

Crucial preferences hinge on forest deal

Greens ultimatum

**WADE PEARCE
and AAP**

A POWER struggle has erupted within Geelong Greens over whether to preference Labor in the November 30 election.

Sources close to the Greens said there was concern a push to offer preferences to Labor on the condition the Govern-

ment promised to protect old growth forests would backfire.

Geelong Greens secretary Bruce Murray said party members would meet on Monday to decide preferences in Geelong seats.

Mr Murray, the candidate for Geelong Province, would not confirm reports a key member of the Greens' campaign team

fiercely opposed to Labor had resigned yesterday over the preferences tussle.

"We've got many refugees from the Labor Party in our ranks and I think they're dissatisfied with Labor in various ways," Mr Murray said.

Sources within the Greens said a failure to direct preferences could boost the Liberal Party, which opposes Labor's

policy to end logging in Otways native forests.

Greens environment spokesman and candidate for Macedon, Marcus Ward, said yesterday preferences from the Victorian state election would flow to Labor in at least 13 finely balanced seats outside the Geelong region provided the Government promised to protect old growth forests.

In delivering what amounted to an ultimatum to Labor, he said neither party had done enough for native forests but the Government was ahead by a nose.

If Labor did not respond, the Greens would make no direction on preferences, he said.

The state's largest remaining pristine forests in East Gippsland would be

logged during the next few years, so the Government needed to make an immediate commitment.

He said West Australian Premier Geoff Gallop and Queensland Premier Peter Beattie had promised to phase out logging native forests and Premier Steve Bracks could do the same.

The WA Government has agreed to slash old growth logging by 90 per

cent and turn 200,000 hectares into national parks.

Mr Beattie has pledged to phase out logging in native forests and turn over 425,000 hectares to new national parks.

Monash University political analyst Nick Economou said Greens preferences could decide the seat of South Barwon.

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