The Hon Scott Morrison MP Martin Curtis

Prime Minister 20 D’Arcy Ave

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Dear Mr Morrison

I write to draw your attention to growing community concern about government inaction and lack of clear policy around the Great Forest of the Victorian Central Highlands.

As joint signatories to the Central Highlands Regional Forest Agreement (varied in 2020 to extend to 2030) both the Federal and Victorian governments have responsibility for the management of the 735,655 hectares of forest in the area.

Virtually all the water used by the 5 million people who live in Melbourne and many people north of the Great Dividing Range comes from the forests of the Central Highlands.

These forests have been logged for more than 150 years, causing major damage to ecosystems, threatening biodiversity, and reducing their capacity to generate water and store carbon. Despite this they support a remarkable diversity of wildlife including 70 species of birds and a rich assembly of possums and gliders.

Ecosystem accounting reveals that the economic contribution of agriculture, water supply, tourism, carbon sequestration and plantation timber production substantially outweighs that of native timber production in the Central Highlands. (Threatened Species Recovery Hub: *Ecosystem Accounts in the Victorian Central Highlands 2017*).

It is time to extend greater protection to the Great Forest of the Central Highlands by:

* Taking the steps necessary to proclaim a national park covering the Great Forest;
* Investing in infrastructure and tourism to create jobs and support regional communities;
* Ceasing native forest logging by 2024, allowing old growth forests to expand and reduce the fire risks associated with young logged and regenerated forest stands;
* Moving to an entirely plantation-based timber industry;
* Employing former logging contractors as elite firefighters and involving First Nations people in forest management.

The lack of access to our forests and parks due to COVID-19 restrictions on travel has reminded many people how important natural places are for physical and mental well-being. For the sake of the well-being of the community, the security of water supplies and the conservation of a significant, bio-diverse wilderness area, please act on the opportunity to enhance protection of the Great Forest.

Sincerely

Martin Curtis