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Milton NPA Submission on Regional Forestry Agreements (RFA's)

Introduction

The National Parks Association (NPA) Milton Electorate is a non-government, non-political community based organisation of 160 members and families in the Milton-Ulladulla area of the Shoalhaven. It is concerned with the preservation and protection of our natural environment and its enjoyment by future generations. As an organisation, the NPA tries to present a balanced and fact based commentary on key matters of interest to us and our community.

Background

Milton NPA is located on the South Coast of New South Wales in an area with a long history of forest logging, which continues to this day. We have, as members, families who have in past years worked in the industry and we all know friends in the community who have long standing forestry connections.

We do not have a myopic view that all forest logging is bad, nor do we believe that all those who oppose it are ignorant idealists. We understand however that the NSW Govt. has, prior to this review, in fact already committed itself to extending the RFA's. This is most unfortunate as it casts a shadow over the value of this community consultation process. Nevertheless we are making this submission in good faith in the expectation that its contents will be seriously considered.

Key Issues

- ***RFA's are not working.***

We seek a better model than that represented by the current Regional Forest Agreements (RFA's), which we believe are not delivering the outcomes which they were originally intended to deliver. The original RFA's were underpinned by the concept of Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management (ESFM), which is aimed at ensuring that logging does not result in negative impacts on forest systems. Detailed reviews of the RFA by the NPA in 2016 have concluded that they have failed to achieve their stated aims, nor have they resulted in a thriving logging industry!

The RFA's as they currently stand are in fact a failing model and there is no point in expecting that they will somehow succeed in future unless they are changed. The evidence is that logging is NOT conforming to ESFM but is instead contributing to overall forestry economic value destruction through its impacts on water supplies, carbon storage and wildlife. Why continue with this downhill path?

- **Stakeholder Management is weak**

Breaches of licence are too numerous to mention and it would seem to us that this situation will continue to occur unless, and until, Commonwealth oversight of forestry is restored.

- **Tourism issues in this area**

There is role for logging but the model must be workable, which is currently not the case. While the logging industry still exists in this region, the economic imperatives which were present in our area twenty years ago are rapidly changing and today it is sustainable eco-tourism which is underpinning the prosperity and economic growth in the area and into its future.

Badly managed logging is a clear threat to the future growth of such tourism and we strongly believe that the current RFA model is no longer delivering acceptable outcomes to our community. While logging employs 400 people in NSW, tourism employs over 260,000 jobs and eco-tourism is growing rapidly in the South Coast region.

The area has a natural advantage through its perception of being “unspoilt” but eco-tourists, particularly from abroad, are notoriously fickle and will not return or recommend regions that are not protecting the natural environment which they are increasingly coming here to enjoy. Perceptions of poorly managed forestry areas surrounding our beaches, walking tracks and trails will do the area no good whatsoever, especially with the fast growing international bush walking tourists.

Recommendations

- Milton NPA does not seek to end logging in our area but to set it up under a **new business model** which will be better managed as a public good and as an **eco-tourism drawcard**.
- **The current RFA’s are clearly not working as originally intended and should not be renewed.** They are failing to deliver results for the loggers, for the public and for the environment.
- **Commonwealth Govt. oversight of the process of forestry management should be restored** to ensure best practise guidelines are adhered to, and that our international obligations under our climate change agreements are honoured.
- Alternative models of management need to be seriously considered, and in conjunction with inputs from both the logging industry but also key stakeholder groups such as the **National Parks Association (NPA)** and the **Nature Conservation Council (NCC)**.
- It is imperative that **community support** for future approaches be genuinely obtained, as the current system is breeding distrust between key stakeholder groups in the community and will continue to do so unless it is altered.

Barry Tomkinson
Convenor, Milton NPA Electorate.