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Janet Rice

janet@janetrice.com.au

www.janetrice.com.au

Just before Christmas the Victorian Government began logging of majestic wild forest at Brown Mountain in East Gippsland.

It's now been nineteen years since the summer of 1989-90, when huge protests brought logging at Brown Mountain to a standstill. Hundreds of protesters were arrested, and the story dominated the news.

A federal election was due in March 1990. Graham Richardson was federal environment minister and the Hawke Government had determined that the environment was *the* election issue.

But destroying nationally significant old growth forests didn't fit with Federal Labor's green image. I was campaign co-ordinator of forest conservation group East Gippsland Coalition. The protest actions were planned to show people what was happening – and to get the federal government involved.

The action worked. I remember the heat of January 1990 well. I was not in the forest. I was in Melbourne negotiating with federal and state ministerial advisers – including Gavin Jennings who as the current Victorian Minister for the Environment has given the go-ahead to this year's logging.

I remember the phone calls from Richo – 'don't worry Janet, those National Estate forests won't ever be logged'. An agreement was struck and \$20 million of federal money was found to fund studies and forest-based employment options. Logging would resume only if it could be shown that there were no 'prudent and feasible alternatives'.

We were canny negotiators though – what did 'prudent and feasible' mean? The state government said that it would only be 'prudent and feasible' not to log these forests if they could find new additional amounts of wood elsewhere locally. Obviously this was highly unlikely. We felt it would be 'prudent and feasible' not to log these forests if wood supplies and jobs could come from elsewhere, or any number of other options.

Richardson's office was desperate for the protests to stop – they were a bad look on the nightly news. So they agreed with us. Richardson drafted a letter to Victoria stating that the agreement depended on the federal definition of 'prudent and feasible'. We read the letter – it looked watertight, and we called off the protest actions. Mission accomplished.

The election came and went. Hawke snuck back in. And then it turned out that Richo's letter was not signed nor sent prior to the election. Richardson was no longer environment minister. We had been conned. *Whatever It Takes*, was the apt title of Richardson's autobiography.

It was a pivotal moment. I now threw myself into establishing The Greens. I had spent the previous five years lobbying Labor and Liberal governments on environment issues. But I now realised how fruitless this was. They only start to listen when they start hurting at elections.

Nineteen years on, Labor, like the Liberals, keeps governing to suit those who are making money out of environmental destruction, rather than for the long-term national interest, or what the community wants. Opinion polls consistently show the community thinks old-growth logging should stop. Yet it continues, subsidised by our taxes, with 85% of the logs going straight to the woodchipper.

Premier Brumby, Prime Minister Rudd and you and I know why old-growth forest should be protected – for its sheer beauty and inspiration; as a carbon sink; as cloud makers and water purifiers, and for the sake of all the plants and animals that live there, including at Brown Mountain threatened species such as Long-footed Potoroos, Tiger Quolls, and Powerful and Sooty Owls.

But instead of protection we get greenwash. Before the state election in 2006 the ALP promised to protect 'all significant stands of old growth currently available for logging', and to fund a tourist walk through these forests. The reality: government foresters named the first stand of old growth clearfelled at Brown Mountain before Christmas 'The Walk'.

We formed the Greens in 1992, but it took more than a decade of hard slog before the government began to feel the electoral bite. Greens now hold 25 seats in Australian parliaments, and there are more than 100 Green local government councillors. There are now Green marginal seats in Melbourne and Sydney.

The community is calling for change on forests, climate change, transport and water. The ALP's response is feeding the growth of the Greens. If Labor won't act, the Greens certainly will.

This piece was published in Greens Victoria News Autumn 2009. For more information about Brown Mountain visit www.eastgippsland.net.au or www.vnpa.org.au.