



Lawyers for Forests members Lucy Turner, Joanna Cary, Paul Coady and James Cotton in a recently logged area in the Central Highlands.

Lawyers for forests

Dressed in her neat corporate suit, Lucy Turner does not fit the stereotype of radical environmental activists with dreadlocks chaining themselves to bulldozers to save forests.

While she might not be involved in direct action, Ms Turner is just as passionate about Victoria's forests and has formed the group Lawyers for Forests to assist in the fight.

"I have a long-standing interest in environmental issues and since I've become a professional, I have seen a role for professionals to add to the public view on this issue," she said.

"More and more, especially given the [February] election result in Western Australia, environmental issues and the environmental agenda is moving up in the area of policy priorities of governments and becoming less of a marginal issue.

"There is a role for professionals, particularly lawyers, in contributing to this debate."

About eight months ago, Ms Turner, 25, decided to take a "giant leap into the dark" and form the group. She had no experience in setting up groups such as this but has been encouraged by the many people who have "come out of the woodwork" and shown interest.

For the past eight months, Ms Turner has been working with a small group to set up Lawyers for Forests as an incorporated association and to research different aspects of

environmental issues in order to formulate strategies for the group.

At the time of writing, Lawyers for Forests was scheduled to be officially launched in May.

Ms Turner, a second-year solicitor in the intellectual property group at Corrs Chambers Westgarth, said lawyers had much to offer the environmental movement, particularly in terms of law and policy analysis. She said lawyers could also give credibility to environmental concerns by showing such concerns are not restricted to the radical fringe.

"Rightly or wrongly, activists are often stereotyped. But these are serious issues and are not confined to a radical minority. If professional groups can add their weight to the debate, it will help in raising awareness of the issues.

"At one level, we have a purely political role in terms of lobbying and in terms of showing the broader community that these issues are relevant to all of us.

"But there are many skills and experiences lawyers can add to this debate, especially in terms of our analytical and advocacy skills."

Ms Turner said law and policy analysis had been missing from the current debate.

"The current environment groups have been campaigning very hard and for a long time but they have not had the resources, time or money to do this analysis.

"People are fighting for change in our attitudes to the environment on many fronts and we are adding a different element to the mix."

Ms Turner said Lawyers for Forests will have three separate areas to focus on, each coordinated by a separate committee. The areas are:

- Law and policy – this committee will analyse the regulatory framework relating to the management of public native forests and advocate law reform that promotes the conservation and better management of native forests. The committee will also lobby, and assist other groups to lobby, state and federal governments to ensure the decisions they make regarding native forests are in accordance with the law.
- Corporate awareness – this committee will work to promote awareness about corporate interests in native forests, particularly woodchipping companies, and the ways in which consumers can influence these companies, and promote businesses pursuing alternatives to native forest logging, through ethical investment decisions and shareholder activism.
- Access to justice – this committee will coordinate legal professionals who are able to provide pro-active and reactive assistance to people involved in protests, blockades and other forms of direct action in an attempt to promote a more lawful and peaceful culture of public protest.

Ms Turner said she hoped the group would bring together people who had a long-term but solitary involvement in environmental issues and also attract those who had never participated in such groups before.

"People in the group range in experience from people with lots of experience, such as barristers who have been fighting cases against logging companies for years, through to articled clerks who see something wrong with the way our forests are managed but who have never been involved in doing anything about it," she said.

"Through this work, we hope to contribute the particular skills and powerful voice of legal professionals to this growing movement, which demands better management of our native forests."

Ms Turner said the group was intentionally aimed at professionals and membership was restricted to people with a law degree. There is a \$25 membership fee.

For more information, contact Lawyers for Forests by email at info@lawyersforforests.asn.au or PO Box 550, Collins Street West, Melbourne 8001.

The Lawyers for Forests website will be launched at the group's official launch in May. The address is www.lawyersforforests.org.au. ■

MELINDA BROWN