

SOCIAL DISCONTENT IN THE SOUTHERN FORESTS

SUMMARY

This section outlines a history of the woodchipping sector and presents an overview of the inadequacy of the Regional Forest Agreements to meet critical climate and environmental conservation needs, as well as community cohesion and security. Beyond the facts and figures quoted, this section illustrates the genuine long standing concerns and passion for nature and beauty of the local and broader communities, indigenous and non indigenous, and how they have not been considered through the unreasonable application of the NSW Forestry Act. Also explained is the blatant disregard for the rightful ownership of the forests by residents of NSW.

In 1929, Sir Arthur Streeton, painted *Our Vanishing Forests* as a warning against damaging the natural environment.



Image 1: Sir Arthur Streeton (1867-1943) *Our Vanishing Forests*, 1929, oil on canvas, 63.5 x 76.5.
Private Collection

Start of Woodchipping in South East NSW

Extract reproduced with permission from The Peoples' Forest Collection recorded by Gregg Borschmann.¹

By 1965, the Crown's District Forest Director, Ray Hammond, had 35 years experience in native forests and timber plantation development. The Crown told him they had a buyer for woodchips and asked him to call for tenders to commence woodchipping in southeast NSW. Hammond had a pivotal meeting with a Harris Holdings representative and indicated that the cost of woodchips should be 7/6d. (75c) per 100 super feet (0.2360 cubic meters) from saw mill timber waste and forest waste.

Harris (later Daishowa) won the tender against Australian Paper Manufacturers, and the agreement was made that 5,000 tons per year for five years would be felled from the southeast native forests of NSW and sold to Daishowa, a Japanese paper producer. At that time, 'waste' was defined as the heads and butts and damaged or hollowed timber from trees felled for sawmills. Initially, very strict guidelines were enforced so that good quality logs went to sawmills and not to the chipmill, and cutters lost jobs if regulations were breached. Because of his tenacity to adhere to this practice, Hammond became sidelined and lost the power to overrule or modify operational decisions.

Hammond's conscientious vision of woodchipping did not transpire. From an economic perspective he believed that conservative logging for woodchips could have worked for NSW. But, under the proposed regime, saw-logging and woodchipping were incompatible because the chipmill would demand a larger volume of unmillable timber than orders for sawmill timber could guarantee. He foretold the environmental impact as he witnessed a runaway situation develop. Five years stretched into perpetuity which he perceived:

Guaranteed supply of the unborn forest financed by the unborn children of tomorrow.

In 1971, Japan's biggest paper maker, Nippon Paper, and Daishowa with which it merged in 2003, took control of the Eden chipmill and traded as South East Fibre Exports (SEFE). Commonwealth and State Governments enacted the State's Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) for native forest management. The Eden RFA was signed in 1999 and the Southern RFA in 2001. Economic and environmental pain followed.

Woodchipping was established in other states, became politically powerful and the governments approved vastly increased exports. Protection of the forest by the acquisition of timber under the original definition of 'waste' was ignored and whole logs were supplied to the SEFE chipmill. Today, 90% of timber from Australia's native forests is used for woodchips. *(At the time of writing in 2012)* SEFE exports about 850,000 tonnes of woodchips annually. Each day 2,500–3,500 logs enter their woodchip mill at Eden from heavy logging of carbon dense forests south, north and west of Eden and into East Gippsland.

Australia has logged 50% of forests since colonisation. Woodchipping in southeast NSW has thus historically created dilemmas between its stakeholders and the community. The major political parties support continued logging of native forests for woodchips, and it is clear operations would not survive without government financial support.

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Everything in a forest is integral to its survival. The environmental damage from logging is severe and extensive and it destroys beauty, habitat, and fragile and unique ecosystems. Hammond maintained that the beauty of the forest was taken for granted and that the foresters didn't foresee that logging old growth timber would be detrimental to the environment. He stated that:

The *Forestry Act* will tell you to...look after flora, fauna and soil.² You can't muck around with the Act but it is the reasonable application of it that runs foul of politicians and forestry heads now.

Hammond believed implicitly that 'the forests of NSW belong to the people of NSW' and this is legally correct. It still grieves him that his knowledge and experience-based foresight were ignored.

Hammond's knowledge and prescience aligns with a problematic legacy which is neither economically nor environmentally sustainable. Our optimal legacy for 'the unborn children of tomorrow' will be secured by preservation of old growth forests and cessation of logging our native forests.

*With thanks to Ray Hammond (1916-2016)³ and the National Library of Australia for permission to reproduce content from The Peoples' Forest Collection recorded by Gregg Borschmann. A fuller version of this account is in Nature NSW, Autumn 2012, National Parks Association⁴.
Dr Bronte Somerset*

Inadequacy of the Regional Forest Agreements

Countries throughout the world have developed regional and international criteria and indicators that can measure and monitor success in achieving sustainable forest management. The seven main indicator initiatives of this, the Montreal Process⁵, are:

- (1) conservation of biological diversity;
- (2) maintenance of productive capacity of productive ecosystems;
- (3) maintenance of forest ecosystem health and vitality;
- (4) conservation and maintenance of soil and water resources;
- (5) maintenance of forest contribution to carbon cycles;
- (6) maintenance and enhancement of long-term socio-economic benefits to meet the needs of societies; and
- (7) development of legal, institutional and economic framework for forest conservation and sustainable management.

It is hard to imagine how any of these standards are complied with when one witnesses the degradation caused by logging in south east NSW such as this image portrays.



Image 2: Devastation in Gnupa State Forest which was an industrial 'mistake'. 2010. BJS

There are three RFA sub-regions in the southern forest region of NSW: South Coast, Eden and Tumut. The Department of Agriculture and Water Resources⁶ states that:

Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) are 20-year plans for the sustainable management and conservation of Australia's native forests. ... The RFAs seek to balance competing economic, social and environmental demands on forests by setting obligations and commitments for forest management that deliver:

- certainty of resource access and supply to industry—building investment confidence
- ecologically sustainable forest management—ensuring forests are appropriately managed and regenerated
- an expanded and permanent forest conservation estate—to provide for the protection of Australia's unique forest biodiversity.



Image 3: Glenbog State Forest 2015. David Gallan, 2015

Yet, given the image above, one can see these undertakings are lacking on an operational level. RFAs disregard the interdependence between soil, carbon, water and habitat. Tree hollows only begin to appear in eucalypts when they are between 80—100 years old, and logging destroys over 70% of hollows in high conservation value native forest areas.⁷ Scientists maintain that a forest's ability to store carbon should be protected.⁸ Fire studies undertaken since Black Saturday in Victoria, show that canopy-dense moist native forests inhibit bushfire.⁹ Wildlife organisations work against native species loss as logging disconnects landscapes. Marine environments and aquaculture also suffer from silt washed down from logged areas. Environmentalists from the community take on the responsibility of identifying breaches of RFAs by logging companies.

Today, woodchipping and logging is at a crossroad. Global markets have changed, plantation woodchips are preferred, and new producers are supplanting Australia.¹⁰ Native forest woodchipping for paper production appears to be in decline.

The practice of logging native forests on State and privately owned land for woodchips creates a conundrum of national importance, as both jobs and forests need protection. Timber plantations can support nearly all of Australia's domestic timber needs and woodchips are increasingly being produced from eucalypt plantations grown specifically to produce high quality fibre for papermaking.

In theory RFAs were meant to protect the environment as well as provide certainty of supply. Some areas were put into national parks, but the environmental prescriptions that should have been applied to logging were not adhered to, and the unrealistic and unworkable outcomes were not achieved, nor were they able to be. The current aim to maintain 2013 levels of wood supply and protect the environment (to the unsatisfactory 2013 level) is unachievable. It would require around double the area of State forest to be logged to maintain supply, and this would be devastating for wildlife, the forest ecosystems and their water supplies.



Image 4: A winter vigil by local campaigners. Sam Davis

Logging of native forests is contentious.

The struggle to protect the forests of southeast NSW is decades old. It is driven by the passion of people who love and respect forests and nature for no gain other than for them to not be cut down—it is that simple. Many men, women and children campaign against their destruction, for their beauty and for preservation of their wildlife habitat.

Communities protest in logging areas close to their townships, and experience how natural water catchments are threatened by logging and need protection.¹¹ Campaigners' infringements are usually dismissed when dealt with by courts.¹² Indigenous communities want heritage rich forestlands protected.¹³ Young people are educated about, and are eager to preserve our natural wildernesses, yet current forestry practices permitted by the RFAs contradict these ideals.

Campaigns are waged by writing submissions, letters and briefs to politicians and State and Federal Government departments, and by letters to local, state and national newspapers. Campaigns are waged on the ground by stopping logging trucks and disrupting logging activities. Indigenous people have received penalty infringement notices for trying to protect their sacred Aboriginal land. People with the courage of their convictions have locked on to gates and machinery, been arrested, attended court to defend their actions, and the majority of these cases have been dismissed. For them, the risk of penalty is a small price to pay to make a point about the wantonness of native forest logging.

Forest protests have been supported by people from many walks of life: professional people have called in to blockades on their way to work; children have held up 'Save the Koalas' placards; pensioners and families have rallied; musicians have played in the path of logging trucks; communities have held silent vigils by the roadside and held street marches; and theatrical enactments, and choirs, have performed in logged coups.

The Internet means people are well educated about scientific research. Some people tire of the struggle and some have passed away before seeing resolution. Despite this outpouring of opposition from the community, nothing has overturned the RFAs which permit the needless destruction of native forests and all they hold.



Image 5: String quartet and Mozart block logging truck route – still from video

- The South East Region Conservation Alliance (SERCA) played a lead role in opposing Renewable Energy Certificates from potentially being issued to the woodchip mill for biomass burning.
- SERCA groups supported a 50-day Mumbulla sustained community protest because of logging activities which disregarded Aboriginal heritage and threatened biodiversity including koalas and other known native species. About 30 charges were laid against activists during the Mumbulla Forest campaign and only 2 people were convicted.
- South East Forest Rescue (SEFR) systematically records breaches of forestry logging operations and tables these with the Environmental Defenders' Office (EDO). The Nature Conservation Council of NSW commissioned the EDO to compile a statewide report demonstrating how ForestsNSW fails to comply with its legal obligations.
- Chipstop instigated a campaign against the owners of the Eden Woodchip mill, Nippon paper, to draw attention to the abuse of native forests for paper production.
- The Tanja residents' group negotiated a compromise with FNSW to have an environmentally significant compartment excluded from logging activities and for logging in the Tanja State Forest to be restricted to sawmill logs only.
- SERCA was one of four groups appealing against the State and Federal Governments' approval of a gold mine at Dargues Reef, Majors Creek. SERCA became the first group to lodge its appeal with the EDO regarding this environmentally damaging gold mine.
- The Five Forests group campaigned against the logging of the Cathedral of Trees over-hanging the road entrance to Bermagui Village. The Cathedral at least was saved but the surrounding forests were logged.

The Fate of Myrtle Creek Catchment, Wyndham Community Hall

A resident recalls her first encounter with woodchipping and the community at a meeting arranged to discuss logging of native forests in their local water catchment.

Residents of Wyndham and the Myrtle Creek catchment area had campaigned vigorously against proposed logging in Yurammie State Forest¹⁴, so Forests NSW (FNSW) agreed to a public consultation session on the evening of 11th May 2010.

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Wyndham Hall overflowed with local people, families, children, ring-ins, loggers and truckies, Shire Councillors, FNSW's CEO, their regional planning manager, a hydrologist, a soil specialist, and an ecologist. A condition of the meeting was that the public should not speak or ask questions during FNSW's hour and a half presentation.

Their data may have intended to bamboozle with acronyms, figures and graphs. Why was I thinking 'smoke and mirrors'? Predictions were made regarding future conditions yet disregarded climate change. Black numbers on blazing white digital screens used to justify the destruction of a living breathing forest were incongruous.

Each topic was disconnected from the next. It was as if the 'bones, flesh and blood' of the forest were being dissected and evaluated independently and not on how they interacted. I thought that Suzuki's 'sacred balance' was ignored. It seemed to be thought that the integrity of the forests would remain intact despite removing part of its flesh and exposing its bare bones, disconnecting the blood and nerve flow and expecting that the body of the forest would not alter or suffer.

FNSW's translucent maps showed overlapping areas of incidence of native species and the proposed logging area. They stated that some areas were designated as being less valuable because only swamp wallabies, lyrebirds and wombats were observed there. I thought about what chance each would have against corporation and machine as their habitat was lost.

Finally, as local knowledge and passion were pitched against data, whiteboard, and forestry employees: heated debate ensued. Questions flowed from people who were already well aware of the impact of logging on the catchment area. The residents knew that eight threatened species, (Koala, Yellow-bellied Glider, Potoroo, Sooty Owl, Powerful Owl, Barking Owl, Glossy Cockatoo and Giant Burrowing Frog), rainforest, swamps and stands of old growth and mature forest were in the threatened forest.

They pointed out that the February 2010 rains were not indicative of typical seasons yet were included in FNSW's hydrology figures and predictions. FNSW commented that if the water flow was affected post logging, they would consider rebuilding a new water supply, in tanks. It was irrational to them that the existing naturally occurring water supply should not be threatened. I thought the opposition won the debate by not only having a comprehensive and clear understanding of water catchments, and in some cases a lifetime of knowledge of the area, but by their expressions of love and passion for the beauty of the land, the forests and its wildlife, lacking.

The residents' lost their appeal: the catchment was logged. The forestry sector could tick the 'consultation' box. In truth, had the catchment been protected, some other area would have been logged anyway to compensate for 'their loss'. This sort of confrontation between the corporation and the local residents should not have to happen. The Great Southern Forest would mean that the other industries and the community could work together on environmentally safe, and climate-sensitive activities.

Bronte Somerset



Image 6: Local Indigenous Elders and youth protect their land from logging. Mumbulla State Forest, 2010. Sam Davis

Mumbulla Campaign

... and what people should know is that without one's ceremonies, which are at the core of our culture, one cannot understand the importance of our land as they both make us whole. John Mumbler ¹⁵

Mumbulla mountain is an important heritage site for the Yuin people and is also koala habitat. The logging of it by Forest Corp is a perfect example of failure to protect Indigenous values.

In 2010 Compartments 2135 and 2135 of Mumbulla State Forest near Bega were approved for logging which proceeded against strong community protests, uniting the local Indigenous and wider communities.

Local Koori elders led walks into the prohibited zone, marches and public rallies in Bega in support of stopping the logging and protecting the forest on the mountain. Many arrests occurred, but many convictions were avoided because of the acknowledged illegality of the logging.

The logging contractors finally withdrew on 27th March 2010 after the Forestry Corporation had been presented with evidence that the area had been gazetted as an Aboriginal Place in 1984. An official inquiry was conducted and this acknowledged the error. Following the admission of the illegality of the logging, the contractor (LW&CK Cocks) received \$18,000 compensation for 'loss of resource', but the Koori community received nothing. The approved Harvest Plan is still on the Forestry Corporation website.¹⁶

Anon



Image 7: Stop logging native forests rally in Bega, NSW

Tanja State Forest

This Forest was approved for logging, but these plans have been postponed twice. FCNSW conducted routine pre-logging surveys for koalas before the first approval, but found none. It was only after koala sightings and community protests against the logging that FCNSW conducted more intense surveys which found koalas, and the community has seen more since.

Due to strong community campaigning and discovery of a new koala population, one compartment has been permanently removed from the logging schedule.

The Tanja State Forest is an example of the inadequacy of the Biodiversity Fund Project, "Corridors and Core Habitat for Koalas". In spite of there being a known koala population there, it was not included in the 5 year moratorium area, and the estimated woodchip yield from Tanja was actually increased to make up for the logging moratorium in the neighbouring State Forests of Mumbulla and Murrah.

Community members and residents have been seeing koalas in the forest; this includes a sighting by an off duty Forestry Officer. In spite of all this, the approved Harvest Plan remains on the FCNSW website. So it is apparent that FCNSW intends to log this forest.

Harriett Swift

CONCLUSION

It is time for the contentiousness to end. The opinions of men, women and children of our communities demand respect. We the people speak for the forests: we speak for the wildlife whose homes are destroyed, for the loss of natural carbon capture, for the degradation of soil and waterways, for the destruction of wildlife connective corridors and for the loss of the integrity of and respect for the land we all stand on—Aboriginal land. We require our State and Federal Governments to recognise the fact that the community is very much at odds with the way our environment is being treated.

Communities cannot thrive on internal division and the imposing of uncaring, destructive and short-sighted practices on their ambience, culture and amenities.

The Great Southern Forest would end the woes of the forest and their communities. It proposes solutions to the problems which the world now faces. The global view has undergone a change of heart and mind which now perceives the dire need to protect not destroy our environment, especially in view of the knowledge we now have about a changing climate. We don't have another planet. We owe our very existence to this planet, our home.

Paul Payten

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- ¹⁴ Save Myrtle Creek Catchment Petition published by Myrtle Catchment Group on Apr 23, 2010
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