

Submission to NSW Regional Forest Agreements Second and Third Five-Yearly Review

Introduction

I live at Port Macquarie, NSW and recently travelled north to Coffs Harbour to the Pop-in information session regarding the RFS and when I arrived I found about 50 protestors outside the venue demonstrating.

I listened briefly to speakers who were passionately deriding the Forestry Corporation, the EPA and the NSW Government.

I slipped inside the building intending to beat the crowd who I presumed would soon be making their submissions to the State and Federal representatives.

I made an oral submission to a couple of representatives and later a Bellingen councillor joined us and made comments about log trucks chopping up the roads and deterring tourism activities.

When I went outside I talked to a couple of protestors whom I knew and to my surprise found that no-one from the demonstration was prepared to talk to the government representatives.

All of the people demonstrating in public were going home without meeting with anyone inside the building. **I realised then the crowd were boycotting the process. The answers I was given were that they believed nothing they said would make any difference to the RFA result, the determination to proceed with even less environmental protections was a foregone conclusion.**

The only thing they could do was to boycott the sham consultation and remove any risk of the NSW and Federal Governments claiming credibility through proper consultation with environmentalists.

When you think about it leaving the staff inside with no-one to hear their government's presentation was a statement in its own.

Why is it so?

1. From my personal observation, confirmed by others from different areas of NSW, the single tree selection method has evolved into taking every single tree apart from a couple of seed trees like Tallowwood and Blackbutt so as to turn the forest coupe into a monoculture or bicultural plantation.

This of course drastically alters the nature of the native forest which preservation was once the aim of Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management. It is more akin to farming public forests than to conservation of the environment.

I spoke recently to Bob Debus on the site of a clearfell west of Warrell Creek and he seemed upset and angry when he stated quite firmly that this was most definitely not what was envisaged when the first RFA was delivered.

It is plain that, with the collusion of the NSW Government and the EPA, bit by bit the rules have been changed, ignored, watered down and there has been little monitoring of the logging in our State Forests while the EPA has consistently

failed to prosecute and produce fines worse than a slap on the wrist when activists have dragged EPA officers to see evidence of multiple breaches.

2.

The EPA is considered by conservationists to be just an arm of Forest Corporation.

If the reviewers care to they could search the writings of Dailan Pugh OAM. This is just the latest.

<https://www.echo.net.au/2018/02/epa-refuses-act-logging-breaches-limpinwood/#.WoZwOwlMfbk.facebook>

In my view the whole department should be sacked immediately.

3.

Lack of monitoring of deliberate breaches and slap on the wrist for continual breaches.

On the South Coast Judge Pepper in 2013 in her ruling noted that Forest Corp was a repeat offender with serial offences. She was not talking about some hoon with continual breaches of the law but about a government agency.

<http://www.smh.com.au/environment/nsw-forestry-corporation-fined-for-damaging-environment-20130724-2qj5w.html>

4.

The first question I asked the Government representatives at Coffs Harbour was how are our forests going? What did the assessment of the environmental situation show you?

The gentlemen looked at each other and said there isn't one but there is a biodiversity study which was done recently, in December I think.

5.

The RFA has failed. The forest logging industry is an economic basket case which loses money every year and has failed, deliberately, to conserve our forests as a natural ecosystem.

6.

The Forest Corp and EPA are koala killers.

As I write activists and supporters are demonstrating to halt logging of known koala habitat at Gladstone Forest near Bellingen where a koala mother and baby were recently sited in situ. Breaches of roading rules have allegedly occurred where land slip has forced the loggers to make new tracks which undoubtedly will make new siltation issues when the next heavy rain event occurs.

Steve Phillips, a respected ecologist specialising in koalas found in a study commissioned by Port Macquarie Hastings Council that the forest industry west of the Pacific Highway had cut out most of the suitable koala food trees in our forests.

Phillips recently addressed a Port Macquarie Koala Roundtable of government agency and development representatives and produced 3 scenarios for what was previously called the strongest koala colony on the NSW North Coast. Each scenario predicted local extinction within 50 years!

Meanwhile the Port Macquarie Koala Hospital reported an absence of juvenile koalas presenting at the hospital. The conclusion was a probable lack of breeding females.

If this is correct in the wild then 10-20 years might be an optimistic prediction for koalas in our area and all we will have will be a few breeding inmates for zoos in the local zoo and 50 lovely fibreglass koalas outside tourist venues.

7.

Things can't go on as they have in the past.

Considering just the mammal and bird populations in the State Forests is not enough.

- There is currently a push from government sources for increased Private Native Forest activity which is already encouraged by Forest Corp visiting neighbours and private contractors. There was a conflict between the NSW Government and Coffs Harbour Council about PNF while Port Macquarie Hastings Council (PMHC), through Midroc, protested the amount of PNF PVPs being allowed in its area without written response from the then environment minister.
- While developing a response to the dire warnings from the Roundtable predictions by Phillips PMHC determined that they should avoid making bad decisions. However they then proceeded to approve the Biocertification of 440 ha. of land adjoining the Port Macquarie Airport including 100 ha. of koala habitat without a viable offset. A rider was written in that no account would be made of anything from the CKPoM Committee, presuming of course they found out about it.
- PMHC are developing a CKPoM (Coastal) and have done a good job of defining core koala habitat although such area has to be more than one hectare. However because of NSW rules any and all core habitat can be bulldozed and offsets at a certain rate made. The offset can be a few trays of seedlings to be planted later!!
- Not even National Parks are safe for koalas due to arson, (and the push by some in the National Party for nil-tenure). The recent fire in Limeburners NP and Wilderness area was thought to be the work of arsonists while the Royal National Park was similarly a suspected arson event with the lack of lightning etc. There needs to be a reinstatement of NPWS field staff numbers and the use of drones and possibly occasional satellite surveillance.
- To finally finish off our forest diversity the new clearing laws replacing the Native Vegetation Act may have tremendous effect in decimating our natural biodiversity.

State Forests have now an even greater role to play in preserving our forest ecosystems.

8.

Forest Corp continually burn after flogging a forest which must be contributing to climate change and destroying biota in the soil.

This also leads to weed infestation like lantana and the spread of BMAD.

The failure to monitor and present an environment impact statement by the government bodies before seeking a renewal and even an extended renewal of the RFA is indicative of the complete lack of concern for the original concept of the RFA.

Ecologists and environmentalists know a lot of the damage being done but if the RFA is renewed for 20 years with even weaker regulations and an impotent or complicit EPA it will sign a death warrant for the forest ecology and also the timber industry.

John Jeayes

