

Public submission

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My Name is Stephen Maxwell Luke, my past history is working in Melbourne for a mining equipment manufacturer for 30 years.

During this time, my holiday destination was Barham NSW where I had a permanent caravan on site within a caravan park on the Murray River.

My partner and I made the decision that it was time to leave Melbourne and start a new life in Barham. After a short period of time, I wanted to commence working for a local business in the community. To contribute and give back to the community that I had visited for over 20 years.

I gained employment at Gelletly Red Gum Firewood in Barham on 14th October 2023 as a logging truck driver. A position I genuinely love and enjoy.

Never having worked in this industry, I had little knowledge on how this industry operates. In this past 12 month period, I have learnt that we as a business all respect and take pride in our work to sustain and look after the forest.

Gelletly's employs people locally and from neighbouring towns which greatly improves our local business community as they spend money locally shopping, petrol, eating, etc.. The timber mill in Koondrook also employs local and surrounding people, without us doing our jobs this would have a long-lasting effect on businesses and families in the community.

Our local Mens Shed who use the wood from us and the mill gives them purpose, a place to meet friends, a place to learn new skills or keep their life trade in check. As an elderly community we must look after our people and give them a place to go.

If the timber industry was to close in this small community the affects would be devastating for many. Relocation to find work, change of schools for children, move away from family support, emotional and mental health risk and the surrounding forest would become overgrown and a fire risk to ALL not just us who lose their jobs.

Many who work in the timber industry have done so for all their working lives, some are new to the industry, as I am but all who work in the industry respect the forest and understand why they are needed to work, to keep their communities safe.