

Public submission

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Submission ID: 204908

Organisation: *Clarence Valley Conservation Coalition*

Location: *New South Wales*

Supporting materials uploaded: *Attached overleaf*

Submission date: 10/13/2024 3:10:38 PM



[REDACTED]

13th October 2024

Submission on Forestry Industry Action Plan

The Clarence Valley Conservation Coalition (CVCC) is a community group based in the Clarence Valley in the NSW Northern Rivers. Formed in 1988 following the announcement of a proposal for a huge kraft pulp mill¹ in our LGA, the CVCC has been involved with environmental issues – both locally and beyond – since that time. It has had a long-term interest in biodiversity conservation, climate change, waste management, the water cycle and protecting the environment of our local area and further afield.

The CVCC has become increasingly concerned about the management of our publicly-owned native forests and believes that they are not being sustainably managed for their owners - the people of NSW. Nor are these forests providing the important services for the environment that are required of responsible land managers.

1. CURRENT ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY OF PUBLICLY OWNED NATIVE FORESTS

Losses despite generous government subsidies

Over recent decades the Forestry Corporation division involved in logging public native forest has had significant losses even after receiving generous subsidies from the Government (i.e. NSW taxpayers). In 2023 this division posted a \$28 million loss despite the handing over of millions in government subsidies.

This largesse does not make sense - particularly when the NSW Government is talking of its inability to increase wages for government employees in the care section of our economy as well the need to cut various other services. A reconsideration of spending priorities is obviously well overdue.

¹ The Daishowa pulp mill proposal did not proceed, largely because of the strong opposition of the North Coast community which understood the damage it would do to the forests of our region as well as to our waterways and air quality.

Declining yields and other problems

Other issues affecting the economic sustainability of the native forest industry include declining production yields (40% since 2010) and regular over-estimation of the harvestable timber available.

In many areas timber being extracted is low quality salvage or small sawlogs with a large percentage being turned into woodchip.²

The fact that hardwood and softwood plantations already provide 91% of Australia's log production, is a strong argument supporting calls for the phasing out of logging in our public native forests. Other states – Victoria and Western Australia – are already moving in this direction.

Another issue relates to failure to adhere to logging regulations which are supposed to give protection to biodiversity (even if these regulations are questionably weak). In recent years the Forestry Corporation has been taken to court for logging breaches which have led to increasingly heavy fines. These breaches have outraged community members who are attempting to protect threatened species and have led to more blockades where forestry operations are occurring. The breaches and the failure to adhere to weak conditions indicate the Forest Corp is not an ethical or responsible manager of public land.

Plantations

NSW already has plantations supplying significant volumes of softwood and hardwood timber. If logging in native forests is phased out as many scientists and conservationists are urging, the areas under plantations could be expanded onto already cleared land.

Shifting to plantation timber, which can supply high quality and composite timber products, will reduce pressure on native forests and result in positive outcomes for the State's economy as well as its biodiversity, its forest and waterways health, and tourism.

2. PUBLICLY OWNED NATIVE FORESTS AND ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY

Impact of native forest logging on the biodiversity crisis

The biodiversity crisis we are facing in NSW continues to worsen largely because of habitat loss. Habitat loss is pushing species such as the Koala and the Greater Glider closer to extinction. Public native forests in NSW provide vital habitat for these and many other species. While some private land as well as protected areas (National Parks and Nature Reserves) contain important habitat, these areas alone are insufficient to provide enough area and range of habitat to assist with the survival of threatened species. NSW's publicly-owned native forests are an essential part of the provision of habitat for native fauna in this state.

Public native forests managed for timber production

Despite this, the native forests in our area are being managed for timber production with little, if any, consideration of their importance as habitat for native fauna - particularly threatened

² See the CVCC article "Shea's Knob State Forest Protest Action" in the Appendix (p. 6) for a general description of the timber being extracted in the Shea's Nob SF in May 2024.

species. This is scarcely surprising given the attitude of successive NSW governments. They have invariably paid lip-service to biodiversity protection but at the same time have loosened protections for key habitat and eased rules controlling logging on steep land and close to waterways.

The Great Koala National Park (GKNP)

Those who campaigned for this protected area welcomed the new State Government's commitment to the creation of the park. The delay in its creation has been disappointing to many community members but even worse has been the failure of the Government to stop Forest Corp from the heavy logging in the forests which will become part of the new Koala park.³ This means that, assuming the GKNP is **eventually created**, much important koala habitat will have been lost – trashed by Forest Corp. This is another example of the Government's skewed priorities referred to in the next section.

Government policy removes fauna protection to expedite logging

The native forests in our State Forests provide vital habitat for 150 threatened species. Many of these species – including the Greater Glider - are hollow dependent and the retention of older trees is critical for their survival - as is connectivity. Regulations for the protection of mature trees were removed in 2018 resulting in intensification of logging and further habitat loss. This and other easing or removing restrictions implemented for fauna protection illustrate how governmental priorities are skewed against biodiversity and the health of the natural world. It also highlights an extremely worrying lack of government concern about preventing extinctions.

Forest and landscape health suffers as a result of logging

As well as having disastrous effects on threatened species, logging affects general forest health and the health of the surrounding areas. Industrial-scale logging results in erosion and waterway pollution and increases fire intensity. It also opens up the logged area to weed growth and in some areas to Bell Miner Associated Dieback (BMAD) which has devastated forests along the east coast and hinterland areas.

The proliferation of weeds in native forests in our area has been of increasing concern as has been the lack of any action by Forest Corp to bring this problem under control.

Another local concern has been waterway pollution. The protection of the Nymboida catchment from pollution has been of concern for some years. The Nymboida, a major tributary of the Clarence River, is the source of water for the Clarence Valley-Coffs Harbour Regional Water Scheme. Agricultural and logging activities have contaminated the river in recent years on a number of occasions, resulting in difficulties in extracting water from the river and leading to water restrictions being raised for an extended period. The State Government protects water catchments for major urban areas with very prescriptive legislation. Regional water catchments like that of the Nymboida are not protected.

3. ADDITIONAL IMPORTANT ROLES OF NSW PUBLICLY OWNED NATIVE FORESTS

Forests provide important services for the environment and local communities.

³ For a more extensive discussion of the on-going loss of important habitat in the proposed Great Koala NP, see the CVCC articles "Degrading Proposed Koala Park" (p. 5) and "Shea's Nob State Forest Protest Action" (p. 6) in the Appendix.

Healthy, unlogged forests are in a significantly better position to provide these services than forests whose health has been compromised by logging.

These services include:

- Forests supply habitat connectivity which supports biodiversity and ecosystem health.
- Forests generate rainfall, cool the landscape and clean the air.
- They regulate water flow and improve water quality - both important for fish stocks in local streams and rivers.
- They store carbon and help in reducing our emissions.
- These forests in NSW hold significant cultural and spiritual value for First Nations people
- They provide places for recreation for locals and visitors. This leads to improved health outcomes for those visiting these natural areas.
- As tourist destinations forests provide opportunities for the creation of jobs – both directly in tourism and indirectly in the local economy. Tourism is an important industry in our local area and is likely to grow further in coming years.

4. PUBLICLY OWNED NATIVE FORESTS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Logging native forests creates increased climate risk

- Forests, like other natural areas, are being affected by the growing impacts of climate change.
- Mature trees in these forests should be protected for their biomass and as important carbon storage repositories as well as for their ecological importance.
- As millions of tonnes of carbon are released when forests are logged, removing logging from native forests in NSW would have positive benefits in reducing our carbon emissions as well as saving millions of subsidy dollars for the state.
- Unlogged forests are more resilient to a changing climate and to the catastrophic fires that occur as a result of worsening climate change impacts.

5. CONCLUSION

This inquiry has provided a timely opportunity for the Independent Forestry Panel to recommend a change in direction in the management of publicly-owned forests in this state to ensure that our native forests are used for biodiversity protection and function as providers of a range of other important environmental services including storing carbon, generating rainfall, cleaning the air and providing opportunities for human recreation in the natural world.

The CVCC urges the Independent Forestry Panel to recommend the phasing out of logging in publicly owned native forests and development of a transition plan for the workers and businesses engaged currently in logging in publicly owned native forest. The plan should also include expansion of the areas under plantations on already cleared land and remediation of the damage caused by logging in the publicly owned native forests.

APPENDIX

The Clarence Valley Conservation Coalition (CVCC) contributes VOICES FOR THE EARTH, a column on environmental matters to the weekly local newspaper, The Clarence Valley Independent. Copies of three of these articles dealing with issues relating to logging in publicly owned native forests are printed below.

Sheas Knob State Forest Protest Action

On Monday 6th May a delegation of concerned citizens walked into an active logging operation at Sheas Knob State Forest to bear witness to the wanton destruction of significantly important tall eucalypt forest, and its wildlife habitat, that is currently being undertaken by contractors employed by the NSW Forestry Corporation.

Citizen scientists have recorded multiple sightings of threatened fauna in that forest including the endangered Greater Glider and Koala, and the fact that this forest is a part of the promised Great Koala National Park, makes this logging operation even more abhorrent.

The state government's decision to allow the ongoing widespread destruction of Koala habitat all across the proposed park is nothing short of scandalous and is rightly being widely condemned.

Even while this destruction is occurring, the timber industry is negotiating compensation for the loss of the timber resources which it claims will result from the park's declaration. However, after witnessing the current destruction, the question arises, why should any compensation be paid? The timber resource is being taken anyway, and the forest is left in such a state that recovery will take many decades.

The combination of over logging, which is promoting dense regrowth, and the resultant high intensity bushfire impacts, makes it highly probable that these tall forests may never fully recover to their former glory.

Much of the timber being extracted is low quality salvage or small saw logs, with many measuring less than 30cm diameter at the small end, and few, if any, measuring more than 45cm at the larger end. At the mill, 30% is the most that can be salvaged as timber from a small saw log, the remaining 70% being turned into woodchip.

As a result, it's clear that Forestry Corporation will lose money from this operation, as it has done consistently across the state for the past 23 years, and the fact that the NSW's government still allows the logging of these forests to occur at a financial loss, beggars belief.

For the sake of Koalas, **STOP LOGGING NATIVE FORESTS!**

Published in The Clarence Valley Independent, 22nd May, 2024

Degrading Proposed Koala Park

The plight of Koalas – as well as other endangered species such as Greater Gliders - in our publicly-owned North Coast forests continues as a major concern for conservationists who are increasingly frustrated by the State Government’s failure to protect important habitat.

While the new government’s election commitment to create the Great Koala National Park (GKNP) was welcomed, the slow progress over the 15 months since the election and the continuing destruction of important habitat has angered conservationists.

Forest Alliance NSW recently analysed the Forestry Corporation’s maps of the 20 active logging operations on the North Coast from the Hunter to the Queensland border. They found that more than half of these were in the proposed GKNP, an area containing just a fifth of the State Forests in the region. The areas impacted include compartments in Shea’s Nob, Clouds Creek, Wild Cattle Creek and Orara East State Forests.

North East Forest’s Dailan Pugh said, “The Minns Government is allowing the state-owned logging company to target the proposed park to take as many trees as they can, degrading the proposed park before it’s even established. It’s outrageous.”

The proposed park will include about 1760 sq. km of State Forest and 1400 sq km of existing national parks in five LGAs from the Clarence to Kempsey.

The Government established three separate advisory panels – Aboriginal, Community and Industry - to provide input to the assessment process and creation of the park.

The Community Advisory Panel, which has representatives from LGAs (for example: Coffs, Bellingen, Nambucca and Clarence Valley Councils), tourism authorities and environmental organisations in the park footprint area, made two important recommendations to the Government for the assessment period. They were for a moratorium on logging or, at the least, to the undertaking of pre-logging surveys to identify core Koala habitat to protect. These were both rejected by Government.

Commenting on the continuing logging, Justin Field from Forest Alliance NSW, said, “The Minns Government needs to step in and stop this destruction if the park is going to be the reserve Koalas need to survive.”

Published in [The Clarence Valley Independent](#), 10th July, 2024

Greater Gliders Threatened with Extinction

Greater Gliders, a nocturnal species and the world’s largest gliding marsupial, weigh up to 1.3 kg and are capable of gliding up to 100m through a forest. Once abundant in eucalypt forests throughout Queensland, NSW and Victoria, the species was federally listed as endangered in July 2022.

Professor David Lindenmayer, a world-leading expert in forest ecology and biodiversity conservation, said recently, “Forty years ago when my colleagues and I did spotlighting surveys, the southern greater glider was the most common animal we’d see. Now, this amazing species is endangered. In many areas it is hard to find; in others it has been lost altogether.”

Glider populations declined by 80% in the last twenty years as a result of habitat destruction – including forest destruction, bushfires and climate change. Gliders are amongst the range of species relying on tree hollows which can take over 100 years to develop. So old growth forest provides the required habitat of large tree hollows where they shelter and breed.

Recently the role of NSW Forest Corp logging in destroying endangered species habitat for Greater Gliders and Koalas has been highlighted with community members reporting numerous breaches of

regulations which are supposed to offer some protection for these species. Breaches in Styx River SF and Sheas Nob SF are amongst the latest reported.

Although the EPA has imposed fines on Forest Corp for breaches, environmentalists are concerned that the prosecutions and fines are not enough to bring Forest Corp into line and that effective action is needed from the Environment Minister and Premier to stop the habitat destruction.

One of the community groups campaigning to stop forest destruction is the Blicks River Guardians which last Friday at Billys Creek celebrated 150 days of saving the Greater Gliders in Clouds Creek SF. The Guardians have identified over 40 gliders to date in bushfire impacted older forests along Billys Creek and the Blicks River in areas scheduled for industrial logging by Forest Corp.

Campaigners like the Guardians are urging people to call for effective Government action to stop the destruction.

Published in The Clarence Valley Independent, 7th August, 2024