

On Thursday 2 April at approx 2.50pm the ABC Melbourne Afternoon program presenter Jacinta Parsons interviewed Chris Schuringa, an environmentalist, and member of the East Gippsland 'Goongera Environment Centre', to as Ms Parsons put it, get some background on the recently signed Regional Forests Agreement between the Commonwealth and Victoria.

Ms Schuringa then spent around six minutes attacking it. Her claims included that: It was going to lead to the, widespread destruction of the environment and endangered species; was done in secret; and had not taken into account the impact of the summer bushfires. at the end of the interview Ms Parsons then read out a text message from a listener claiming the RFA was signed under the cover of the response to CoVid-19.

At no time did Ms Parsons challenge any of the assertions made by Ms Schuringa, or question the proof or factual base of what was been claimed. At no time did she say that they would asking any other authority or group to respond. Prior to it none of the Victorian peak forest product industries were contacted asking for a response and in the days since no contact has been made asking for it.

On Friday 3 April, when I was made aware of the interview and then listened to it I contacted Ms Barbara Heggen, the show's producer, in my capacity as the Senior Communications Manager at the Australian Forest Products Association and told having listened I felt it needed responding to and offering to make our CEO available. Ms Heggen asked for me to make that request by email directly to her, which I did. She responded saying she had passed my email on to the ABC Melbourne Drive program.

Later that day I wrote by email asking if there had been any progress. I received no response. On Monday 6 April I wrote to Ms Heggen again asking if there had been any progress. As I write this no response has been received.

In essence my complaints about this highly unbalanced program segment are:

1. It was unbalanced and unchallenged and seemed to be actively supported by the presenter.
2. At no time since has the program sought to balance this.
3. Despite being offered the chance to balance it with a right of reply from one of the forest product industry peak bodies, it remains unchallenged. That offer was made by telephone and in three emails to Ms Heggen.
4. Why is this right of reply being offered to your Drive Program? The interview was done by Ms Jacinta Parsons on the Afternoon Show, not the Drive Show, and each show has a particular audience. After the airing of that segment that audience is left with the view, supported by the ABC by omission, that she and her environmental group are the only party who can talk about this and the only party with a common sense view. This is not true.

By allowing this segment to go to air the ABC is showing a willingness to let unbalanced opinion and bias to be aired because, it would seem, they fit in with the social/political views of some of its program makers.

I look forward to the ABC response.

Campbell Cooney

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Australian Forests Products Association.