

MY SUBMISSION:

I have been living and working in the Northern Rivers for the past 25 years, I am an employed taxpayer and I vote.

I am OPPOSED to the renewal of the NSW Regional Forestry Agreements (RFAs) because I consider them to provide inadequate protection for our forests in this age of increasing carbon emissions, increasing numbers of threatened and endangered species, and the need for healthy, robust forests throughout the state.

Our wildlife is struggling

I have been a WIRES Northern Rivers volunteer for the past seven years and I have also lived on the same property for fifteen years, and in that time I have personally noted diminishing numbers of species in the area especially gliders, phascogales, quolls and many bird species.

The pressures on our wildlife are coming from every direction, and since the RFAs were developed twenty years ago we have lost significant wildlife corridors throughout the region due to roads and other development. Many riparian zones were eroded almost beyond recognition in the March 2017 floods, and key waterways which previously supported platypus, fish and turtles are now shallow and full of silt. Excessive clearing along creeks and waterways was a significant contributor to the speed at which the floodwater was able to travel through the valleys.

Over the past five years we have experienced several severe heat events causing the death of thousands of flying foxes.

We have also experienced heartbreaking events whereby rescued and rehabilitated animals were taken back for release, only to find that their habitat had been destroyed in the meantime, often due to tree removal, resulting in the necessity to euthanase the animal. Many species are highly territorial and can only be released back in their own or otherwise unoccupied territory if they are to survive after release. They cannot just be released anywhere.

There is a severe lack of nesting habitat for animals requiring tree hollows, and we find animals trying to nest in places where they cannot survive, such as a pair of Eastern Rosellas who hatched their chicks inside a hollow Telstra post last year. Fortunately they were discovered before any significant rain event, which would have caused the chicks to drown. WIRES was able to provide them with an alternative nesting box which was set up on the fence above the original nesting site. It can take hundreds of years for good nesting hollows to form and such hollows are only found in very old and large trees.

Our wildlife is increasingly struggling, an alarming indicator of the failing health of the overall ecosystem and our native forests. Wildlife volunteers are under ever greater pressure and we are all exhausted.

Ecologically sustainable forest management must come first

In all of the documents made available to me the '*certainty of resources access and supply to industry*' (Regional Forest Agreements – an overview and history, Department Agriculture 2015) seems to be the first priority stated and by implication, prioritised above

ecological sustainability. Even under the National Forest Policy Statement's first goal of Conservation, economic value is listed prior to social and environmental values.

And despite statements such as Goal 4 of the aforementioned Policy Statement regarding private native forests: *ensuring... [they]... are maintained and managed in an ecologically sustainable manner*, I find it difficult to believe how such goals are actually upheld given the lack of any real monitoring or regulation occurring. Most transgressions of the regulations are discovered by ordinary and caring citizens who observe illegalities and take it upon themselves to report them. Even where these matters are followed up and tokenistic fines issued, it is too late once the forest is cleared or the riparian zone torn apart.

The situation currently occurring at Limpinwood in the Tweed LGA here in the Northern Rivers is just one of many examples of questionable 'ecologically sustainable' logging that I am aware of or have personally witnessed. Concerned citizens reported the logging activities occurring in privately owned native forest, having observed large koala trees being felled causing the death of at least one koala, with her joey now in care of Friends of the Koala. The EPA investigated and has said that the activity is occurring within their approved Management Plan. I am struggling to understand how a logging activity resulting in the known death of a koala within a very short time from commencement, and also likely to have caused the dislocation of many other species such as birds, possums, gliders which may have been either nesting in or relying upon these trees for their food, can be considered in any way ecologically sustainable.

Native forests should be off limits

Timber is clearly a highly useful and potentially renewable material. However the concept of renewal implies that the overall timber and indeed general biomass is not reduced. Reduction in biomass results in increased CO₂. If we reduce native forests any further we also risk eradicating biodiversity. We need the remnant native forests to be allowed to grow and regenerate, and preserve them from any further retraction.

Instead of relying on native forests as though they are infinite resource, it would have been a far greater achievement had the RFA led to sustainably managed plantations so that we would be well on our way to securing a sustainable source of timber that is not taken from native forests. Regrettably this has not occurred, but this should be the primary aim of any new forestry arrangements.

In the meantime we need to learn to be more frugal with what timber we do have. For example, laminated timber, commonly used in the UK and Europe for beams or bearers or wherever traditionally large spans of timber are required, is rarely used in Australia. A behavioural change is urgently needed in Australia to promote more conservative use of timber.

Timber which is currently sent to landfill or burned could be recycled into a range of timber products.

There are also alternate building products which could be utilised, such as hemp masonry. The nature of hemp masonry is that it almost eliminates the need to use hardwoods. It only takes one ¼ acre crop of hemp to build an average sized house. In our region two crops can be grown per year.

Now is the time for the NSW Government to show leadership and vision and take action to ensure our native forests and their inhabitants are preserved. Indeed, I was raised to leave everything and everywhere at least as good if not better than I found it. I am appalled at the plundering of our environment as if it is primarily there for us to exploit and destroy.

Riparian Zones should be significantly extended

As severe weather events continue to increase with the impact of climate change, we need to work a lot harder to protect riparian zones from major flood events. The current set back requirements are not sufficient.

A Flawed Consultation Process

I attended the so-called consultation held in Lismore in February 2018. At that meeting we were shown a list of *non-negotiables* which included:

- The current RFAs to continue for 20 years;
- The existing boundaries will remain the same;
- The goals of the National Forest Policy Statement will remain the same;
- The existing core objectives of resource certainty and ecologically sustainable forest management will remain the same.

Clearly there was nothing of any consequence on the table for discussion and this consultation felt as though it was merely a box-ticking exercise.

There was no scope for discussing alternatives and clearly native forests continue to be earmarked for exploitation and destruction.

I am saddened by the lack of leadership and innovation shown by the NSW Government and the willingness to contribute to the ongoing extinction of our wildlife by treating native primarily as a resource for us to exploit, with little, if any, genuine consideration given to all the creatures who live in it. The longer we continue with a 'business as usual approach' to our forests, the more difficult it will be for future generations to secure their own future. The difficult decisions need to be made right now and the challenges need to be faced head-on. We cannot continue to take the easy route of continuing to harvest from our native forests whilst treating their inhabitants merely as collateral damage.

I confirm that my submission does not contain sensitive information and can be published in full on the Environment Protection Authority and/or the Department of Primary Industries website.

I understand that the Environment Protection Authority, Department of Primary Industries and/or the independent reviewer may contact me about my submission.

Yours sincerely

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