

Commons Conversations Podcast - Citizen Science and Big Tree Hunting with Alice Hardinge

Emily Wood-Trounce

Hi Alice! Welcome to Commons Conversations. Thank you so much for coming and chatting with me this morning. How are you going?

Alice Hardinge

I'm really well, how are you, Emily?

Emily Wood-Trounce

I'm doing okay, a little bit croaky. But we'll see how we go.

So at The Commons, we are at the moment trying to expand our focus beyond all the East Coast capitals and get campaigns and stories from the NT, WA, South Australia and Tasmania.

When I was thinking about who I wanted to interview, obviously, you and I both have our minds in the forests a lot of the time, and at the moment, we're coming up to the end of native forest logging in Victoria and in Western Australia, and I think the Tasmanian context is really interesting, because logging is not stopping there, it's actually intensifying. And that is so crazy, because Tasmania is home to these giant trees; it's known as the 'Island of the Giants,' and it has such a reputation for conservation and forests.

I know that you've done so much work in Tasmania's forests and in other places on the continent as well, and wanted to speak with you about this. I guess I'm identifying you as 'Alice: the Big Tree Hunter,' but also as 'Alice: the Forest Campaigner,' and talk through what's happening in Tasmania's forests, why that context is so important and special, and where that campaign is heading. But maybe we could start by you introducing yourself and talking about Alice in the context of the forests.

Alice Hardinge

Yeah, thanks so much for having me on Emily. I really appreciate it. And I think it's really important to highlight some of the campaigning that's going on in Western Australia and Tasmania and other states, not just the main Eastern seaboard cities.

To go back to my origins and when I first got involved in forest campaigning and really fell in love with the forest, we journey back across the Bass Strait to Victoria.

An introduction to myself is: I'm Alice, I grew up on Woi-wurrung Wurundjeri Country in Big Pat's Creek, which is close to Warburton. So that's in the upper Yarra Ranges of so-called Victoria. I've worked in quite a few grassroots organisations, as well as working for The Wilderness Society as a forest campaigner. I was so blessed to grow up in the stunning forests of the Central Highlands, Gondwanan rainforest.

Back in about 2014 was my first exposure to the Great Forest National Park campaign, when I first became aware of some of the impacts that native forest logging was having on my local community. And my involvement really stepped up when I became involved in blockading, through Forest Conservation Victoria and Protect Warburton Ranges. Entering into the blockading world, throughout the Central Highlands, but also out in East Gippsland.

A really big campaign that, I guess took me to that next level of love for the forest, and also involvement, was in Big Pat's Creek when logging was encroaching within kilometres of my childhood home. And that brought me into the community space a lot more through Protect Warburton Ranges and also through Warburton Environment. And we saw many, many weeks of sustained direct action in that area, so close to my home. And that real passion and connection to the place was magnified through that experience of having grown up there, but then also seeing the machines and the extractivism just on my doorstep. And the joy of connecting with the community that I grew up in, really spurred this passion and that further involvement in the Victorian forest campaign and then, you know, onwards to the last year that I've lived in lutruwita / Tasmania, and have worked on forest campaigns down here.

Emily Wood-Trounce

Brilliant, and how did you find Tasmania's forests and fall in love with them?

Alice Hardinge

So, I think my first penny drop moment, down in lutruwita / Tasmania was a few years ago when I came down for the summer. So I came down for a couple of months. I remember the first week I was here I had the privilege of going out with a group called Forestry Watch to do some citizen science out in the Styx region. And we went to an area of beautiful high conservation value forests that was still standing. But we also did a post-logging survey of an area that had been clear felled.

I think that moment of both the beauty and the intactness of these temperate rainforests, in contrast with this quite bleak, industrially logged area, and seeing some of those values and really recognizing the threat. That was a bit of a moment where my heart started really pumping for lutruwita's forests as

well. And over the following years, I came down over the summers, and eventually moved here in December last year, and decided I really wanted to be more involved.

Emily Wood-Trounce

There is something so uniquely horrific about being inside a clear felled coupe. I think the first time that I experienced that it changed my life entirely. The silence of the forest. They're pretty much always surrounded by lush, full forests with birds in them, and then you walk into the clearfelled area, and it just is absolutely heartbreaking, I think that's something that we should all experience.

Alice Hardinge

I completely agree. One of the most powerful incendiary moments that I've ever experienced was also in a clearfell. And that was just before I got more involved in Big Pat's Creek and the Warburton campaign, I'd come back from traveling after high school, and I was a couple of kilometers up the road from my folks place, and there was, yeah, 120 hectare clearfell, 5 logging coupes next to each other. And they'd just completed logging the top section. And they were logging further below, down the hill. And just that, yeah, that the starkness of that exposed area on the mountainside, just the lack of the animals, the lack of the trees. Yeah, it was, **it was really heartbreaking, but also really spurred something deep within me about fighting against that.**

Emily Wood-Trounce

You and I've been on a few tours to clearfells together, and I've seen it be that incendiary moment for other people. It's absolutely horrific. Before you mentioned your time with Forestry Watch, and I guess this concept of citizen science. And I do want to talk to you about big tree hunting and what you've done with citizen science in forests across Victoria and Tasmania. Could you speak a little bit to that and the big tree hunting?

Alice Hardinge

Yeah, of course! So like many folks, I think fieldwork is probably my favourite work, going out and looking for threatened species and for conservation values, like the giant trees that you mentioned.

So I guess to go back to the beginning of my involvement in citizen science: at first, it wasn't necessarily giant trees or large trees that we were predominantly looking for. I first became involved with Wildlife of the Central Highlands, so in Victoria, back in 2019. And then, with Warburton Environment, looking for a critically endangered long lived understory species; the *personia arboria*. Citizen science, it's super varied, there's many different things that you can go out and look for in intact areas of forests or previously logged areas of forests. But some of the things that we looked for were threatened species such as the Leadbeater's Possum, as well as the Greater Glider and Yellow Bellied Glider. And then also flora species like the *personia arboria*.

All of these species have certain prescriptions, certain levels of protection. **So by finding them, citizen scientists going out volunteering their time with really amazing equipment, we can get buffer zones.** So, for instance, with the Leadbeater's Possum every time you get a Leadbeater's Possum recording, you note it down on the GPS, you get video footage evidence, and you submit that to the relevant government body. And actually also potentially use it as court case evidence. And that way you get little patches of forest protected in the logging areas.

So over time, for instance, WOTCH (Wildlife of the Central Highlands) has protected over 1500 hectares of forests throughout the Central Highlands, by finding these records of threatened species. Yeah, so there's some of the conservation values we look for.

Also in Victoria with citizen science, I became involved in big tree hunting with Brett Misford. **So going and looking out for very significant old growth trees, often eucalypts, and recording where they stand and where these last stands of really highly ecologically intact areas with high ecological integrity are.** So yeah, citizen science is super varied. And it's a super fun way to get involved in conservation, by being out in the field, enjoying beautiful places, seeing unique animals that many people don't ever get to see because they may be nocturnal. And also, to boot, get areas protected from logging. So it's really a win-win-win in my situation. But yeah, I've got to admit, one of my soft spots is the giant tree hunting for sure.

Emily Wood-Trounce

And I want to return to the Big Tree hunting. But first, the Leadbeater's Possum, I know is tiny, the smallest possum in the world, right? And they're critically endangered. There are so few of them left in the wild. They fit in the palm of the human hand. How on earth do you find a possum that small in the forest at night?

Alice Hardinge

Yeah, that is a really good point, Emily. So the Leadbeater's Possum, as you said, is this tiny and really, really critically endangered species. So there's only 1500 of them left throughout the Central Highlands, and they've got quite a small endemic range as well. So in order to find them, you do need some specialised equipment. So we use infrared cameras in order to detect their heat signal in the forest.

We also use calling techniques as well, to communicate with the possums. So to help call them in, sometimes we also play Powerful Owl recordings. **So they're really staunch little possums, as you mentioned, they're really small, but when they hear a Powerful Owl call, which is one of their main predators, in their family group they will sometimes come up and kind of like little possum ninjas, investigate Powerful Owl calls to try and ward them off from their**

territory. So yeah, we use those infrared cameras as well as video cameras, and we use GPS, Garmin devices as well, in order to first detect these possums, but then also get really high quality video evidence and get also in the shot, that image of where we are in location just so we can really prove that these possums are out there in these exact locations and then be able to get those buffers and protected areas in place for those species.

Emily Wood-Trounce

So pretty much you're telling me that if citizen science teams were not out doing this amazing work in Victoria's forests, would they just be logging those regions? Would they be completely smashed, these places with threatened species in them?

Alice Hardinge

Yeah, well, that's something that is quite fascinating about the real importance of citizen science in forest campaigning, because due to the state owned logging agencies having jurisdiction. What I mean by that is that state logging is exempt from federal environmental laws, so the states are regulating logging practices within their own states due to the Regional Forest Agreements.

So what we're seeing is the government not necessarily putting the required resources into surveying these areas and finding these threatened species. So then the gap is left to be filled by volunteer citizen scientists. And it's absolutely crucial that we have people going out into these forested areas, especially areas of forests under threat from industrial processes be that through extractivism for logging or also extractivism for mining, like we see in Western Australia, and go out and actually record where these species are, because as you said, unfortunately, **if it weren't for volunteer citizen scientists, many of these areas, containing, in some cases, critically endangered species, like the Leadbeater's Possum, would have just been logged due to inadequate surveying practices by the government programs.**

Emily Wood-Trounce

It's so crazy that we have state-owned agencies logging, destroying and profiting from state-owned forest, they're just completely in control of the whole situation. But do you find that if you do get adequate evidence, you get a good video of a Leadbeater's Possum, you GPS mark it properly, you put the report in in all the right ways, does that guarantee protection for that forest? And for Leadbeater's Possum, how much protection is guaranteed?

Alice Hardinge

Yes! So it does actually guarantee protection through this special protection zones. So these special protection zones are specific for each species. And also state specific. So some of the conservation values that we may find, through citizen science in Tasmania, we'll get have different prescriptions, get different

buffer zones, to the species, that we survey for in Victoria. So for example, the Leadbeater's Possum gets a 200 metre buffer zone, so it's a 200 metre radius, buffer zone, around the location where it's recorded. So that's about 12 hectares of forest, which is better than nothing.

But of course, it would be even better if we saw the cessation of extractive industries in threatened species habitat altogether. This patchwork approach has done absolute wonders for the incremental protection of some of these species. **However, systematically, of course, we still have a situation where poor regulation is allowing the extractive processes and the logging of some areas which, you know, never should be up for logging, considering the impacts on biodiversity and carbon and on these threatened species' habitat.**

And, of course, one of the limitations of citizen science is, we have, you know, this great amount of enthusiasm and a lot of dedicated individuals. But when we look at the scale, for instance, in lutruwita / Tasmania, there's over 700 logging coupes on the three year plan. So there's over 700 areas that are threatened by logging across the state. And even with the most dedicated, and professional, citizen science volunteer teams, it's a lot to have the capacity to do anywhere near the number of all those logging coupes. So we're really having to target areas that we've assessed, as, you know, some of the most high conservation value areas, although really, we would love to have capacity to survey the whole of the state and the same goes with Victoria. Obviously, that's also affected by the end of native forest logging announcement that happened earlier this year in May.

Emily Wood-Trounce

Yeah, it's absolutely wild that this crucial work is left largely to groups of volunteers to go and spend their time in the forest. Surely, this falls under the responsibility of the logging agencies, like you talked about the Regional Forest Agreements. I know that they're not bound by federal environmental law, but they do have regulations, right? Surely it is their responsibility legally to do the survey work to know what's in the forests or not log where endangered species are, am I correct?

Alice Hardinge

Yeah, so there is a regulatory framework in each state. There's normally a timber code of practice, which varies in name state by state, but is one of the codes which the logging industry must abide by. There's also state legislation. So in Tasmania, we have the Forest Practices Act. However, in practice, it's again all about that resourcing and that prioritization of doing thorough surveys. So there is an independent regulator in Tasmania called the Forest Practices Authority. Who do issue the certification of individual logging area plans. We call logging areas 'coupes' a lot of the time, so there's Forest Practices plans for specific logging coupes. However, there are questions around the co-regulation of Forest Practices, whether it is truly independent.

And also, again, just on the ability to thoroughly resource and prioritize citizen science and government issued surveying. I haven't seen the evidence that there is really thorough survey going on in lutruwita / Tasmania, and it was it was similar in Victoria, where there are all these gaps. They're not dedicating the money or the people necessarily, to actually go out and record all these high conservation values. And yeah, that brings us back again to citizen science and volunteers filling in the gaps, and also filling in the gaps on regulation. So we are recording a lot of alleged breaches of the Forest Practices Code and also reporting to the Forest Practices Authority, the regulator, as well as the government whenever we find alleged breaches. However, there are also issues and questions around the effectiveness and the willingness to regulate as a state government and as an independent forest regulator.

A poignant example of this is that we are yet to see any prosecutions from the Forest Practices Authority, the regulator down here in Tasmania, against the state owned logging agency, Forestry Tasmania. So despite many alleged breaches being submitted by citizen scientists, we are in a situation where, yes, still there is ineffective resourcing of the surveying in the first place from a government standpoint, or for the regulation. So again, it's left up to citizens to make use of that space and try to hold the government to account for its current logging practices.

Emily Wood-Trounce

So what you're telling me is the regulator does absolutely no regulating, is that right?

Alice Hardinge

I wouldn't go so far to say they do no regulating, but I would criticise the regulator for not taking more effective, consistent regulation measures for the state owned logging agency.

So the regulator in lutruwita / Tasmania also regulates private native forest logging. And we do see this skew between resourcing and regulating private land, over resourcing and regulating public land. So I do think there are very reasonable questions to be asked around why the regulator is not adequately resourced to regulate, and why is there a lack of enthusiasm, seemingly, to regulate the state-owned logging agency for all the alleged breaches that citizen scientists report?

Emily Wood-Trounce

And why do you think there is that disparity between the regulation of private clearing and state logging,

Alice Hardinge

I think it goes quite deep in lutruwita / Tasmania. So as was mentioned, kind of at the start of this conversation, we are seeing the end of native forest logging in Victoria and in WA. And we're seeing, I would say, quite an ideological shift in some of the populations of those states, respectively, around being aware of the effects of native forest logging, and also a bit of a cultural shift.

However, in Tasmania, I do think we have a fair way to go when it comes to the ideological front. There is still a lot of romanticization around the logging industry, there's also a belief that it supports a lot more of the working population than it actually does.

So recent studies showed that the Tasmanian population believed that 20% of people were employed by the logging industry, but it's actually less than 0.4%. A few thousand, including direct and indirect jobs. So I think there is a lot of ideological shift that needs to come in Tasmania, and that is also respective of the government's willingness to act. So at the moment, we have a Liberal government in power in Tasmania. It's the last liberal state left, but we also have an opposition Labor Party, who believe fervently in the native forest logging industry, and it's almost as if neither of them wants to be wedged on the issue. So they're actually competing to be more pro industry than the other. So I think that might be one of the reasons why we see poor regulation and poor resourcing of the regulation of the native forest logging industry.

Emily Wood-Trounce

Yeah, it's good to get that context, especially with the party that's in power and the cultural attitude towards forests and logging. But I think it is kind of surprising to hear that. I know that the forestry industry is admired in a lot of places in Tasmania, but at the same time, as a Victorian, I look at Tasmania, and I think, big trees, lots of conservation, huge national parks, you know, massive amounts of that island are without roads, people go hiking, we idolise the nature in Tasmania. And it's interesting to think about that dichotomy of so much logging, so much industrial destruction of the forests, whilst also the romanticization of these forest regions. Can you speak a little bit to that?

Alice Hardinge

Yeah, I mean, we are absolutely blessed down here with one of the highest ranked world heritage areas in the entire world. And some reserve tenures actually allow logging and mining, but you can say almost half of the state is in some form of reserve. However, as one of the most forested states in so-called Australia, there is also that contrast with there still being 812,000 hectares in a land tenure known as 'permanent timber production zone.' So that's the area that is subject to native forest logging of public land. So there is this large reserve estate, some of those areas do still need further protection from extractivism. But then you've also got this huge area of land that has been set aside specifically for logging.

So I think, yeah, I do believe that Tasmania may end up being the Albany of whaling, but for native forest logging, so we are seeing shifts in New South Wales, potentially ending or greatly reducing native forest logging there. And I do believe it is 100% possible for Tasmania. But I do think a lot of political, cultural, and I guess just community more broadly shift is necessary in order to get there. And part of that is also the deeply entrenched conflict over native forests that has revolved around Tasmanian politics for decades. You think of how foundational things like the Franklin blockade were, and how some of those effects are still felt. And some of those political influences from the 70s and 80s still run rife here in Tasmania. And yeah, I feel like there is quite a bit of a way to go.

But one of the advantages of having all those wild protected places throughout the world heritage and different land tenures is that we know it's possible - there have been huge wins down here before for the environment. And I do really believe that native forest logging will end down here as well, we're just going to have to put a fair bit of work into getting the state ready to make that decision.

Emily Wood-Trounce

Yeah, and the longer it takes, the more irreplaceable forest is gonna be destroyed. The stakes are so high.

I feel like this leads quite well into talking about some of the work you've been doing with the big tree hunting and these sort of campaigns to valorize the forests and these giant trees and rebrand Tasmania as this land of the giants. You know, helping Tasmanian people identify with these big trees, these amazing, diverse forests as something to be really proud of and to admire a lot. What have you been doing with big tree hunting?

Alice Hardinge

So yeah, one of my absolute favourite things to do is go out into the stunning forest down here and look for these giant trees. Giant trees are another one of the conservation values that do actually get protection from logging when you find them.

So just a bit of context, what is a giant tree? Definitional issues are rife within the conservation movement. But under Forestry Tasmania's policy, a giant tree is a tree that's over 280 cubic metres in wood volume, or over 85 metres tall. So first off, I need to say that for context, but I also want to say that that is completely arbitrary. If you're a Swift Parrot, you're not going to care if a tree is 84 metres tall or 85 metres tall. But it is important to note that when I'm talking about giant trees, I could specifically be referring to this policy that the loggers have.

Looking for giant trees means lovely long days off track in areas of absolutely fantastic old growth. Lots of cool temperate rainforests and these huge emergent eucalypts; often we're talking about *eucalyptus regnans*, the mountain ash, or also

eucalyptus globulus, giant blue gums, or *eucalyptus tasmaniensis*, which is the *delegatensis* from the mainland. But these trees in order to reach this kind of 'giant' threshold, are often 17, 18, 19, 20 metres around the base when you measure them with a measuring tape.

So we're talking about walking through these forests and coming across these ancient trees, well over 500 years old for the eucalypt species to get this large. And they could be six, seven metres in diameter, just this wall of wood before you and of course full of hollows and habitat for all sorts of threatened species.

But one of the other really special things about these trees, is if you find them on that permanent timber production zone that we spoke about, that area that is subject to logging, these trees also get a 100 metre radius, no logging zone. So they get an informal reserve created whenever we find these trees and submit them.

So not only do you get to have that experience of walking through this wonderful old growth, but also by finding these trees, we're getting little pockets, 3.12 hectares per tree, taken off the logging schedule.

So we get out as much as we can, and go out and look for these big trees, not just for conservation from logging, but also to measure how much carbon they're storing, as well as generally wanting to do some more scientific studies on these areas, because they are some of the most carbon dense forests in the world. And also, as far as tall trees and giant trees go, really, the only place that you could compare it to of density of large trees and giant trees would be the redwoods, which are world famous. And it's probably about time that we started valuing these giant trees for what they are in Tasmania, miracles of nature, instead of logging them for low value chip.

So a lot of the giant tree work in the giant tree hunting is really around finding these trees, first off, to stop them from being logged, but also about iconising them, and letting people know about them. Letting folks know that in lutruwita / Tasmania, we have some of the largest trees in the world. They're really miraculous, and we should be visiting them and looking into regenerative tourism options instead of seeing that industrial clearfell mentality, because they're worth so much more standing.

Emily Wood-Trounce

500 years old is so long. I've seen some big trees, nothing like what you would have seen, but every time you're with them, it just feels so amazing to think of how ancient this creature is, how much it's seen, how much life has come through it, moved around it and with it. But you're talking about finding big trees. What do you mean by this? Don't we know where the big trees are? Are you actually

discovering trees that the government hasn't marked out? They don't know are there? What is 'finding' a big tree?

Alice Hardinge

Yeah, well, it's exactly that! It's going out to areas that either have never been surveyed, or are threatened by logging. And the government and the logging industry, they don't know about where these trees are.

So when we say big tree hunting, we are actually often driving an hour, sometimes more, sometimes two or three, to an often quite remote area of forest, then spending the day walking off track through through the bush country, and into areas that are potentially scheduled for logging or that we know, potentially do contain these giant trees. And we're walking through the forest, often using our GPS, after doing some desktop analysis, and we're finding these trees and photographing and recording them. And then we're letting the logging agency as well as the government regulator know about these trees, because without submitting that evidence, we wouldn't be able to get those protected buffers created.

So it is something quite special knowing that these trees have been standing here, hundreds and hundreds of years before colonisation.

And these trees are absolutely of such value and also of cultural value. And I often think about how if it weren't for citizen scientists going out and letting the government know about these trees that, you know, we still see quite often, without those submitted reports, these trees just get cut down. And some of the listeners may have seen some of the 'single load log' photos. So that's when a tree is so big that you can only just fit one log on the back of a log truck. And I think some folks may or may not have seen some of the photos of single load logs coming from Tasmania this year. Some got international media attention. But yeah, we still see these practices of giant trees getting cut down for cheap mill, cheap pulp and paper products.

Emily Wood-Trounce

Absolutely horrific. Those videos of that one log that went viral were heartbreaking. And so, so shocking. Because we'd all assume that this sort of thing has serious permanent protections, that if a logger saw that tree, they would know, don't cut down this giant of the forest, but that they're doing it and then seriously, pulping it and turning it into paper or cardboard is a travesty.

Alice Hardinge

It is. And one of the one of the things about going and finding these trees as well is when you have these really special moments, like looking just up at the grandeur, and thinking how many generations of animals these trees have provided habitat and homes for. And you also think about the amount of time that these trees have

lived for as well, like seen all the changes over the last couple of centuries and how much carbon they've accumulated day by day, growing and sucking that carbon back into the soil and the mycelium network.

I don't really even have the words to explain how much I appreciate and love being out in those particular areas of forest that have been without fire or industrial influence for so long.

They still have that ecological integrity, and just amazing biodiversity as well. But for these trees, there's still a long way to go in showing the greater population just how important and valuable these places are. Not necessarily only from an economic standpoint, although there are again, regenerative tourism opportunities, perhaps here, but more so from an intrinsic value standpoint, and from an ecosystem services standpoint, as well. So I think the more giant trees we can find the better. And already just this year, we've protected over 30 hectares by discovering these giant trees. Of which the threshold is so high, that it's quite hard to find trees that meet that threshold. These are the 0.01% trees or even less, you know, there's only a couple of hundred that have been recorded across the state. And it's likely that there would only be a couple more hundred that haven't been recorded yet, before that threshold is reached.

And of course, this is also in the context of, we've seen throughout the Central Highlands in Victoria, and also in lutruwita / Tasmania, the decline of large hollow bearing trees, especially at risk from fire and from climate change, which just makes it all the more crucial to find these areas and protect them whilst we still can.

Emily Wood-Trounce

Absolutely. It must be so interesting as you campaign dancing with these different systems of value, you know, you're talking about the intrinsic value of the forests. And this makes me think about the utter relief, you must feel, you know, having grown up in an industrialised extractive world, and then finding these giants, these pre-colonial trees, living in these sound ecosystems, with so much diversity, and so much magic inside of them. And just feeling that, and seeing that, witnessing that, and knowing the intrinsic value of these forests.

But then you're also talking about ecosystem services, and you're definitely dancing the dance of our colony, and the systems of value that are primarily financial within that. And we're also talking about carbon storage, and then climate change. It must be so interesting, because from the way you're talking, I can tell that you're feeling the love for these trees and feeling their value outside of any of that, but then having to frame it in the language of 'Australia,' and the systems of capital that we have here, and trying to translate in order to, as you're saying, iconise these trees and these forests for the greater Tasmanian, Australian, and global population in a language that works for them.

So much of environmental campaigning is shifting people along these systems of value so that they can get to understanding the intrinsic value of forests, but you often have to start speaking in much more empirical and practical terms.

Alice Hardinge

Yeah, very much so. And I guess that one of the issues here is that the only way that we can get protection for some of these areas, some of these conservation values, like giant trees, or, you know, Tasmanian Wedge Tailed Eagles or Devil dens, is by submitting the data, but ultimately playing by the rules that the government has provided through the Timber Practices Code, through the Forest Practices Act, and the rules are not great, to be frank. There's lots of grey areas.

There are a lot of values that you know, the prescriptions, the rules that we can apply, you know, they're very limited. And there is definitely nowhere within the Forest Practices Act or within the Forest Practices Code or within the state regulation in general, that provides for intrinsic value. So as much as that really speaks to me and speaks to many of us, unfortunately when we're advocating for the protection of these places, often we will use what rules we have available to us. And that's a starting point.

Emily Wood-Trounce

Yeah, absolutely. It must be such an interesting space to navigate. And when you're doing all of this big tree hunting and iconising the forests, who are you working with? What have you been doing?

Alice Hardinge

Yeah, so one of the great things about citizen science, big tree hunting, and forest campaigning in general, is the community. The people you get to meet. I mean, that's one of the things that really drives me, is those connections and that passion.

So at the moment, I am working in the role as acting campaign manager of Wilderness Society Tasmania. So within that role, I work with a great small team, but we also do a lot of work with local communities and yeah, volunteer citizen scientists. So throughout this year, I've done a lot of work with quite a few different groups.

The Tree Projects - absolutely amazing group leading strong on canopy-lead science. So you've got Dr. Jennifer Sanger, forest ecologist, and her husband Steve Pierce, who is an amazing photographer. And they're doing brilliant work on really spreading the word about the absolute beauty and the incredible nature of some of the trees down here in lutruwita, as well as Grassroots Action Network Tasmania (GRANT), that's another amazing grassroots community group, who have been out doing citizen science in the forests over this year. And there is also a Wilderness

Society coordinated citizen science program. And we go out to the southern forests, out to the Styx, the Florentine, we've been up north around Quamby Bluff. And we do work with local community groups, like Hands Off Quamby as well as folks who live in Maydena. So that's a couple hours north of Hobart. '

It's really one of the best things about citizen science, that experience with other people, the friends you make, and the really strong connection with local communities who are super passionate about their patch, the area of forest that they live nearby to.

There's not much better than going out for the day, sitting under a big Myrtle with all these magic coral fungi at your feet, having a picnic lunch with a couple of people who are equally as passionate about finding conservation values; large trees, giant trees, Devil dens, you name it, in order to get some protection for bush country.

Emily Wood-Trounce

Such special forest and such a special community. And really cool to hear about the different nodes in the ecosystem of campaigners and citizen science scientists who are doing this work in Tasmania.

I guess that brings us quite well to talk a little bit more about campaign strategy as we go forward. And I guess to give some context for the people listening, Alice and I are talking at the end of 2023. And logging industries across the continent are really shifting at the moment, because a few years ago, the Western Australian State Government decided that they were going to pull the pin on native forest logging happening in Western Australia at the end of 2023. So in 2024, there will be no more native logging in WA. There are of course, exceptions to that. And you touched on that briefly before Alice, bauxite mining in WA's jarrah forest in the southwest of the state is entirely exempt from that declaration, but largely it is going to be the end of native forest logging in that state.

And we're actually seeing a similar circumstance here where I am in Victoria, where just in May this year, the State Government decided to end native forest logging at the same time, meaning that in 2024, the industry will shut down. And there are of course, exemptions here too. But both of these cases show an industry drying up. And we are seeing New South Wales move towards the same.

And you're speaking to the industry in Tasmania doing the opposite - rather than moving to plantations and winding up this destruction of our native forests, it's intensifying. And, you know, we're talking about this island of giant trees, of unique species, of wild heritage areas that have the highest value in the world. Why is it that the Tasmanian forest industry is not following the same path as the rest of Australia?

Alice Hardinge

Yeah, it is such a fascinating time for forest campaigning right across so-called Australia. **With the end of native forest logging in Victoria, it has actually had a direct impact on lutruwita's forests**, because we're seeing every day, logging trucks, driving across the state, up towards Devonport, getting on the Spirit of Tasmania and then getting off in Geelong and driving to the mills around Hayfield. High conservation value forests from Tasmania going straight to Victorian mills.

So it is a quite delicate situation. Where, in one area you've seen the cessation of an extractive industry, but it is actually having an effect on another region, on Tasmania's forests. It's really upping the pressure. And there is generally an acceptance amongst the industry, that the transition towards plantation is well and truly underway. In fact, if you look across the whole of Australia, and then to Tasmania, specifically, across Australia, it's about 90% of our wood products from plantations domestically, and in Tasmania, it's about 85%. So still quite high, a little bit lower than the mainland.

However, what we are seeing is native forest logging last year in Tasmania was 7000 hectares. And we've seen an increase of 1000 hectares to the logging plans, the three year plan. So now that means that next year, 42,000 hectares are subject to imminent native forest logging. That doesn't mean that it'll all be done in the following three years.

But I guess this speaks to the pressure of getting our native forest products, still to some of those mills in Victoria, as well as the ongoing native forest logging for Tasmanian suppliers. So from a campaign strategy standpoint, the pressure is really on for lutruwita's forests. And what we're going to see over the next few years is a real drop in supply of native forest logging products. So 2027, there's this huge drop off of supply, and that's due to over logging as well.

So it's really the crux of the campaign in many ways over the next year or two, about making sure that that transition to plantation is completed, that we do see a cessation of native forest logging.

And in order to get there, we're going to have to use many tools in our tool belt - be that people power, getting people out into the forests, there is also scope for some more ionising of the forest areas in light of a once-in-a-generation election coming likely next year. So that's when we'll go from 25 seats to 35 seats in the Tasmanian parliament. So we do have a lot of scope to see a government down in Tasmania with a lot more Independents and Greens and possibly a balance of power situation. And there's also the need for some strategic litigation, potentially from community groups, as well as from eNGOs, around the legality or alleged illegality of logging in this state.

Something that I think is also really important, from a campaign strategy standpoint, is making sure that the supply chains, that the businesses who end up with the products from some of this timber - again, most of it going to woodchip and disposable products, over 75% going to woodchip - but for those long term products, those chairs, window claddings, things like that, there needs to be a really concerted effort to educate businesses about where they're getting their products from. And that some of these items are coming directly from critically endangered species habitat like the Swift Parrot. So I think there is a lot of work to be done over the next few years. Some really big steps to make.

I do think completing the transition away from native forest logging to plantation is inevitable, and also well and truly underway, despite the increased threat of logging of native forests in Tasmania due to the shutdown of the industry on the mainland.

Emily Wood-Trounce

Yeah, wow, you're really embodying that concept of diversity of tactics. You're talking about supply chain, market-based campaigning, you're talking about citizen science. You're talking about the corporate world, direct action, strategic litigation, taking them to the courts, there's so much work going into this. It's incredible.

Alice Hardinge

Yeah, and it takes a lot of passionate people to get there. So yeah, definitely huge recognition and shout out to the many, many diverse groups who are working on forest campaigns in lutruwita / Tasmania. There's so many amazing people, but we could always do with more.

Emily Wood-Trounce

Absolutely. Thank you so much for all of your work Alice, and so much respect, admiration and appreciation to everyone fighting for Tasmania's forests. They are incredible parts of the world. And yeah, it is so unfortunate that they have been destroyed at this accelerating rate. Thank you for talking to me. And thank you for doing all the work you do. This has been a really, really great conversation.

Alice Hardinge

Yeah, thank you so much, Emily. And yeah, just noting that all the work that we're doing down here in lutruwita / Tasmania is also taking place on unceded palawa lands. And you know, when we're campaigning for these forests, first and foremost, they're twice stolen forests. They were stolen during colonisation, and logging is continuing without the consent of the Aboriginal people of Tasmania. So really wanting to highlight that as well. But yeah, thank you so much for your time.