

Public submission

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I am a forest ecologist and threatened fauna expert with over 50 years' experience conducting surveys and research in the public forests of NSW. I have worked for the Australian Museum, the University of New England, the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) and as a private consultant in forests east of the Dividing Range and along the Tablelands from Eden to the Queensland border and west of the Range from the Riverina to the Pilliga.

In the past I have been involved with assessments of the impacts of the Eden woodchip industry, rainforest logging on the mid and upper North Coasts, forestry operations in the Red Gum forests of the Riverina and the Cypress-Ironbark forests of the Pilliga, together with hardwood logging in public forests from the Hunter to the far North Coast regions, particularly the Wauchope, Urunga, Coffs Harbour, Casino and Murwillumbah Forestry Districts.

I gave evidence to the Terania Creek Inquiry and to NSW Land and Environment Court cases on the logging of Washpool, Chaelundi and Mistake State Forests and on forestry operations in the Riverina Red Gum forests. I also presented evidence to the NSW Administrative Decisions Tribunal on the ecological value of the public hardwood forest estate in NSW and whether its current management is protecting those values.

In my role as a forest ecologist with the NSW NPWS and DEC, I reviewed the fauna component of forestry EISs for the Mt Royal, Wingham, Kempsey-Wauchope, Warung, Glen Innes, Dorrigo, Grafton, Casino, Tenterfield and Murwillumbah Forestry Management Areas and conducted numerous audits of forestry operations throughout these areas. Following the EIS process I was appointed a member of the Ministerial Gaps and Clusters Committee reviewing silvicultural methods in NSW North Coast forests.

I have been involved with the development of survey methods for forest vertebrates, determining attributes and definitions of old-growth forests and the early design of protocols and prescriptions for mitigating impacts of forestry operations on wildlife and particularly threatened species in NSW public forests. I assisted in the nomination of forest-dependent vertebrates for listing under the various iterations of NSW threatened species legislation and was a team leader for the North East Forest Biodiversity Surveys and Comprehensive Regional Assessment Surveys aimed at achieving a comprehensive, adequate and representative forest reserve system for NSW.

More recently I have undertaken research on the ecology on the large forest owls and on their role as indicators of the health of forest ecosystems and on the requirements of specialised wet forest and old-growth forest-dependent vertebrates, particularly threatened species. I have also assisted the North East Forest Alliance with their audits of logging operations on the NSW North Coast.

Over this time, I have witnessed a steady and accelerating erosion of the overall health, age structure and diversity of NSW public forests, particularly of old-growth elements and the sensitive vertebrate species dependent on these attributes. The changes in logging methods and silvicultural practices, from selective logging to clear-felling have resulted in the broad-scale conversion of multi-aged forests to young, even-aged stands. This is resulting in ecological truncation, with the loss of the most specialised fauna species, particularly those with large area requirements and dependent on old-growth elements such as stable moisture regimes and micro-climates, abundant nectar and exudate production, large tree hollows, large logs and well-developed litter layers.

In relation to the hardwood timber-production forests of the NSW North Coast, with which I am most familiar, I have witnessed the harvesting prescriptions designed to protect their ecological values having been progressively and arbitrarily abandoned or not applied, and breaches ignored or ineffectively prosecuted by the regulatory authorities. There is now an almost complete lack of pre-logging assessment so that values are destroyed without even being recognised. The logging of these forests has been unsustainable in terms of biodiversity conservation since the late 1990s and is now reaching a stage where the forests will take centuries to recover and many losses are likely to be irreversible.

The native hardwood timber-production forests of NSW are of immense significance for biodiversity conservation and other non-timber harvesting values and their importance as genetic and species refugia will increase as climate change impacts and associated perturbations become more severe. Continued logging of these forests combined with the predicted increased frequency of wildfire, drought, cyclones and flooding is likely to lead to ecosystem collapse and is no longer socially acceptable. Their alternative economic values of the NSW public forest estate far out-weigh the value of the timber currently being harvested and, in my opinion, logging should be phased-out immediately and the forests should be incorporated into the State's reserve system.



David Milledge

