



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

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Inquiry: Inquiry into ecosystem decline in Victoria

Hearing Date: 10 March 2021

Additional Question[s]

Directed to: Monique Dawson, VicForests

**1. Ms BATH – by email**

**Question asked.**

Can VicForests identify the harvest approach practices and obligations used to assess state managed forests for example Wombat State Forests to avoid negatively impacting on species such as greater glider and Leadbeater possum?

**Response:**

In mid-2019, VicForests started variable retention harvesting, which retains a significant number of trees in each coupe for current and future habitat for native species. All coupes are assessed for habitat values - that is, native species and in particular threatened species, including aquatic species. We then plan for retention, building in threatened species observations. This approach protects hollow bearing trees, which are home to many species and connects habitat patches, allowing species to move between areas in the forest.

Prior to harvesting, every single coupe is surveyed to ensure they meet all timber harvesting and biodiversity requirements under Victoria's strict environmental regulatory system. These requirements include the Code of Practice for Timber Production 2014 and the associated Management Standards and Procedures for timber harvesting operations in Victoria's State forests 2014, the Procedure for Identifying Old Growth Forest in Victoria, Flora and Fauna Guarantee Action Statement and other regulations. They are then overlaid with our harvesting and regeneration management and High Conservation Values practices focused on hollow bearing tree and habitat retention. VicForests Harvesting and Regeneration Management Systems is attached.

Operations in the Wombat State Forests are thinning operations for firewood. This system provides for the retained trees to have greater access to water, nutrients and sunlight and are able to grow larger more quickly.



## 2. Ms BATH – by email

### Question asked.

Does Vicforests have any additional scientific information in relation to Leadbeater possum populations and or greater glider numbers across state managed tenures that would assist the committee?

### Response:

Historical information indicates that between 1867 and 1909, just 5 Leadbeater's possums were recorded. Up until 2013, that number increased to the mid 280's. At present, there are 1864 Leadbeater's possum records in the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas (VBA), which is a database managed by the Victorian Government containing species observations and survey effort. Many of the sites record the presence of more than one animal, with the total count in the VBA being 2386 (April 2021 publication date). VicForests maintains its own register of species detections which is more current than the VBA and contains 1988 verified records in State Forests since 2014 and 1400 absence records. This is critical to understanding where the species can be found, and also the habitat that they do not favour. VicForests is using LiDAR data and machine learning algorithms coupled with known presence and absence records to model the preferred habitat of the Leadbeater's possum. VicForests is currently working on modelling projected population counts with raw results at this point indicating population counts well above 10,000 individuals. VicForests has created 1090 timber harvesting exclusion zones around detection sites with an area of 12.5 hectares each. Each exclusion zone represents a colony of possums consisting of typically 2-12 individuals.