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Director
Forestry Branch
Environment Protection Authority
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SYDNEY SOUTH NSW 1232

Dear Madam/Sir,

Re: NSW Regional Forest Agreements

I am writing on behalf of Friends of the Koala (FOK) to strenuously oppose renewal of the Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs). Our organisation is licensed to rescue, rehabilitate and release koalas across the Northern Rivers Region of NSW, and we take over 300 koalas a year into care, unfortunately releasing only 15% back to the wild. We of course have a particular interest in the North East RFA which expires in 2021. Nevertheless, we oppose renewal of any of the three RFAs as the review of the RFAs in New South Wales conducted by the National Parks Association of NSW (NPA) has demonstrated that they have failed to protect the environment or to facilitate the concept of *Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management*, which was to underpin the original agreements. Forests are critically important habitats for koalas and other wildlife species, particularly when so much of their habitat outside forests and national parks is being removed across the State for industrial and residential development. Yet there is evidence that forest wildlife is in decline and constantly under threat. It is clear that the RFAs, as originally constituted, are driving climate change and are a failed model for forest management.

Surveys of residents in the electorates of Ballina and Lismore have demonstrated that 90% of people support protecting forests for nature, water, carbon and recreation, whereas less than 10% support logging for timber, woodchips and biomass burning. Research indicates that the value of carbon, water and tourism from forests is significant, indeed much greater than from logging, and should be protected as they're important for the economy. The tourism value of the North East forests, which are one of just 36 global biodiversity hotspots, to the Northern Rivers region is evident on a daily basis to us at FOK. We provide educational tours at our Care Centre every day except Sunday, and many international tourists want to learn about koalas and tell us of both their delight in visiting our national parks and their deep concern about governments that are compromising the future of our spectacular wildlife. They, like we, believe that forests are a public asset which should be managed for the public good rather than in the interests of logging.

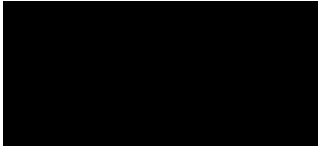
Indeed, it is our view that a Government that listens to the people should use the end of the RFAs to ensure that there is no further logging on public land. The NPAs *Forests for All* plan, if implemented, will facilitate increased human access for health and well-being, recreation and education, and the proposed *Great Koala National Park*, which we support, would help protect koalas and other wildlife and become a huge tourist attraction. These are far better alternatives to the RFAs which have failed to result in an economically sound timber industry and are effectively robbing future generations of their ability to enjoy these spaces and reap the benefits of their protection into the future.

We know that logging kills forest animals, and it's a particularly terrible way for koalas to die. We have heard of contractors 'clearing' the forests of koalas before the logging is due to occur so that there will be few delays, but on the other hand we have instances where koalas have fallen with the trees and either killed, injured so badly that they have to be euthanased, or their habitat is removed causing starvation or stress, which leads to diseases such as chlamydia and retrovirus.

Commonwealth oversight of forest management must be restored, as public oversight of RFAs by third parties of logging breaches was excluded, which led to a lack of accountability and transparency and has favoured the logging industry over the public interest. That the NSW government has already committed to extending the RFAs prior to the review currently being conducted is particularly worrying. Not only does this throw into question the value of the consultation process, but it also undermines the rationale for the reviews and gives the community no confidence in the RFAs.

We urge the Government to consult independent scientists, not just government agencies, undertake on-ground inspections of logging impacts with community groups, and implement alternative models for forest management that protect our environment and wildlife and lead to far better outcomes in the public interest.

Yours faithfully,



Dr. Roslyn Irwin
President

21 February 2018