

Submission on the Discussion paper on the proposed Remake of the Coastal Integrated Forestry Operations Approvals

I support the submissions of the NCEC, the North East Forest Alliance and the Bellingen Environment Centre. The NEFA submission in particular is a detailed and authoritative submission reflecting the history, policies and participation of the conservation movement in forest management on the north coast of NSW over the last forty years. This submission draws to a limited degree on others made by the conservation community.

My first encounter with the NSW coastal forests was undertaking work experience as a NSW Forestry Commission trainee following high school in 1965. My involvement in forest issues has been almost continuous since that time.

I am engaging in the "IFOA remake" process with considerable reluctance and with no confidence that the views and those concerned with the conservation of our internationally recognized forests will be considered in balance with other considerations as reflected in the National Forest Policy..

Since the adoption of the National Forest Policy in 1991 and the JANIS conservation criteria in 1995 we have watched the outcomes fail to meet agreed criteria and then, particularly in regard to threatened species and non sustainable harvesting, progressively get worse. This is during a period during the last ten years when the timber industry based on native forests has been in significant decline and losing money.

The current IFOA has failed in many respects. I believe this has been as much because of a lack of will from the regulators as deficiencies in the wording. Over the last decade the conservation movement have suggested many changes that would make conditions auditable, none of these have been adopted.

Issues supported for inclusion in the IFOA remake

I support inclusion of the following initiatives in the proposed IFOA Remake, most of which not mentioned or adequately addressed;

- The inclusion of carbon accounting.
- transform the proposed IFOA remake into the third five year review of the RFA's.
- establish and release a framework and process for the twenty year revision of the RFA's.
- the completion of the reserve system to full JANIS target achievement.
- the protection of all wilderness capable areas.
- the undertaking of a tenure blind assessment of the potential World Heritage attributes as identified by the national expert panel and committed to in the Regional Forest Agreements..
- The removal of crown timbered land other than State forest from the IFOA.
- Review of long term trends in the timber industry, and classification of quality of use considerations, eg consideration of use of products for largely decorative purposes as against leaving forests unlogged.
- The reduction of wood supply quotas to reflect a sustainable yield from the forests available for harvesting.
- the protecting all hollow-bearing trees.

- the protection of recruitment hollow-bearing trees from each age/size cohort, allowing for mortality.
- the abolition of the Regrowth Zone.
- the protection of all trees with a DBHOB of 90cm.
- the permanent marking of all retained trees and their location recorded on GPS with such information available to community monitoring teams.
- permanent hard exclusion areas on all riparian areas including drainage lines.
- permanent hard exclusions providing connectivity between retained forest.
- basal area retention rates no less than the PNF Code of Practice.
- the requirement of FCNSW to maintain publicly accessible compliance registers.
- more serious penalties for breaches.
- the reinstatement of Third Party Appeal rights to the community .
- the requirement for the EPL to be permanently switched 'on'.
- the maintenance of habitat clumps of sufficient size and structural complexity.
- the need to protect retained habitat values from post-harvest burning.
- strong penalties where erosion occurs due to inadequate drainage measures.
- increased auditing of FCNSW logging activities with the results publicly available,
- making contractors share responsibility for licence breaches including financial penalties.
- application of the Federal EPBC Act should apply where nationally threatened species are likely to be present.

Flawed and damaging IFOA process

The discussion paper on the remake of the Coastal IFOA's sets out a range of damaging proposals, including:

- weakening protections for our most vulnerable native plants and animals
- removing requirements for pre-logging threatened species surveys
- removing restrictions on intensive logging operations and clearfelling
- increasing erosion and water pollution risks by allowing logging on very steep slopes.
- Amalgamating the four coastal IFOAs and separate licenses for threatened species and erosion control into one non-IFOA license.
- Failure to reduce over-committed timber volumes.
- Removal of most species-specific prescriptions for the most vulnerable animals will be removed.
- Replacing specific auditable and enforceable prescriptions with largely un-enforceable broad outcome-based protocols.

- a threat of major expansion of industrial logging to steep slopes throughout the Bellingen Valley and surrounding areas
- transfer of legal liability will be shifted to contractors.

Taken together, the proposed changes represent a substantial reduction in environmental protection and a serious threat to our native forests, wildlife and water courses.

It is evident the community are about to lose much of what it took us years to achieve and now the NSW Government, led by the EPA, are about to gut logging prescriptions. The proposed 'landscape scale' approach appears a meager fig leaf as against a reputable approach to ecologically sustainable forest management for our internationally important forests.

The proposed change to the IFOA is a cost cutting exercise and also a move toward more self compliance or self regulation. It is evident that NSW Forest Corporations continued financial losses are singularly driving the IFOA remake agenda; not the desire for healthy forests or to address the major changes affecting the forests since 1991 when the National Forest Policy was adopted.

The reality of the current IFOA licence is that it has never been effectively enforced and suggestions from the environment movement to make it enforceable have been ignored. The current regulatory system has failed threatened species. The EPA have failed to enforce licence conditions and develop a methodology to ensure blatant and obvious breaches can be prosecuted.

The review promises better protection for threatened species and their habitats while also committing to no reduction in wood supply. The threat to most of the threatened species is the loss and/or fragmentation of habitat. We do not believe that the changes proposed will provide better protection for those species if timber supplies are to be maintained. Timber volumes have been set at unrealistic levels, and the only means to better protect threatened species and have a viable sustainable timber industry is if volume commitments are significantly reduced.

It is difficult to comment when broad assertions are delivered but the paper is lacking in detail.

There are now hundreds of areas for which pre-logging surveys were done and which provide the opportunity for the EPA to conduct similar survey work to determine whether the logging had an impact and whether the prescriptions worked for the species identified in the initial survey. The complete failure to conduct any work of these kind means that important opportunities have been missed. It is not too late for the EPA to undertake comparative survey work, in fact this should be done prior to any changes to the IFOA so that they are informed changes.

As a result I strongly oppose:

- the debasing of established process for implementation of the RFA's, in terms of late or missing reports and inadequate processes and limited agendas.
 - any reduction in pre-logging surveys that enable the presence of some species to be identified and precautionary action taken
 - the proposal to have the Tasmanian Forest Practices Board critique the proposed changes.
- Tasmania is internationally recognised as an appalling example of forestry practice and the idea NSW is seeking to adopt Tasmanian-like provisions is a major cause of alarm.

- Proposed protocols outside the IFOA. licence enforced o will not have any teeth if it is relegated to 'protocols' that can be easily changed presumably by any Government Minister or Department Head. Furthermore we are alarmed at the proposal that the 'protocols' can be easily changed and 'adapted'. This will lead to ongoing watering down of logging constraints at political direction.
- the suggestion that guidance material and protocols will be developed separately and presumably not form part of the next public consultation on the IFOA. This would be extremely dishonest and lacking in transparency.
- the removal of burning, heritage protection, grazing, weed control and road construction should continue to be clearly covered by the IFOA. All of these are clearly related to logging activities and have a major impact on the environment and should be transparently regulated by the IFOA.
- sloppy language around threatened plant protection (p23) “The proposed IFOA will include specific provisions to address these species when identified.” This is similar to the language in the PNF Code, when threatened species prescriptions are only triggered when the TS has been identified, but there is no requirement to look... hence the prescriptions are never triggered. This rings more alarm bells.
- the logging within TECs. The proposed changes allow logging of TECs if needed to meet timber supply. This is completely unacceptable.
- any change that does not mark exclusion boundaries in the field.
- changes to stream protection buffers.
- the implication that FCNSW have acted responsibly with respect to Bell-miner Associated Dieback. They have not. Their role on the BMAD Working Group has not been constructive and they have refused to alter their logging practices in recognition that BMAD is a response to disturbance and areas at risk should be avoided.

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