

RUBICON –SNOBS CREEK RECREATIONAL FOREST RESERVE INC.



WATER = FOREST = LIFE

Submission to Parliamentary Committee on Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

Subject: Deforestation Logging within the Snobs Creek Water Catchment and its direct threat to the Snobs Creek Fish Hatchery

Introductory Remarks:

The Snobs Creek Water Catchment (north central Victoria) is of unique ecological value in that it is a closed, geographically discrete and fragile catchment that relies upon a combination of numerous groundwater and surface water springs that supply clean, filtered, pristine, low temperature water to the creek on a year-round basis.

The Snobs Creek hatchery was carefully chosen in the 1940's directly as a result of these value: The hatchery has for 75 years, been the sole provider of both introduced and native fish to over 200 rivers, lakes and impoundments across Victoria which supports a huge recreational fishing industry to the tune of \$2.6 Billion annually. Snobs Creek is -as it always has been - the backbone of this industry.

The facility remains the only major agricultural industry that draws its water from Snobs Creek.

The Problem:

1. We believe that the Victorian Government and their agencies have failed to have applied the Precautionary Principle in respect to past, present and planned Clear-fell Logging operations within the Catchment. It is our believe that the said parties, have failed to have demonstrated the scientific evidence that the past, present and planned operations within the Snobs Creek Catchment will not adversely affect both the riverine health in Snobs Creek and impact fish production at the facility.
2. We also believe that these stakeholders have failed to provide the scientific evidence that the increased sedimentation and nutrient load in Snobs Creek as a result of the logging operations, will not have a major impact on fish sustainability in Snobs Creek and also downstream in the Goulburn River.

Immediate Concerns:

Clear fell logging a catchment directly leads to:

- increase in turbidity & suspended solids (A measurement of 5-10NTU's is the norm for successful breeding of fish. Since April 2020 readings have been averaging from 2 to 3 times this figure. On day in Aug, readings were 9 times the 10NTU limit).
 - Long term reduction in flows
 - Increase in stream temperatures
 - Loss of water volume and yield
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- Under the current Timber Release Plan in addition to the three coupes that have already been logged, directly adjacent to Snobs Creek Road, another 20+ coupes are planned that are in close proximity of the creek. These logged coupes have no buffer zones (required by VicForest Code of Practice) and during any rain event in the valley, result in huge sedimentation loads flushing directly into the creek.

- We have a low confidence in DELWP's pre-harvest surveys of flora and fauna species within the Rubicon State Forest. Most of these studies come from historical desktop surveys and not current in the field surveys. Our concerns here are validated by recent Federal Court injunctions placed on VicForest's operations in 66 areas of threatened species habitat within the Central Highlands.
- We believe that there is more than compelling evidence from coupes that have been extensively logged in the Rubicon State Forest adjacent to the Snobs Creek valley, that regeneration of the forest has failed, due to the silting up and diversion of watercourses as a direct result of forestry operations. This deforestation forestry has resulted in large scale soil disturbance, erosion and infestation of weeds into once a dense biodiverse forest.

Long Term Concerns:

- Threat to the future production capacity of Snobs Creek Fish Hatchery and the future of inland Recreational Fishing across Victoria.
- A 2017 SEEA based study shows the economic value of the water in *all* of Melbourne's catchments was more than 25 times the economic value of the timber, woodchips and pulp produced from all Victoria's native forests.
- We ask all committee members of this parliamentary inquiry to reflect for a moment on the trade-off between the different uses to which land can be put. Use it to produce water supply, and it's very valuable. Use it to produce water supply *and* native timber however and you reduce the value of the water by far more than the chips and pulp are worth. Here in the Murrindindi Shire 88% of the trees coming out of our forests are wood chipped, pulped and used in products such as cardboard boxes and paper!
- In a [Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry](#) into VicForest's operations held in 2017, it was revealed that in the period 2013/14, the value -added activity for logging in the Central Highlands Region was \$29 per hectare whereas the combined return per hectare for the industries of Tourism, Water and Agriculture was \$5043.00
- Loggings negative effect on Future Tourism and Agricultural opportunity
The industry value add for tourism, water and agriculture, are of large benefit to our region, while logging is of comparatively small benefit. The economies of Water, Tourism and Agriculture are complementary of each other. Logging to the contrary, is exclusive of these other benefits and in fact corrodes, degrades and diminishes these other environmental, economic and social benefits.

Concluding Remarks:

Science informs us that far fewer environmental impacts arise from the sourcing of timber in well-managed plantation systems. Economics echoes the many benefits of plantation harvesting over clear-felling.

The research by Australian and international climate, water and forest scientists tells us that the urgency to protect our local ecosystems is NOW. We know how ecosystems function, and why they cease to function. Our capacity to act in a timely and impactful way on forest protection, has not yet been compromised to the point of impotence. Yet to ignore this patently foreseeable threat is to risk placing ourselves in the thrall of a peril that may suddenly overwhelm us.

Surely this fact has been brought home to us all over the past year where the application of the scientific principle has metaphorically speaking, 'slayed the (COVID) dragon'.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our submission to your committee into ecosystem decline in Victoria.

Further, we would welcome the opportunity to talk to it at your upcoming regional meeting in Shepparton later this month

Rod Falconer & Geoff Hall




 <https://rubiconsnobsreserve.org/>