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**MEDIA RELEASE**

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Wombat Forestcare welcomes the draft recommendations from the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council's (VEAC) Central West Investigation, released last week.

The recommendations include a new Wombat-Lerderderg National Park, and a new regional park located in two parts.

This is good news for the Wombat Forest's many threatened species, such as Powerful Owls and Greater Gliders. The Wombat Forest is an important refuge for many endangered and vulnerable flora and fauna species including the endemic Wombat Leafless Bossiaea (*Bossiaea wombata*). The only place on the planet where this plant is found is at a few locations in the Wombat Forest.

There are also two extremely important fungi species that are only known to occur in the Wombat Forest. The Earpick fungus (*Auriscalpium sp.*) is found at only one location.

The headwaters of six major rivers rise in the Wombat Forest: the Loddon, Campaspe and Coliban flowing north and the Lerderderg, Werribee and Moorabool flowing to the south. The VEAC report notes, "The draft recommendations for Wombat- Lerderderg National Park and Wombat Regional Park provide improved water supply security for the headwaters of several of western Victoria's most significant rivers."

The creation of a regional park around Trentham, Blackwood and Daylesford allows for a range of activities including bushwalking, dog walking and horse riding close to towns.

Wombat Forestcare members have been particularly concerned that without the protection of a 'Park' structure, there would be a return of industrial logging in the Wombat Forest. Under this proposal sawlog harvesting would not be permitted, with domestic firewood collection allowed in the new regional park.

The VEAC draft recommendations represent a great opportunity to protect one of the very special forested areas in central Victoria.

Wombat Forestcare is disappointed that the draft report failed to recommend greater protection for much of the Mt Cole area. Mt Cole is greatly loved by bushwalkers and naturalists and concerns have been raised regarding the recent intensive logging. The clear felling of these forests has the potential to impact the headwaters of the Wimmera River as well as rare flora and fauna.

The draft report is open for public comment until the 31st October, with final recommendations due in March 2019. The Victorian government will then decide whether it will accept all or some of the recommendations.

<http://www.veac.vic.gov.au/investigation/central-west-investigation>

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