

VICTORIA

Evolution and revolution in Victoria

With the cessation of native forest harvesting by the Government of Victoria in 2024, a number of challenges have arisen - including reimagining forest management in the absence of harvesting, expansion of plantations and changes to fire preparation and suppression. Land-use and tenure of the natural forests has been considered by the State Government, and Forestry Australia made a submission to the Great Outdoors Taskforce entitled 'Future use and management of Victoria's State Forests'. The submission called for a whole of landscape approach with active and adaptive forest management. A public petition supported by 40,208 signatures to the Legislative Council called on the Government not to create any new National Parks and keep state forests open for public access and traditional activities. A decision was made not to change land-tenure to create new National Parks across 1.8 million hectares of state forests. The Great Outdoors Taskforce remains focused on improving forest management. The Victorian Government is continuing the Gippsland Plantations Investment Program (GPIP), a \$120 million initiative to establish over 16 million commercial trees over the next decade by partnering with HVP Plantations. To further support plantation expansion, the Victorian Government has created the Trees on Farms program providing funding to assist with on-farm planning and decision-making, as well as grants to help with the purchase of seedlings, tree establishment and management.

Member highlights

The Victorian Committee supported the Ballarat Symposium '*Healthy and resilient forests for our future*' (29-31 October 2024) including field trips to look at silvicultural and fire ecology research in the Wombat State Forest, plantation management post-fire at Mt Cole, agroforestry (led by the Ballarat Region Tree Growers), history of the Victorian School of Forestry at Creswick, and new approaches to recreation and forest use.

Events

Considering the member's survey, regional (field trips) and Melbourne based face-to-face (pub) events maximise the opportunity for member participation. The Committee gratefully acknowledges the contribution of ideas and support from Victorian members to make these events happen:

- **Biodiversity Markets** – Integrating Commercial and Conservation Objectives: A pub night (19/09/2024) with David Bennett (PF Olsen) and Ben Boxshall (Wood4Good) explored managing biodiversity assets and getting the balance right; where biodiversity + carbon sequestration omits wood production is a missed opportunity.
- **Forest and Rural Fire** – What is happening on the other side of the world?: A pub night (5/12/2024) with Ruth Ryan AFSM FFA reflecting on recent experiences in Portugal, Saudi Arabia and the European Union. Ruth provided insights of how these relate to forest fire management in Australia.
- **Australian Forest and Wood Innovations (AFWI) Overview:** A pub night (27/03/2025) hosted the Executive Director of Australian Forest and Wood Innovations (AFWI), Dr Joseph Lawrence. Dr Patrick Baker (Head of the Melbourne University Centre) and Prof. Rod Keenan (Chair of the Research Advisory Committee) attended. AFWI is a 5 year Federal Government investment of \$100 M, but seek to connect with another \$100 M from other investors.
- **Farm forestry field day:** The Farmed Forests of the North-East (FFORNE) and Forestry Australia field day (2/05/2025) focused on farm forestry. The field trip explored plantation management techniques and product marketing with Clinton Tepper (Tree Storey).
- **State forests – Forests and Fire Programs:** A field trip led by Bill Paul (Senior Program Manager, Forest Health and Recreation – DEECA) was held in May (24/05/2025). It considered forest regeneration and seed collection following the closure of the native forest timber industry, as well as recreation and fuel management works. This provided a platform for considering challenges and opportunities that are broadly applicable to all State Forests across Victoria.
- **Optimism & Expansion; Forest Research Repositioning Australian Forestry:** A pub night (5/06/2025) with Mark Brown (Professor of Forestry Operations, Forest Research Institute) provided an overview of research at the University of Sunshine Coast; views of future forest research and collaborations with the sector and international partners.
- **Trees that work for timber, carbon and critters:** A field trip (7/06/2025) at Lancefield Tree Farm which explored timber, biodiversity and carbon with c.40 landholders and experienced tree growers braving cold, wind, and rain to join a walk and talk.



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Other initiatives

Other initiatives undertaken over the past 12 months include:

- Submissions: Preparation of background information for a submission to Great Outdoors Taskforce on the future use and management of Victoria's state forests.
- Linkages with legacy groups: The Committee has maintained a connection with the Australian Forest Grower legacy groups by attending and promoting functions.

The Committee

- The Victorian Branch operated under a Committee structure with roles assigned to members; secretariat and events. The Committee comprises Alex van der Meer Simo, Braden Jenkin, David Dore, Joanne Lewis and Sebastian Klein, with Pia Angelike (a new member). Monthly meetings were mostly online or linked to face-to-face events. The focus has been a pipeline of events balancing regional field trips and Melbourne-based pub nights.

Braden Jenkin

VIC Committee Chair



VIC Field Trip to Black Range, Central Highlands, in May 2025



David Bennett from PF Olsen speaking on biodiversity markets, at a Networking Night at The Last Jar in September 2024