

New England Greens Armidale Tamworth submission

Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs)

New England Greens Armidale Tamworth (NEGAT) is grateful for the opportunity of contributing to this important debate. NEGAT opposes the renewal of Regional Forest Agreements.

NEGAT is concerned that the current process is not a genuine review of the performance of RFAs and whether they have met their aims as Berejiklian and Turnbull governments have already committed to their extension. It is our contention that the overdue progress report on the second and third five-yearly reviews fails to provide adequate data for the public, NSW and Commonwealth governments to assess the performance of the RFAs. It also fails to take account of new knowledge, particularly on climate change and its increasing threat to ecological systems, biodiversity and human wellbeing – social, health, mental, and economic.

With regard to climate change, we know that trees provide the most effective form of carbon capture and storage- a reason to protect our native forests.

RFAs mean that the public native forest logging industry is not required to comply with the usual environmental impact assessments under Commonwealth environment laws. While every other industry must comply with these laws, logging in habitat for federally listed threatened species occurs routinely in areas covered by RFAs.

We know that RFAs have failed:

Populations of forest animals - including koalas - have plummeted over the life of RFAs;

Ecosystem processes in forests, like the carbon and water cycles, have been disrupted;

Hollow-bearing trees, key to the survival of wildlife, have been reduced by logging;

Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management has not occurred;

Forestry job numbers have steadily declined, and subsidies keep logging financially viable;

The NSW taxpayer has repeatedly footed the bill to buy out logging contracts.

NEGAT urges the State Government to use the expiry of the RFAs to trigger a just transition of workers out of the native forest logging industry.

These public forests belong to the people of NSW; they are an inalienable part of our common-wealth. NEGAT demands the protection of public native forests and an end to damaging industrial logging. It demands increased public access to forests for recreation and tourism with the requisite increase in funding to enable appropriate maintenance and development. We insist that the benefits provided by our native forests, which include clean water supplies and management of CO₂, are protected and passed on to future generations.