and community groups dedicated to protecting and conserving lands and historic sites in the public domain. (Many groups are large coalitions in their own right.)

The Terms of Reference of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee's present inquiry include:

the relative merits of supplementing Melbourne's water supply by some or all of the following means:

1. *further water savings that can be achieved by increased conservation and efficiency efforts;*
- ...
6. *any other optional water source which appears to the Committee to be appropriate.*

Melbourne's water supply is seriously compromised by the continued logging in Melbourne's water catchments. At a time of water shortage, there is no justification for this continuing.

Once, our water catchments were sacrosanct – and the public are still excluded. However, for the past 30 years, loggers have been permitted into our water catchments.

Around 12% of Melbourne's total forest catchment is available for logging. 340 hectares can be harvested each year – approximately 170 MCGs.

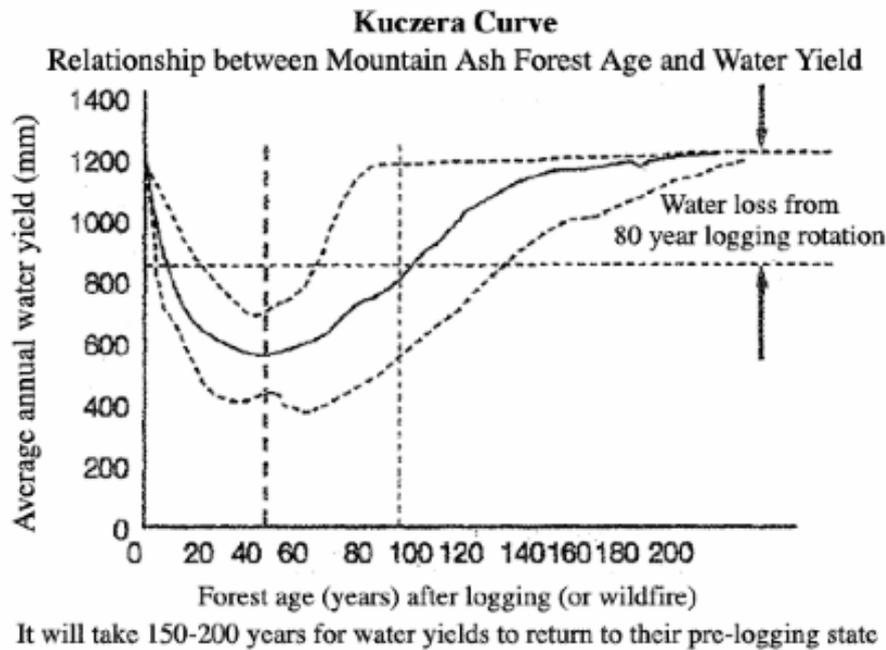
Clearfelling occurs in five catchments which supply approximately 40% of Melbourne's water needs.

The logging of native forest has a marked and well-documented impact on the water yield from the forest logged. As new growth establishes itself on the logged landscape, the new plants transpire much more water, and this reduces yield from the logged area. Yield drops to about 50 % of what it was, and it takes up to 200 years for the water yield to reach its former levels. In the meantime enormous quantities of water are lost.

As Vertessy, Watson and O'Sullivan (all attached to the Cooperative Research Centre for Catchment Hydrology in Canberra, but also respectively from the CSIRO, California State University and Monash University) express it in their 2001 study:

There is a well-documented empirical relationship between stand age and water yield for mountain ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*) forested catchments in the Central Highlands of Victoria, Australia. Catchments covered with old-growth stands of mountain ash yield almost twice the amount of water annually as those covered with re-growth stands aged 25 years.

Set out below is the well-known Kuczera curve which sets out the position graphically.



In the Thompson catchment alone, it has been estimated that ending logging would save some 20 gigalitres of water annually – for up to 200 years. If other catchments are added, this amount probably doubles.

Twelve Melbourne councils have now passed motions calling for logging of our catchments to stop.

There is no sound policy reason for continuing to log Melbourne's water catchments: it makes neither economic nor environmental sense.

The logging of Melbourne's water catchments should end immediately. No consideration should have been given to the north south pipeline or the desalination plant while we continue to compromise the primary source of Melbourne's water.

The halting of logging in our catchments falls within paragraphs 1 and 6 of the committee's terms of reference. We urge the committee to recommend it.

I hope that the Committee could grant me a hearing so that I can expand on my arguments. I can be reached on 9600 1422 or 0411020967.

Yours faithfully,

Brian Walters SC
President, Protectors of Public Lands Victoria Inc