

Comments re IFOA

The NSW Government promised that any changes to the IFOA would result in no loss of timber and no decrease in environmental values.

They have certainly delivered for the logging industry. But like much else that they do in environmental policy, the proposed changes will be devastating for the environment.

Despite the Government having paid out more than \$12.5m for being unable to supply timber committed, FCNSW called for Expressions of Interest for new timber contracts in January 2018.

That it could do so, prior to the IFOA or RFAs being finalised only demonstrates what a parody of a process this is. There is little doubt that all of the key decisions have been made, and were made, several years ago, and that the public consultation is a sham. This is further underscored by the complete failure of the department to provide any outreach or briefings to the public. Best keep it in the dark and draw as little attention to it as possible.

Considering that the public forests of NSW are a significant asset of the people, this approach shows the contempt in which we are held, and the agenda of privatisation by stealth. By awarding wood contracts that require broadscale clearfelling and intensive logging across the forest estate, the companies that benefit are profiting at the expense of current and future generations.

This intensive logging regime will see the overall age of the trees in the State Forests be reduced to juveniles. As such their ability to store water in their root systems and carbon in their bodies, will be greatly diminished. They will become more susceptible to fire and require more water to survive. Effectively, this logging policy will lead to the drying out of the landscape, with less downstream water produced, a higher likelihood of wildfire, greater carbon release and diminished number of and diversity of plants and animals.

Only those who are in denial of climate science, which is unequivocal in its predictions of rising temperatures and more extreme weather events, would think that diminishing one of our greatest mitigating natural assets is a good idea.

FMZs 1,2 and 3a

These are known as Forest Management Zones, 1, 2 and 3a or Special Management Zones when they are protected by an Act of Parliament. They form part of what the State and Commonwealth Governments deemed to be a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative reserve system. The areas within these exclusions counted towards all of the targets of the Comprehensive Regional Assessment (CRA). When any area is removed from the reserve system, it should trigger a re-analysis of targets, as areas weren't just protected as oldgrowth for example, but all of the habitat values of relevant fauna species that overlaid that area were also counted.

The proposal from the NRC, which has clearly failed on its mandate to provide advice that won't damage environmental values, that areas of oldgrowth and rainforest be reexamined and 'where found to not be oldgrowth or rainforest' be opened up for logging, is deeply flawed.

All parties to the recognised that there would be some errors in the mapping, but that these errors would cut both ways. That is, areas of oldgrowth and rainforest would not have been identified, and thus end of in the logging zones and there would be some that had been mapped as oldgrowth that could also have been in error. The phrase at the time was 'swings and roundabouts'. We all acknowledged this but having a definite map provided more certainty and less subjectivity for all

interests. It also needs to be recognised that areas of oldgrowth smaller than 10 ha were not identified or given any protection. Also, the oldgrowth protected as High Conservation Value, was only a subset of the oldgrowth actually identified during the CRA. All the 'disturbed oldgrowth' was made available for logging from the outset, as was a considerable amount of the non-disturbed oldgrowth. These have no doubt been logged in the life of the RFA. A number of environment groups campaigned for further oldgrowth protection, and this was realised to some extent in 2003.

The NRC's trial remapping of oldgrowth and rainforest displays all that is wrong with the process, it fails to recognise that most of the oldgrowth was inadequately reserved, ignored the presence of inadequately reserved forest ecosystem, ignored that their criteria are inadequate to identify oldgrowth of many ecosystems and resorts to lying to claim that "new" oldgrowth is identified.

The Natural Resources Commission have dramatically changed both the criteria for identifying oldgrowth forest and rainforest and the methodology for mapping them, with their trial resulting in 88% of mapped HCV oldgrowth and 62% of mapped rainforest being identified for logging. The revised criteria and methodology being used to remap oldgrowth and rainforest out of existence is inconsistent with the original criteria and methodology applied in the Comprehensive Regional Assessment and the application of these reduced criteria and methodologies is objected to.

NRC have misrepresented the criteria applied to identify High Conservation Value Oldgrowth Forest by failing to recognise that this included both High Quality Habitat Oldgrowth Forest for 21 threatened fauna and high "summed irreplaceability". All oldgrowth and rainforest must be assessed based on the full suite of environmental values and reserve targets they contribute to the Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative reserve system, not just rorted oldgrowth targets.

These oldgrowth forests were identified as part of the Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative reserve system and counted as contributing to reserve targets for oldgrowth, forest ecosystems, national estate, fauna, flora and Centres of Endemism in the 2000 Regional Forest Agreement. Mapped HCV oldgrowth forests in the Upper North East are also legally protected as a heritage item under the NSW Heritage Act 1977. An additional 20,000 ha of oldgrowth was included in Special Management Zones in 2003.

But in 2018, in north-east NSW the new IFOA is targeting oldgrowth (that has met revised targets) and rainforest for logging. They have changed their definitions and mapping methodologies, with their trial remapping resulting in 88% of mapped High Conservation Value oldgrowth and 62% of mapped rainforest being wiped off the map. The outcome of these multiple attacks is that using the Natural Resource Commission's criteria and methodology, of the 103,000 ha of protected oldgrowth on State forests up to 58,600ha (57%) may be opened up for logging, and of the 81,567ha of protected rainforest up to 50,600 hectares (62%) may be opened up for logging.

No oldgrowth forest or rainforest should be logged- not in 1995 when Premier Bob Carr promised to protect our high conservation value oldgrowth forests, not in 1982 when Premier Neville Wran promised to stop rainforest logging and not in 2003 when Premier Bob Carr agreed that oldgrowth forests, were of themselves of high conservation value and should not be logged. Certainly not in 2018 as we stare down the climate change barrel.

The trial remapping of oldgrowth and rainforest is simply a comparison of one technical mapping code definition with an entirely different definition, and has little to do with genuine API 'mapping errors', as has been claimed by the government as justification for this process. It is misleading to report that a 78% reduction in old growth spatial area across the trial site is a reflection of the mapping accuracy of the original data when a completely new and abridged technical definition is applied. In short, it is by limiting the definition dramatically that the trial has lead to oldgrowth forests 'disappearing' off the map. The reference to mapping errors is largely a smokescreen for an Orwellian change in definitions.

Changing the old growth definition without expert input is not a scientific and transparent way to

assess and protect true old growth forests. Furthermore, it is completely unacceptable for the government to adopt the PNF protocols as a valid public land definition for old growth forest when they have been heavily discredited in the past. A simple spatial analysis shows that the PNF definition mapping codes equates to approximately 55% of the previous ‘Candidate Oldgrowth COG’ spatial areas. The PNF protocol and re-mapping process has in the past been subject [to a quality assurance review](#) by the NSW Government due to serious concerns from the community and the review exposed serious flaws with the protocols.

The outcome of the review, by experts commissioned by the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water showed that under the PNF Protocols there had been areas of PNF old growth forest made available for harvesting and that re-assessments were inconsistent and subjective. The Quality Assurance report states *The implementation of old-growth is highly variable and problematic and has apparently resulted in some areas of old-growth being potentially available for harvest*’ (*Executive Summary - <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/-/media/epa/corporate-site/resources/pnf/ogrreviewgeneral.pdf>*).

The definition of old growth forest should reflect the definitions in the National Forest Policy and the JANIS criteria and encompass all elements including the biological, aesthetic and cultural values, including the functioning habitat from structural diversity across the landscape and the social values. The JANIS criteria explicitly defines that negligible disturbance effects will be evident in most forests by a significant proportion of trees with age – related features and a species composition characteristic of the ecologically mature forest ecosystem. The JANIS criteria recommends that structural, floristic and functional qualities should be the main focus in ecologically mature forests to assess negligible disturbance.

This trial appears to apply an approach that rules out forest with minimal disturbance that no longer impacts on the structural and functional qualities of the ecologically mature forest . This is a major component of the new definition and the underlying criteria that has unmapped the existing old growth areas.

The old growth definition should not be reduced to reflect old growth forest with no evidence of human occupation but broadened to allow for a definition that encompasses the ecological and scientific values of these highly diverse structural forests including the habitat values for hollow dependant threatened species. The CRA old growth expert panel defined negligible disturbance as disturbance which allowed the forest to remain structurally intact and functional as ecologically mature forest. Other flaws and inconsistencies in the NRC report include the following:

1. Bizarrely, the NRC report invents a new category of older forest values that it is calling ‘high quality habitat’, but without any clear definitions and without any clear outcomes as to how it will be managed. They indicate in the pathway in Figure 22 that such areas may be made available for logging as FMZ3b. They suggest this could be the outcome for an area like Clouds Creek 167 – which even they acknowledge has areas of up to 40% senescence and which is a vital corridor connecting two parts of the CAR reserve system. In short, this is a fop which offers no genuine protection.
2. The proposed environmental values assessment is flawed and appears to have cherry picked small parts of the Biodiversity Assessment Method (BAM) which is now the standard for assessment of impacts due to land clearing, logging or development. There can not be an adequate assessment of impact of proposed logging in protected areas with only a handful of features that appear to be selected from the BAM because they are simple and easy to assess during field assessment. This is yet more evidence that the framework for reassessment has simply been designed as a convenient tool for releasing protected areas for logging. The

assessment of environmental values presented in Appendix 5 falls far short of a proper assessment of the impact to the revocation of protected areas in the CAR reserve system.

3. The proposed change to the minimum polygon size for mapping old growth is presented in the report as a way of ‘adding’ old growth into protection. In many of the examples given, it is likely that the ‘new’ 2ha polygons were actually part of a much larger polygon with a continuous crown pattern and less than 50% disturbance. Under this criteria, even with the application of the PNF protocol these areas would still qualify for old growth. The introduction of the 2ha polygon size to protect tiny areas of forest that meet a significantly reduced code definition of old growth will be subject to increased edge effects and likely to be impacted by adjacent logging practices – this is a poor approach to protection within a compartment harvesting area.
4. The proposed rainforest definition appears to allow for rainforest ecosystems with increased emergents to become available for logging. This overturns previous ecological definitions and is a quantum leap backwards for a state that first moved to protect rainforest in 1982.

Irrespective of definitions, those forests mapped as oldgrowth and rainforest are of immense value as the most intact stands of forests left on State Forests as they have escaped the intensive logging of the past 20 years. The eucalypt stands have a high number of hollow-bearing trees that provide the nests and dens essential for a plethora of hollow-dependent animals and numerous mature trees that provide the abundant browse, nectar and seeds that are essential food resources for a multitude of species. Our rainforests have outstanding biodiversity and a multitude of unique plants and animals. They are irreplaceable assets of immense importance for the maintenance of populations of forest dependent species throughout State Forests. They provide important refugia and stepping stones between our national parks.

It is an all-out assault on the most precious jewels in one of the world's biodiversity hotspots and must not be allowed to proceed.

Anyone paying attention to forestry for the last 20 years would realise that there is virtually no environmental regulation or oversight. The EPA is a lap-dog. It's most extreme version of regulation involves writing a warning letter. It has shown itself incapable of upholding the licence conditions and has refused to act in a way which would have clarified the licence or sought amendment to strengthen clauses it thought difficult to audit.

The idea that EPA or NRC are going to oversee the remapping of OGF and Rainforest would be laughable, if the environmental consequences were not so dire.

This re-mapping is supposedly to enable a timber shortfall to be met. And it is clear from the examples provided in the Draft IFOA, that under the methodology, the overwhelming majority of those areas protected will become available for logging- some 80%.

The NRC, whose brief is clearly about resources rather than nature, doesn't seem to have considered all the other values, other than timber, that these areas represent. The suggestion that they can be compensated for by adding 'steep slopes.... and other non-commercial areas' displays incredible ignorance about the relative values of steep land for most ecological values.

Riparian Exclusions and Threatened Fish

The proposed new IFOA will halve the protection on most headwater streams. The argument put forward for this is that there are more of them now that LIDAR has been used to identify them. Just because there are more of them doesn't lessen the science that requires riparian buffering and that

science actually suggests 30m would be more appropriate. The current proposal for 5m, will give access to many large old trees that were found inside the 10m buffer. Because of the way the 5m is to be applied, any tree that is not below the top of the bank will be up for grabs.

The Environment Department has argued that the riparian strips form important wildlife corridors. Conservationists agree, but think that they should be wider. What is being proposed is basically nothing. Any tree with timber values will be taken. Who will check? We know the answer to that and it is no-one unless it is a passionate volunteer who in their naivete thinks that by pointing out a breach of logging conditions something will change and someone will be penalised.

We know from numerous forest audits however, that this is extremely unlikely.

One impact of this change will be a decline in water quality, which in turn will have serious implications for the region's threatened fish such as the Eastern Cod and the Purple-spotted Gudgeon.

It is important to note that all of the experts consulted as part of the Threatened Species Expert Review Panel opposed the opening up of these riparian areas that have been protected from logging for the last 20 years.

The most emphatic of these was Brian Tolhurst of the EPA who said:

“No further loss or impact on the retained riparian areas that have been protected to date under the existing rule set should occur. The expert panel agreed that these areas were the few areas seen on the site visit that still retained habitat elements and the diversity, form and structure of a native forest.

*...
I am not convinced that the proposed riparian buffers are adequate for ecological protection of these features. The widths seem to have been generated to deliver no net loss of available harvestable area rather than driven by an appropriate buffer for the size/importance of the feature”.*

And yet, it is proposed to halve these buffers. Again, this will clearly result in significant decline in environmental values... but that was obviously the 'non-core' part of the commitment.

Koalas

The Chief Scientist in her [report](#) published December 2016, on the decline of Koala Populations in NSW said as part of her recommendations:

“Within six months of receipt of this report, it is recommended that a priority research project is commenced to better understand how koalas are responding to regeneration harvesting forestry operations on the mid-north coast of NSW. The project will assess the effectiveness of current and proposed prescriptions designed to mitigate the impacts of forestry operations on koalas in these areas.”

Not only has this research project not been undertaken, but this recommendation has been completely ignored and regardless of the impact of 'regeneration harvesting' on koalas, it is to be embedded within the IFOA at a breath-taking scale. All of those bureaucrats and politicians responsible for this criminal destruction of koala habitat that will see koala populations continue to hurtle towards extinction, will be able to tell their children, that they played a role in the demise of the iconic species. What a legacy!

The proposal to introduce widespread clearfelling across some of the most important koala habitat in northern NSW is truly reprehensible. The NSW Recovery Plan for the Koala (DECCW 2008) identifies that the loss and degradation of habitat is the most significant threat facing NSW koala populations. Koalas have been found to have a preference for mature trees of specific species in the size range 30-80cm. In the CRAs, a significant threat to Koalas was identified (Environment Australia 1999) as “*Logging that fails to retain stems in the 30-80 DBH size class*”.

Such trees will be few and far between in the forests of the future, just as they are around Eden, where logging has almost completely extinguished all but a few very small koala populations. And the new koala prescription only requires retained koala trees to be greater than 20cm dbh. From experience, the trees will be left as the smaller damaged stems amidst a sea of carnage. The idea that this will provide habitat for a species already prone to stress is fantasy.

Large Trees

One of the major failings of the IFOA for the last 18 years, has been its failure to protect habitat trees from damage. Almost every logging operation sees retained trees damaged by careless operations and by the piling up of woody debris near the tree that will see it damaged by fire. Large trees are disappearing from our landscapes. The results of the Private Native Forestry assessment carried out this year by DPI suggest that on private land they are now almost non-existent.

That the NRC over-rode the proposal from the EPA to retain trees greater than 120cm (135cm for blackbutt) is appalling. Again, the decision was taken based on timber volumes rather than any other consideration.

Again, it was the EPAs Brian Tolhurst who was prepared to put on the record the importance of retaining large trees:

“All trees greater than or equal to 100 cm dbh should be retained and protected as a matter of urgency. Not only do these provide the best opportunity to develop the large hollows required by many species they also provide more flowers, fruit, nectar and seed along with nesting opportunities for large birds such as raptors. At this stage of the harvesting cycles across coastal NSW all remaining large trees are part of a limited resource and are critical for many threatened species and populations to survive. There is known clear deficit of hollow bearing trees in the forested coastal landscapes of NSW.”

Threatened Species

What can we say, except there will be more species that will move towards extinction and more individual animals and plants which will perish as a direct result of logging.

In NE NSW the proposed changes will see 228 species of threatened plants (72%) lose all protection and 28 species (9%) have reduced protection- if identified! Most species either required 20m or 50m exclusion areas around records. Of the 91 species currently requiring 50m buffers (ie 0.79ha) around records, 79 will have all protection removed and the rest will have buffers reduced to 20m (i.e. 0.13ha).

But without surveys most of these plants will go undetected and be destroyed by logging.

Similarly for threatened species of animals. Most will no longer require species specific surveys. Threatened frogs will be particularly at risk due to the diminished requirements for riparian protection and the significant loss of protection around records of these species.

Timber Volumes

It is not possible to get a clear picture of the current state of NE NSW timber volume commitments, allocations and yields.

FCNSW Annual Reports provide amalgamated figures for hardwoods. What we do know, is that \$12.5 m of public money has been spent buying back timber allocations. The 50,000m³ bought back from Boral in 2011 was effectively re-allocated to them with a wood supply extension until 2028. So they get the money, and more timber than the original WSA specified.

Then, earlier this year, FCNSW sought EOI for more timber allocation. This before RFA reviews, extensions, IFOA changes etc. That is, once again, FCNSW attempts to deliberately force the taxpayer to subsidise the logging industry by entering unsustainable wood contracts. So unsustainable, that we are told, that areas of forest protected for 20 years has to be made available for logging to meet timber short-falls. The EOI outlined a timetable for final decisions on allocation to be made in May/June and new Wood Supply Agreements to commence in July. Again, pre-empting any outcome of the IFOA. All a foregone conclusion and FCNSW continue to do what they have always done, which is more or less whatever they like, regardless of licence conditions or anything else.

Has FCNSW awarded new contracts? Have they given commitment? Does no-one inside the bureaucracy recognise this as abuse of process?

Despite the Boral buyback, in order to ensure 'sustainable supply' FCNSW have been supplying some 20,000m³ of timber above what was allocated for the last 2 years. But the NRC says there is a timber short-fall. So why would FCNSW be supplying additional timber if there is a short-fall? The lack of transparency around timber volumes and the failure of the NRC to investigate the figures provided by FCNSW is symptomatic of this "process", which is about maintaining vested interest access to public resources at the expense of the public. We as a society, will pay many times over for the damage to our forests, biodiversity, water reserves and climate.

I could go on, but who listens?