

Public submission

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Submission ID: 204244

Organisation: *Voice of Wallalong and Woodville (and surrounding localities) (VOWW)*

Location: *New South Wales*

Supporting materials uploaded: *Attached overleaf*

Submission date: 10/11/2024 7:35:37 PM

Submission to address the Forestry Industry Action Plan.

On behalf of VOWW. (Voice of Wallalong and Woodville and surrounding areas)

11/10/2024

We have reached a point where sustainability of native forests cannot always be gazumped by economics or housing. Without a good sustainability infrastructure, we may have an unliveable environment.

We would like to make the following observations towards the current investigation into sustainability of forestry operations in NSW. Logging is not the only driver for environmental damage and loss of habitat. Another activity now condoned, and even championed, as a revenue raiser for State Forestry Corporation, is hard rock quarrying. This results in wholesale clearing of native forest to the detriment of the forest biodiversity.

Sustainability of current and future forestry operations in NSW.

Native forest logging is unsustainable in its current form. Native forests are a shrinking resource. Old-growth native forests are a finite resource and are being removed at a far greater rate than new plantations can replace. Not only that, but with climate change dramatically changing our environment, new plantations will always struggle to become established.

It is our understanding that mature trees are no longer protected, logging has intensified and therefore wildlife which has always been compromised by logging is now even more impacted. In our area in the west of the Port Stephens LGA wildlife such as the Grey Headed Flying Fox, Koala, Grey Crowned Babbler, Microbats, Powerful Owl, Sea Eagle and Phascogale (not an exhaustive list) are already under threat by numerous quarrying organisations as well as housing development. Our Wallaroo State Forest, while not being cleared by logging, is being compromised severely by proposed quarrying operations.

Environmental and Cultural Values of forests, including threatened species and Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Values.

When private land is being clear felled for housing and business, the native forests that are State Government controlled become even more important as a resource for our increasing population. This includes our physical health as well as mental wellbeing. Native forests have traditionally been used by local residents and tourists for recreational activities such as bike riding, walking, bird watching, picnicking, all within a green cool landscape. Logging by private companies on this public land denies all of that. By destroying these forests, we accelerate climate change as well as removing the habitat that is important to the biodiversity of the area.

Demand for Timber products, particularly as it relates to NSW housing, construction, mining, transport and retail.

As we have already mentioned native forests are being sacrificed for hard rock quarries in our area. This is not sustainable practice. For example, the current application for Stone Ridge Quarry by ARDG in Wallaroo State Forest in Port Stephens LGA is the first within a state forest that seeks approval for large scale operations (1.5 million tonnes per annum). To this date other quarrying within state forests has been largely for infrastructure within the state forests themselves. The State Forestry Corporation is prepared to accept a royalty "pittance" and potentially harming the environment that will not be able to be regenerated quickly with changes to climate as we have

mentioned before. This is harming the environment for a short-term money grab. Stone Ridge Quarry is now a test case for other companies. 80 ha of native forest will be clear felled with habitat for threatened and vulnerable species, flora and fauna, destroyed. The much-touted biodiversity corridor will be fragmented. Wallaroo State Forest was not impacted by 2019/20 fires that devastated large parts of the area. It should be noted that forests that have not been logged are more resilient to the changing climate and catastrophic fires that devastate less established forests. Mining/ quarrying has no place in a state forest.

The definition of the role of state forestry is misleading. It has been made clear to our organisation (VOWW) that the State Forestry Corporation is responsible for not only for everything above the ground but also for what is below the ground. There is nothing that is stopping the destruction of vegetation and habitat for vulnerable species for the rocks sought by large quarrying organisations and for the profits they will make. The royalties will never compensate for this complete destruction of the pristine native forest above ground with large abandoned/ somewhat rehabilitated pits after the 30-year life of the consent of the quarries. With most quarries then seeking extensions for a further 30 years the forest will never recover. In the area spanning Port Stephens LGA and Mid-North Coast Council there are multiple quarries already removing or applying to remove hundreds of hectares of native forest. The offsets proposed go nowhere near compensating for this loss and they may not even be in the area local to the quarries. The local environment suffers and endangered species are sacrificed.

Research has shown that logging in native forests is not directed to the housing/ building sector. In fact, 87% of hardwood plantation logs are exported as woodchip. This is often for the benefit of big business and the detriment of the local environment.

Why would this be considered sustainable either economically or environmentally?

Should woodchip be more important than biodiversity or human health?

Hardwoods are no longer the preferred material for building as softwood is now being substituted as a preference by the building industry.

Climate Change

If emission targets are to have any real meaning, then we need to start addressing those targets now. Climate change is moving along at a much faster rate than even the climate scientists initially modelled. The NSW Government needs to accelerate efforts to address the issue and the logging of native forests is a key issue that could begin the process.

Logging in our native forests reduces the amount of stored carbon by more than half of the original value.

Conclusion.

Local residents in our area of Port Stephens LGA have noticed changes in the health of our native forests and the loss of the biodiversity over many decades. One of the reasons is the fragmentation that has occurred. As an organisation we have tried to bring this to the attention of local council as well as NSW State Planning Department, and State and Federal Environment Ministers. No-one has listened to our concerns and we feel if that is not addressed urgently by the Independent Forestry Panel, the opportunity to make a change will be lost.

Our native forests need to be retained for the animals that depend on them as many of those are being driven closer to extinction. As yet no mention has been made to the loss of biodiversity flora which cannot be ignored.

The cumulative and combined impact of loss of state forests for use by mining or logging industries is unconscionable in this day and age.

Woodchip and rock versus biodiversity and human liveability.