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Battle for Baw Baw frog: log it and see

Peter Weekes
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LARGE sections of untouched forests on the Baw Baw plateau may be logged to determine if clearfelling will threaten the critically endangered Baw Baw frog.

A leaked PaperlinX memo says VicForests has recommended the logging of the 10 Baw Baw frog environmental coupes on the plateau's southern escarpment. It expects to receive the go-ahead from the State Government within weeks.

Logging of the coupes was suspended in December 2004 after federal intervention and a spokesman for Environment Minister John Thwaites denied there were plans to resume harvesting. It is believed the suspension will be reviewed next week.

The frog, found only in Victoria, has all but disappeared, with the population falling to a few hundred from up to 15,000 in 1984. The proposal to log the 200 hectares is part of the habitat experimental harvesting program to determine if clearing would harm the frog, which is on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature red list, and is protected under state and national laws.

Environmental groups want the Federal Government to use the same powers it did to protect the orange-bellied parrot.

"To log a forest to demonstrate if it is detrimental to Baw Baw frogs is like throwing a baby into a swimming pool to demonstrate it can't swim," said Professor Jean-Marc Hero, of the IUCN.

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