



Friends of Mallacoota is a volunteer organisation with around 120 members. We aim to preserve the natural character of this coastal wilderness area in East Gippsland. In our actions, we strive to ensure that human activity is in harmony with the natural environment.

We do this through a range of programs that protect, monitor, educate and innovate. We speak for the environment on issues of development and liaise with relevant government bodies. Where appropriate, we consult locally affected residents. We are an inclusive organisation, with representatives spanning many decades. Many of our members are keepers of rare knowledge about the flora and fauna of our region.

1. Conservation and the Environment as Economic Values

It is important to see our East Gippsland forests as an intrinsic value to Victoria and its economy, not just as a resource for increasing recreational activities and to be monetised. Climate change and threatened species values are not given serious consideration in the Taskforce on-line survey. There is too much emphasis on economic opportunities and activity-based tourism rather than biodiversity protection.

Victoria is the most cleared and degraded State in the country. East Gippsland has very high forest values, amongst the most carbon dense on earth.

We therefore need to:

*Assess carbon density. This would be economically and environmentally significant for the whole state to help mitigate climate change.

* Continue to save millions of dollars by not logging (Vicforests were \$50 million dollars in debt when native hardwood logging finished in Victoria).

* Protect water sources for East Gippsland which support agriculture and tourism.

Friends of Mallacoota want greater protection for the Betka River Catchment (approximately 6000 hectares within Wingan State Forest) to guarantee the quality of our water supply now and for the future. This was earmarked for salvage logging after the 2020 fires. It can be protected by adding it to the adjoining Croajingolong National Park. The Betka catchment is home to one of the most endangered species of Bottlebrush in the state.

*Cater for the large number of visitors who value our parks and forests for passive recreation such as bushwalking and birdwatching.

* World Heritage Listing as an economic benefit (see below).

2. Forest Protection

* We need legally enshrined laws to protect against industrial logging and mining in native forests, and to protect biodiversity in perpetuity. This should be completed as soon as possible.

*Importance of addressing the impact of climate change on biodiversity and the important role that forests play in that.

*Conservation funding for management, restoration and preservation of high value forest communities. Many of our State Forests have been severely damaged by clear felling and need time and funding to recover. We need to exclude activities from environmentally sensitive ecosystems to protect endangered flora and fauna within these State Forests.

* Further opening of forests and trails to activities such as 4X4s, trailbikes, fishing, hunting, horse riding, mountain biking will inevitably lead to damage to ecosystems. Conservation Regulator Compliance needs more money and power.

*The VEAC assessment process should involve local knowledge regarding specific environment/biodiversity values. There are many experts in the natural sciences locally based to help collate relevant information. The decisions made about our forests should be based on scientific research, not just economic values. For example, the critically endangered Glossy Black Cockatoo requires extensive intact forests of Casuarinas. Large areas of this habitat are still regenerating in State Forests across East Gippsland after the 2020 fires.

*Dogs and horses should be banned from National and State Parks because of the damage they do to landscape, flora and fauna.

3. Funding

*Significantly Increase funding and staffing for conservation management, staff training, public education.

*Higher profile for Environment in the Ministry rather than included with tourism, sport and recreation.

4. World Heritage Assessment

East Gippsland has a continuity of natural ecosystems from alpine to coastal landscape where a third of Victoria's threatened plants and animals are found. Over 1000 species of native plants are found in Croajingolong National Park.

*Combine all East Gippsland National Parks and State Parks to secure the whole of East Gippsland forests for assessment as a World Heritage area. If successful, this status would add enormous economic benefits to the whole state. Biodiversity protection and economic benefits can go together.

5. First Nations Involvement

*We strongly support consultation and management input from Aboriginal groups.