

# Dismay as VicForests allows logging of unburnt forest in East Gippsland for TAFE training

ABC Gippsland / By Amber Irving-Guthrie

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A timber training unit logging in the Colquhoun Forest in December, 2020. (Supplied)

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Environmentalists say a logging school is operating in bushfire-damaged forests in East Gippsland that should be protected.

About half of East Gippsland forests marked for logging burnt during last summer's bushfires.

Publicly-owned forest agency VicForests has allowed an unburnt coupe at Nowa Nowa, four hours east of Melbourne, to be logged by Gippsland TAFE students for training.

Logging unburnt coupes is contentious in East Gippsland, where few remain.

But environmentalists say they were shocked to discover a logging harvester and a sign that read "Timber training unit" at the site in the Colquhoun State Forest.

Louise Crisp from Gippsland Environment Group said the region could not afford to lose more threatened species habitat.

"How can they justify logging in unburnt coupes at all? They are driving species to extinction," she said.

"There's plenty of silvertop plantation coupes through the Colquhoun State Forest that has very low habitat value.

"TAFE students could be learning to fell a tree in a [plantation] forest that they have already massively degraded."

But Deon Kriek from VicForests said the Lior coupe at Nowa Nowa was needed to train students in chainsaw handling as well as operating forest machinery.

"The plantations [that do exist] in the area aren't approved for harvesting," he said.

"To place untrained people in a burnt coupe would place them in a very dangerous situation."



TAFE Gippsland's timber training area in the Colquhoun Forest in East Gippsland. (Supplied)

## Minister's claims questioned

Victorian Agriculture Minister Jaclyn Symes told ABC Gippsland [only salvage logging of burnt forests was taking place](#) in East Gippsland.

"I can assure you that there is no harvesting in East Gippsland occurring at the moment, apart from salvage logging," she said.

But Tom Crook, from the East Gippsland Conservation Management Network, said Ms Syme's statement was contradictory.

"To say that there will be no unburnt areas logged within the fire footprint makes little sense, considering the fire footprint is essentially a map of the burnt areas of East Gippsland," he said.

"It would be fair to say the minister's claims give the impression that logging is less widespread than it is.

"This approach is unfortunately consistent with the way information around logging is often communicated with the public, where sleight of hand is common, information is used selectively and science is often ignored."

The coupe at Nowa Nowa is the second unburnt coupe allocated for TAFE training this year and the latest in a handful of unburnt coupes logged in recent months.



Nowa Nowa forest. (By Kellie Lazzaro)

## Fears for animals after fires

Elfian Schieren, a resident of W Tree, a high country hamlet about 80 kilometres north-east of Bairnsdale, said she had witnessed logging near her property in recent weeks.

"I've personally witnessed and documented logging at Cape Conran, which is a known long-footed potoroo habitat, a federally listed threatened species," she said.

"There is also unburnt masked owl habitat on Boundary Road and glider habitat near the Lakes Colquhoun Road in the Colquhoun State Forest that has been logged."

VicForests said its logging had had minimal impact on threatened species.

"We have a complex prioritisation process we use to identify areas for harvesting that will have minimal impact to threatened species," it said in a statement.

"These coupes would have had all of the appropriate surveys by VicForests."

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Mr Crook said the surveys were not thorough enough and needed reviewing.

"The State Government's own surveys confirm that threatened species are in the coupes they are logging at Colquhoun State Forest, just not in the numbers required by the laws to protect them," he said.

"These numbers were decided on before the fires and haven't been reviewed since.

"It's ironic and somewhat frustrating that on one hand the Government is spending millions trying to understand and remediate the impacts of the fires, but on the other is allowing logging to occur before they have counted the trees or completed the regional forest agreement assessments with the Federal Government."

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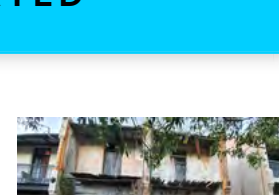
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