

NSW Government Response to the Natural Resources Commission Reports

Advice on the Coastal IFOA Remake



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NSW Government commitment – introduction

As part of the 2016 Forestry Industry Roadmap, the NSW Government is modernising the regulatory framework which underpins a sustainable native forestry estate.

This includes consolidating four Integrated Forestry Operations Approvals (IFOA) into a single, modern Coastal IFOA. IFOAs effectively set out rules to protect native plants, animals, important habitat and ecosystems, soils and water in native forestry operations on public land. They also set requirements to achieve ecologically sustainable forest management in NSW.

The NSW Government is committed to ensuring the new Coastal IFOA does not erode environmental values or impact on wood supply.

New environmental protections in the Coastal IFOA are being considered alongside a number of measures that provide community, investor and industry confidence around long term ecologically sustainable wood supply.

In response to key recommendations by the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) – and as part of this work in ensuring a sustainable wood supply – the NSW Government will soon commence a mapping exercise, aimed at gaining a better understanding of the NSW native forest estate and ensuring commitments to maintaining wood supply and environmental values are met.

The NSW Government is determined to get the right balance between the environment and industry – environmental standards can be strengthened at the same time as providing long term security of wood supply and certainty to investors and the industry.

Understanding the public native forest estate

In striking the right balance between upholding environmental outcomes and maintaining wood supply, it was important for the NSW Government to gain a better understanding of the NSW native forest estate, timber resources and critical environmental values such as habitat for native plants and animals, particularly koalas.

In 2016 and again in 2018, the NRC was asked to provide independent advice on a suite of proposed Coastal IFOA settings and additional measures to assist the Government's ability to maintain both wood supply and environmental values.

The NRC has provided two reports to the NSW Government, which can be downloaded from the NRC's website at www.nrc.nsw.gov.au/ifo.

The NRC's 2016 report outlines a number of recommended IFOA settings that in its view best balances the maintenance of environmental values and wood supply. The NRC's report outlines the challenges in meeting these commitments, and identifies a shortfall in wood supply could occur if the proposed settings were adopted, in conjunction with the already agreed settings. The NRC's report includes additional proposals it considered could address these risks to wood supply.

The NSW Government has accepted the NRC's recommended IFOA settings, and these have been included in the draft Coastal IFOA, along with a range of other environment protection and forest management requirements.

The NRC's alternative wood supply proposals, including initiating a steep slope trial, rehabilitating degraded public land with silviculture on all public tenures, and reviewing threatened ecological community listings are not supported. The NSW Government does not believe that these measures offer the best solution for the environment or industry because they do not align with the public's current expectations of best-practice forest management.

How will wood supply and environmental values be balanced?

The NSW Government sought supplementary advice from the NRC in early 2018 on an alternative option to mitigate any wood supply impacts.

The NRC (2018) engaged Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) to independently remap old growth and rainforest in a sample of sites in north coast state forests. The remapping confirmed issues associated with the accuracy of High Conservation Value Old Growth (old growth forest) mapping in a sample of sites in north coast state forests. The NRC found that by applying modern mapping technologies to these sites, the accuracy of such mapping can be improved, ensuring that important areas of special conservation value are protected while providing for potential timber harvesting only in areas where it is suitable.

The NRC (2018) has advised that the NSW Government consider a process to undertake additional mapping of old growth forest using modern technologies to improve our understanding of wood supplies and environmental values in select State forest sites on the NSW North Coast.

The NRC recommend this mapping process would allow for areas to be re-zoned accurately – ensuring that important environmental habitat remains protected while allowing for timber harvesting only in areas where mapping was previously outdated and therefore does not hold special conservation value.

These changes are consistent with arrangements already in place for private native forestry, and provides flexibility in addressing changes over time in the forestry landscape.

Improved mapping in our public forests

The NSW Government has accepted the NRC's recommendation, and will soon commence the mapping work to gain an accurate understanding of the NSW native forest estate and ensure commitments to maintaining wood supply and environmental values are met. The NRC will oversee this mapping work, with independent environmental assessments to be carried out by the OEH.

The OEH will develop a framework for assessing the special environmental values of potential sites as part of this process. A draft framework will be released for community input in mid-2019.

Once finalised, this framework will provide the scientific basis for any future mapping of old growth sites to inform long term, sustainable management. Depending on the findings of the mapping work, sites may be subject to increased reservation, or made available for timber harvesting if, or when, wood supply impacts are realised following the implementation of the Coastal IFOA.

Have your say

The NSW Government now invites the public to have their say on the draft Coastal IFOA and provide feedback on these new rules for native forestry on public land.

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