



SAWMILLS IN THE ENERGY DESCENT FUTURE

*This letter to the editor of the local newspaper marks another turning point after four years of the Community Forest Management process instituted by the government (referred to in the 2002 letter, Article 31). As in many recent writings I use the opportunity to highlight how the energy descent future will change our perspectives about forests and forestry. These letters and the earlier **Wombat Forest Submission** (1995 Article 17) reflect my sense of responsibility to at least contribute to the possibility of more positive outcomes in the management of public forests but without a great deal of hope that they are forthcoming. Perhaps there is also an evolution from the more individual “expert submission” approach in 1995 to a more collaborative perspective, hoping for a community consensus, especially in the most recent letter.*



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Pat Liffman's suggestion (letter to editor Advocate 8th March) that if "experts of this caliber (referring to me) could be integrated into the Wood Working Group, timber production from the Wombat State Forest would soon become a niche product". I appreciate recognition that our community includes the expertise and the vision to manage the forest and agree that community based management is a historic opportunity. However I have no more idea than anyone else how to solve the complex political and bureaucratic impasse that prevents resolution of the forest management issues.

I feel somewhat uncomfortable even discussing what form of timber management and harvesting might succeed the current system in the light of the news of closure of Dwyer's mill. While the management of the forest has been disastrous, I have always supported the small local mills as the best part of the whole forest management, harvesting, processing and marketing chain. The skill of local millers in producing timber from species (gum) with severe limitations, serving a wide range of customers and end uses, deserves recognition, as does the incredible deal we all got buying messmate as F8 green hardwood. As an occasional customer of both Boase and Dwyer over 20 years and an advocate of the local mills as one of the best sources for the socially and ecologically aware timber buyer, I feel a great sadness about this loss to our local community.

The frustrating irony in the loss of local mills, is that within a decade, the peak and permanent decline of global oil and gas supply will be driving a massive, if ad hoc relocalisation of economies everywhere in the world. The local mills represented one of the best assets we had for the "energy descent future" that has been the focus of my permaculture work for 30 years. Thirty years from now, the forest management controversies of the 1990's and early 2000's will look ridiculous in a world transformed by expensive and unreliable energy supplies and climatic instability. Hopefully there is still time, and the community capacity to nurture (amongst other urgent needs), a catchment forest ecology and economy that can sustainably yield water, energy and building materials for our children and grandchildren adapting to life without cheap and reliable access to the wealth we took for granted.

*David Holmgren
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