

**Lorraine Vass**

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NSW Regional Forestry Agreements  
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Environment  
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Dear Sir/Madam

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the long overdue *Report on progress with implementation of the New South Wales Regional Forest Agreements: second and third five-yearly review July 2004-June 2014*.

The timing of the Report, after the NSW government has already decided to negotiate renewal of the Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) with the Commonwealth, is indicative of all that's wrong with the way in which our public forests are being managed. It conveys the odious message that the new RFAs will be rolled over without a proper scientific assessment of the results of the last two decades; merely more of the same and pushed through no matter that the environmental values of forests far outweigh the wood values. And certainly with no heed for alternatives that are more economically and environmentally viable.

As our climate gets hotter and drier and our population grows, our forests need new management regimes which can ensure resilient and diverse forests capable of delivering for human health and recreation, ecological sustainability including wildlife survival, water supplies, carbon stores and for industries which are far more viable and valuable than the failing timber industry. To miss the opportunity presented by the expiry of the initial 20-year RFAs for establishing a new model of forest management, is totally irresponsible.

I live in the Northern Rivers Region of NSW and am a koala conservationist of long-standing. For years the North East Forest Alliance (NEFA) has carried out audits on the implementation of koala protection requirements and found them wanting. It's not unknown for koalas to be maimed or killed during logging operations. From Forestry Corporation documents acquired under freedom of information we know that over the decade from 2006 to 2016 so-called intensive logging was carried out unlawfully in some 23,742 ha of high quality koala habitat in the Lower North East of NSW.

The weight of evidence to serious and worsening impacts of logging on koalas under the current model of forest management is damning. In her 2016 *Report of the Independent Review into the Decline of Koala Populations in Key Areas of NSW*, the Chief Scientist recognised that intensive logging may have negative impacts on koalas and noted that "little data is available to assess the effectiveness of [logging] prescriptions in mitigating impacts on koala populations". She also commented on the paucity of studies which have considered the direct impacts of logging on koalas, calling for more research to determine the impact of past and future intensive logging and the effectiveness of prescriptions to, "inform evidence-based regulatory settings".

Just how many koalas are left in our public forests is a moot point. Those that are left need forests that are managed in ways that encourages their recovery. Extending the RFAs cannot achieve that goal. Indeed the National Parks Association and several community groups have proposed a range of koala reserves on the North Coast that encompass transitioning some State Forests into National Parks.

To conclude, the present RFA processes are unacceptable in terms of proper performance review or public consultation. RFAs are a failed model for forest management. I therefore oppose the NSW Government policy to extend the current RFAs with the Commonwealth Government. Rather than renewing the RFAs NSW should transition out of native forest logging on public land as the RFAs progressively expire.

It is not too late to save what's left of our public forests and the koalas that call them home.

Yours sincerely

Lorraine Vass  
22 February 2018