

Work continues to protect Leadbeater's Possum

VicForests has acknowledged the Federal Minister for Environment's decision today to list the Leadbeater's Possum as 'critically endangered'.

Robert Green, VicForests CEO, said the organisation hopes this announcement will maintain the necessary focus on action to ensure the long term survival of the species.

"We have been well aware of the challenges the Leadbeater's Possum is facing as a result of impacts on its population and habitat, particularly following the 2009 Black Saturday fires," Mr Green said.

"The change in status of the Possum is not something that has happened overnight.

"We share everyone's concern over the future of this important species and have listened to feedback from scientists and the community about ways we can modify our operations in order to protect the Possum.

"We recognised we needed to make changes to the way we operate and have been involved in implementing a range of measures which have reduced harvest levels and resulted in more than 20 000 hectares of potential habitat being set aside," he said.

These measures include:

- reducing harvesting in Victoria's ash forests by 30% since the 2009 fires
- implementing revised guidelines for the identification and protection of Leadbeater's Possum Zone 1A habitat
- applying 200 metre buffers around all Leadbeater's Possum colonies detected in the past 15 years
- applying 100 metre buffers around all 'modelled old growth forest' across the range of Leadbeater's Possum
- a two-year moratorium on timber harvesting within 14,800 hectares of forest that is anticipated to have a high probability of Leadbeater's Possum occurrence to allow surveys to take place
- replacing traditional clearfell methods with retention harvesting in 50% of the area harvested across the Leadbeater's Possum's range - the biggest change to harvesting practices ever implemented by VicForests
- initiating research to look at ways to enhance future habitat and monitor the effectiveness of new measures

"We haven't sat on our hands," Mr Green said.

"Only in the last week VicForests has commenced a program of remote camera surveys using new techniques to look for Leadbeater's Possum colonies in specifically targeted areas and protect these colonies if they are found.

"We also support the announcement in recent days by the Victorian Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water that new measures will be fast-tracked including additional targeted surveys to identify Leadbeater's Possum colonies and potential habitat.

"With continued focus on delivery of meaningful action, we believe the Possum can co-exist with a responsibly managed timber industry.

"We look forward to being part of further discussions regarding the role we can play to assist the recovery of the Leadbeater's Possum," he said.