

Home > News > Local News

## “It’s like killing us off”

17 June 2020 in Local News



**Lidia Thorpe spent her formative years growing up in East Gippsland before moving to Melbourne for work but takes every opportunity she can to get back to country.**

As a proud Gunaikurnai woman, the bush is an important part of her emotional and spiritual being.

“I come out of Melbourne to come and heal on my country because, you know, I was tired,” Ms Thorpe explained as she returned to East Gippsland last week following the easing of COVID-19 restrictions.

The Lakes Post spoke to Ms Thorpe in the Colquhoun State Forest.

“I’m tired of the injustice so I come out here to seek comfort. We heal from our country and we’ve maintained a connection to our country for thousands of thousands of generations, so when you come to country you feel it. You feel it in your spirit and your heart,” Ms Thorpe said.

Ms Thorpe sat on the floor of the forest having just walked into a logging coupe on the Lakes Colquhoun Road where trees have been cut down.

The coupe, behind Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC), is a training ground for Gippsland TAFE.

GLaWAC has no management responsibilities pertaining to the land.

A variety of trees are being felled for training purposes, including yellow stringybark, silvertop, applebox and some red stringybark. The ironbark, which is protected, is being left.

Those who argue in logging’s favor, say it’s sustainable as these trees grow back quickly.

Ms Thorpe says it takes 15 years for them to regenerate, a time period she believes is far too long.

“It breaks my heart to see this, it really does,” she said.

“There are greater gliders here and if we don’t make a stand to save them, then they’ll be gone. When a totem dies, a part of us dies.

“We can’t maintain our survival as the First People of these lands if our country and everything that belongs to the country is being killed off. It’s like killing us off.

“They mean everything to us, they’re part of our survival,” Ms Thorpe said.

“We learn from the animals, we learn how they behave, we learn from how they dance. Their dances are our dances. So, we are connected to our totems in a way that it’s a family member, it’s not just an animal, and we have a responsibility to care for that.

“It’s important that our children, all children, have a connection to this country and an understanding of why it’s important that we protect it.”

“It’s not just about being a blackfella, I want to teach that to everyone. I want all of our community to be a part of that learning and a part of that connection because that’s what can bring us together.”

Ms Thorpe isn’t opposed full stop to logging. Her own family was involved in the industry with her grandfather a logger in East Gippsland.

“They were the jobs of the day, they fed our family, but they’re not the jobs of today,” she said.

“We have to look at it holistically and still maintain a safe future for the logging industry that is sustainable and environmentally sound,” Ms Thorpe said.

She would like to see a halt to all logging practices until proper and reasonable discussions are had with Traditional Owners.

The former member for Northcote from 2017 to 2018, Ms Thorpe has nominated to represent the Greens in Victoria at the next Federal election. If successful she would be the Greens first Aboriginal federal representative.

“We as the First People belonging to this country have never given consent for the destruction and decimation of our land,” Ms Thorpe said.

“Our mental health and well-being relies on the country to be alive. When it continues to be decimated by governments, it’s also making us sick.

“The government (State) needs to allow conversation with Traditional Owners who are trying to protect country, not just the registered Aboriginal parties. They need to open the room up and we need have all the experts in the room. We have experts who tell us there are gliders in there. We’ve got experts that say this type of logging is not good, so let’s get them all in the room.

“Let’s have a week long respectful conversation on country where we bring it all together and we come out of that with a way forward that people can be happy with. If we have to compromise then we have to compromise, but so do they.”

Ms Thorpe believes logging needs to be negotiated.

“Maybe logging can continue where it looks like there aren’t endangered species or its not going to affect the ecosystem around it as much as somewhere else,” she said.

Ms Thorpe would like to see a traffic light system arrangement where a green light allows logging, red indicates a no go zone and amber requires the parties to come together around the table to discuss it.

“I’ve been saying that for a while. I’ve said that to GLaWAC, but they need to open the doors to Traditional Owners,” she said.

Ms Thorpe last year contacted GLaWAC to meet with them about logging practices in East Gippsland and attended a meeting with the Our Country board subcommittee.

In a statement, GLaWAC says it is “actively engaged with providing commentary into the current forest management strategies and is working hard to get increased rights for Traditional Owners to influence land management policies in the future”.

A member of the Victorian Greens, Ms Thorpe has questioned the State Government’s financial commitment to the logging industry.

“The government is propping up the logging industry,” she said.

“It’s actually costing us more money by propping up the logging industry.”

In November last year, the State Government announced a 30-year plan to support Victoria’s forestry industry as it moves away from using native timber.

As part of the plan, \$120 million will be set aside to ensure the industry is fully supported.

VicForests will extend existing timber supply agreements until 2024, after which native timber supply will be stepped down before logging in all native forests across Victoria ends in 2030.

Ms Thorpe points to a report that the Victorian Greens asked the Parliamentary Budget Office to calculate if logging of native forests ceased immediately rather than in 10 years.

The PBO report reportedly estimated tens of millions of dollars could be saved.

“That’s taxpayers money that could be saved if logging ended today, instead of in 10 years,” Ms Thorpe said.

“So, if we keep it going for another 10 years, like the government has said, extend it until then, then that’s how much it’s costing the taxpayer, not to mention the cost to country and the environment.

“It doesn’t make economic sense to continue logging, but it certainly makes economic sense to transition to a sustainable industry,” Ms Thorpe said.

“Let’s look at ways that we can all agree on.”

Critics of the report say it doesn’t calculate the cost to regional communities, like East Gippsland, where the timber industry provides a conduit to many jobs.

Member for Gippsland East, Tim Bull, says the future of Orbost, Heyfield and other communities in East Gippsland are reliant on the timber industry and “we cannot afford to lose these jobs or this sustainable industry in our region”.

Leonard Fenning, from Fennings Bairnsdale, has been in the timber industry for decades.

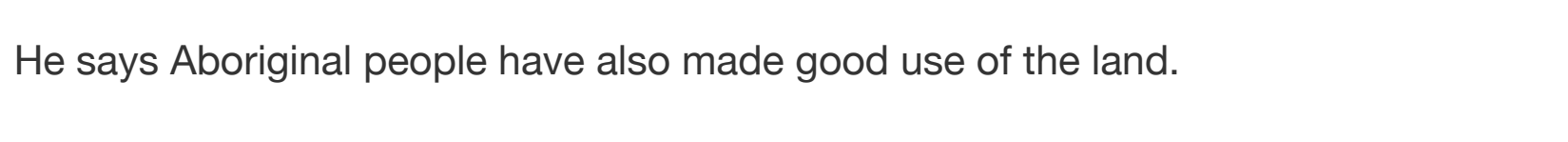
He says Aboriginal people have also made good use of the land.

“They ate the fish and the yams. They cut down the trees and they used the bark. They use the land too,” he said.

“We have the best timber resources and it just frustrates me that we can’t look after something and use it. We want regeneration of the area too.”





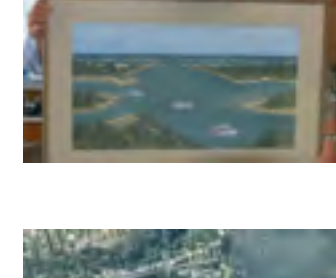
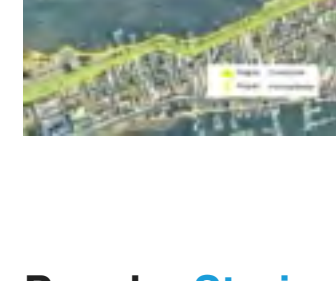
VicForests was contacted for comment, however hadn’t responded by time of going to press yesterday.

**IMAGE: Lidia Thorpe spent 13 years in East Gippsland and as an Aboriginal woman is passionate about preserving its native forests. K309-6339**


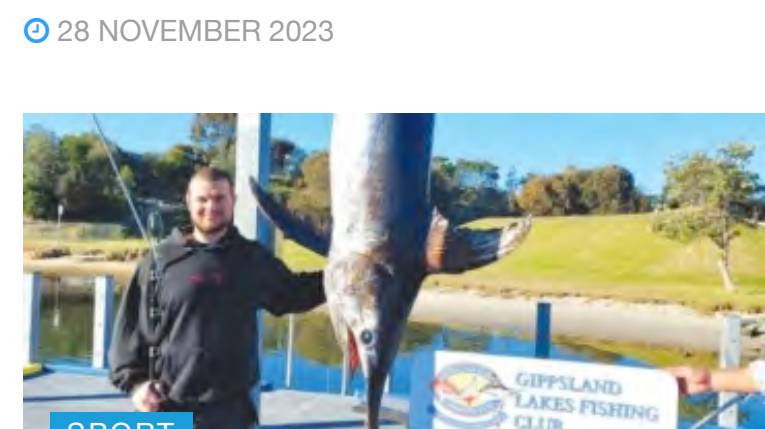
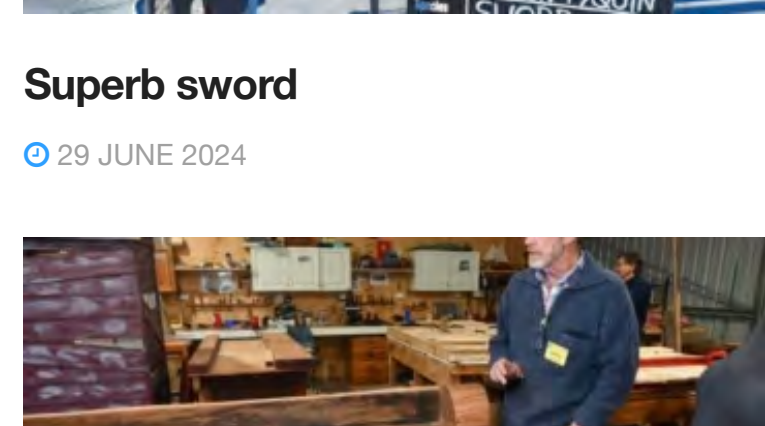
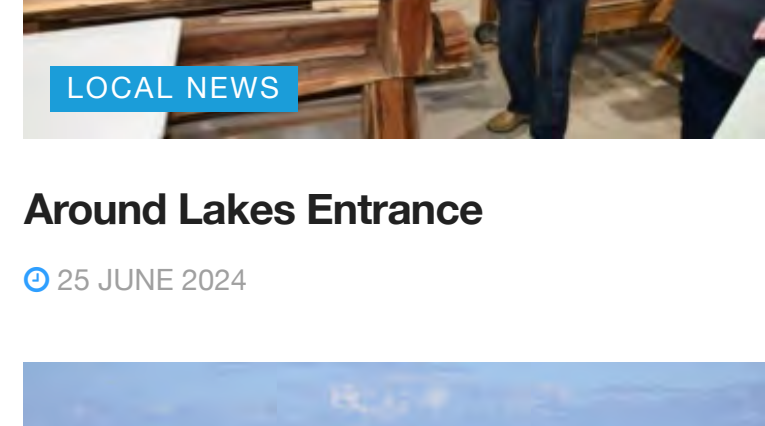


Previous Post **The Blakemans begin their rebuild** Next Post **Light at the end of the tunnel**

### Trending

-  **Superb sword**  
29 JUNE 2024
-  **Stopping human and wildlife crime**  
1 JULY 2024
-  **Boatshed gets a freshen up**  
28 NOVEMBER 2023
-  **Around Lakes Entrance**  
25 JUNE 2024
-  **Peel's 100th birthday**  
22 DECEMBER 2020
-  **Marine Parade upgrade**  
29 JUNE 2024

### Popular Stories

-  **Boatshed gets a freshen up**  
28 NOVEMBER 2023
-  **Superb sword**  
29 JUNE 2024
-  **Around Lakes Entrance**  
25 JUNE 2024
-  **Book brings Club Hotel back**  
14 AUGUST 2019



**Business Cards**  
Turn every introduction into a great impression.  
Prices starting from \$75.  
Get in touch for a personalised quote from one of our friendly staff today.  
Ph: 5152 4141  
**Yeates**