

Timber feature 'misinforms'

I write to you concerning the six-page "special advertising feature" about the East Gippsland timber industry that appeared in The Herald (May 21).

Rather than being a serious publication to contribute to knowledge and understanding of the situation in East Gippsland, it is an attempt to pull the wool over the eyes of the public.

Most of the "articles" in the feature contain misinformation and merely try to justify the continuing mining of East Gippsland forests and the conversion of Victoria's greatest rain-forest and wilderness area into a eucalypt tree farm.

It was clearly a blatant attempt to prejudice the public before the State Government inquiry into the timber industry, due to start last week, was underway.

In the "advertising feature", Dr Peter Attiwill, a lecturer at Melbourne University, claims that most of the gums on Errinundra Plateau are regrowth from the 1939 fires.

In fact, most of the forest is 180 to 230-years-old with some trees as old as four to five hundred years.

Dr Attiwill also claims that clear felling and burning are the only way to "manage the tree population" as he so coldly puts it, yet nature has successfully created and cared for these forests for millions of years without his help.

Contrary to Attiwill's claims about the necessity for burning to ensure their survival, many of the forest types, especially

the magnificent rain forests on the Errinundra Plateau, require centuries of fire-free existence to develop to the stage at which they are now.

The Forests Commission, saw millers, Orbost Shire Council, Dr Attiwill and Gus Geary, the Orbost district forester, all suffer from "pioneer mentality" — a state of mind that believes in the out-of-date concept of "taming of the wilderness".

The real problem is not that conservationists want logging completely stopped, but that there are no areas of the types of forest that grow on Errinundra Plateau and in the Rodger River reserved in any National Park. This situation has arisen because of previous lobbying

activities of the style used in The Herald, and efforts of the Forests Commission that forced the Land Conservation Council in 1976 to exclude every hectare of wet forest in East Gippsland from any park national park proposal.

The Forests Commission itself contracted a botanist to examine the remarkable forests of the Errinundra Plateau in 1979. Recommendations were made to protect areas of botanical significance yet most of these were ignored.

The only conclusion one can draw from this so called "special advertising feature" in The Herald is that the Forests Commission and timber lobby are making an all out effort to divert attention from their

past and present misdeeds, by trying to convince the public through propaganda that it is conservationists who are responsible for the disgraceful state of our forests rather than themselves.

The forests of East Gippsland are recognised as being as important to Victoria as the south west wilderness is to Tasmania, yet there are no national parks in the wet forests of East Gippsland. This imbalance must be corrected.

Victorians played a major role in the rescue of Tasmania's South West. Now let them turn their attention to home.

— Grant Da Costa, director, Victorian National Parks Assn., Little Lonsdale St., Melbourne.

Timing questioned on forest story

It is no coincidence that the largely pro-logging advertising feature (The Herald, May 21) has appeared immediately upon the commencement of the State Government's timber industry inquiry.

The loggers realise the overwhelming arguments against their activities and are gathering their resources to try to save a dying industry.

The Government itself recognises the need to restructure the timber industry, shown by the report on future options in 1982.

Timber reserves in East Gippsland are estimated at 10-

15 years at present cutting rates. Then what?

Conservationists' proposals ensure that there is a gradual reduction in workforce, rather than a sudden collapse of the industry.

Also, some of the industry's arguments need clarifying.

The "Great Bushfire" argument does not hold.

"No wildfire imposes an extensive network of roads and tracks, disturbs more than half the soils... compacts many of them, or, as fires usually move on limited fronts and only burn out part of an area, demolishes all the trees in an area... and carts them away..." (Fight for

the Forests, Routley & Routley, 1974).

There is evidence to show that logging prescriptions aren't being adhered to, especially at Mt Stirling, a recognised water catchment.

Dr Brenda Murray states that the Land Conservation Council wants to create a national park from the Bende-nongs to Mt Kosciusko.

Actually, the LCC has proposed a national park from Mt Buller to the NSW border of 654,000 ha, 302,000 ha of which are already declared national park.

— Geoff Collis, Donald Rd., Wheeler's Hill.