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22 February 2018

Director
NSW Regional Forest Agreements
Forestry Branch
Environment Protection Authority
PO BOX A290
Sydney South NSW 1232

[Email to: forestry.policy@nsw.epa.gov.au]

Dear Madam/Sir

REGIONAL FOREST AGREEMENTS REVIEW: NSW implementation 2004-14

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the review of the past 10 years of Regional Forestry Agreements (RFAs).

The Pitt Street Uniting Church is a faith community which is strongly committed to principles of environmental protection, and ecological sustainability and justice. This commitment arises from our Christian faith and tradition which regards the environment not only as an object for human use or even enjoyment, but as the sacred creation of a loving and caring God. As such all of life is interconnected in God's creativity activity and thus to be preserved, sustained and nourished to the maximum extent possible.

The Uniting Church in Australia has expressed its view in the following words:

The Uniting Church's commitment to the environment arises out of the Christian belief that God, as the Creator of the universe, calls us into a special relationship with the creation – a relationship of mutuality and interdependence. We believe that God's will for the earth is renewal and reconciliation, not destruction by human beings.¹

We do not claim technical expertise, though we have members who have worked and studied environmental issues for many years. As an overall statement we believe that the current RFAs in New South Wales should not be renewed. Although there have been some benefits the Agreements have failed in their primary objectives to provide for conservation, for ecologically sustainable use and management of forests and for successful and thriving timber industry.

The report of the National Parks Association detailed assessmentⁱⁱ found that all three RFAs in NSW have resulted in significant losses of native forests, destruction of protected and, for many years, native forest logging has operated at an economic loss. A significant policy issue is that the current RFAs account for the value of forests in a narrow way, which has contributed to their failure. It is time to move away from this form of forest management to a model that measures the value of forests beyond what timber they can provide. In theological terms we would refer to the intrinsic value and stewardship of God's creation rather a reductionist account of forests which defined 'usage' in utilitarian and economic terms.

A lack of accountability in forest management is a key element of the failure of the RFAs. The Parks Association and many community organisations have reported that there have been continued breaches of codes aimed at protecting native species, often with little consequence. Many of these breaches have only been documented and uncovered because of the ongoing work of conservationists.

A compounding issue is wood supply contracts. The pressure of these contracts has driven greater logging of native forests, leaving protected and endangered species destroyed or damaged. This highlights the need to move away from a model of forest management which measures value nearly solely on timber production, so that everyone in New South Wales can enjoy the benefits that these public resources can provide. As a Christian community we would define forest use in terms which related to the 'common good' not only for the people of NSW and Australia but all living beings. We regard the sacred web of life as being fundamentally interconnected, and thus 'value' must be attached to all expressions of life.

Within a policy framework, and in terms of the Christian values we have briefly referred to, the Pitt Street Uniting Church supports three proposals which have been widely proposed by community organisations.

First, to stop native forest logging. Native forest logging is both an ecologically and economically unsound practice. Moving away from logging these public native forests is the most important change that is needed in forest management.

Second, to recognise the value of forests beyond timber production and investigate alternative ways to use state forests. The forests of NSW are a public resource and vital ecosystem that serve every person in this state. Protecting and preserving these public assets can provide much greater value than just the timber they currently provide. In moving forward with public forest management, it is incumbent upon governments and parliaments, regardless of party affiliation, to assess and investigate the wider value that forests provide.

Third, to establish a Great Koala national park. In NSW and elsewhere in Australia, the iconic koala is listed as vulnerable, with nearly every population on the east coast in decline. Habitat destruction from logging native forests is a significant threat to the species.

Establishing a Great Koala National Park would be a significant step towards preserving this species and changing how forests are managed in NSW. It offers the opportunity to shift towards a model of forest management that allows the people of NSW to enjoy these public resources, while protecting and preserving the inherent value of these forests.

Yours sincerely



Allison Forrest
CHAIRPERSON



Revd Dr Margaret Mayman
MINISTER

ⁱ www.unitingjustice.org.au/environment [accessed 21 Feb. 2018]

ⁱⁱ Sweeney, O.F. (2016). Regional Forest Agreements in NSW: have they achieved their aims? The National Parks Association of NSW Inc, Sydney.