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Submission in response to the proposed Ecological Thinning in the Brigalow and Nandewar Conservation Areas.

Illawarra Birders are based in the Illawarra Region of NSW. Many of our members travel widely around NSW and visit our State Forests and National Parks. Our club has a strong conservation focus and we attend BIGNET meetings where representatives from the wider community of NSW Birding groups and members of Birdlife Australia discuss and act on conservation issues. These meetings occur bi-annually and a network of birding group's actively discuss and pursue any threats to the conservation of our state's bird species.

Our group is strongly against any 'ecological thinning' of trees in National Parks, State Forests or Conservation Areas. Ecological thinning introduces large scale machinery to an area where threatened bird species occur. This machinery is noisy and intrusive and has the potential to scare birds away from nests and young. There is also other significant wildlife and flora species present in these areas that have the potential to be severely impacted by work of this type.

Many threatened and endangered species have been listed in the Brigalow and Nandewar Conservation Areas. The bird species include the Glossy Black Cockatoo (vulnerable), Black-necked Stork (endangered), Swift Parrot (endangered), Square-tailed Kite (vulnerable), Hooded Robin (vulnerable), Black-chinned Honeyeater (vulnerable), Barking Owl (vulnerable), Black-throated Finch (vulnerable), Bush Stone-curlew (endangered), Brown Treecreeper (vulnerable), Squatter Pigeon (endangered), Painted Honeyeater (vulnerable), Turquoise Parrot (vulnerable), Grey-crowned Babbler (vulnerable), Masked Owl (vulnerable) and the Regent Honeyeater (critically endangered). Due to this density of vulnerable and endangered species Brigalow has been identified by the federal government as one of Australia's 15 national biodiversity hotspots.

As you would be aware the thinning of trees affects bird species in many ways – it reduces the availability of nesting sites – less trees equals less nesting area- which increases competition between bird species. This means the less aggressive species often lose out. The Owl Species that use this forest are listed as breeding anytime from March through to December and nightjars can breed from August to January. When, therefore, would be an 'appropriate' time to 'thin' the forest? Removal of trees also reduces the roosting sites utilized by the two vulnerable owl species listed in the forest – these owls and the other more common owl, frogmouth and nightjar species that use the forest shelter in tree hollows during daylight hours. Thinning the trees during the day would have a major impact on these birds. Many bird species rely on the insects attracted to, and living on trees, and flowers as their major food source. Less trees means less available food for wildlife.



We also strongly object to the trees being removed and sold to sawmills for their timber as we see this as actually commercial logging under the guise of a new term 'ecological thinning'. The government would be making a profit from the removal of the trees. It should never be seen that profit may be a driver leading to changes to our conservation laws. NSW taxpayers have paid millions of dollars to restructure relief in 2005 for the very areas where the proposed 'thinning' will occur. Our taxpayers compensated the logging industry for the loss of these areas so that they could be preserved for conservation. This money was to protect the areas from logging and grazing. It would be wrong to do a double-take and now allow this area to be logged *in any way, shape or form*.

Conservation legislation is currently under review. Changes to legislation to allow for trials to be conducted where insufficient evidence has been given to prove that the trial will have an ecological benefit to the forest is wrong. There is too little scientific evidence that proves thinning will help the forests. Indeed historical evidence proves that these forests have always contained different thicknesses of stands of trees. The thicker stands have been shown to be utilised by species such as koalas in times of severe heat or drought. They also provide protection for many small mammals and birds. We strongly object to changes being made to conservation laws that may set a precedent and open the door for commercial logging enterprises to use our State Forests or National Parks.

Conservation areas have been set aside for that purpose 'conservation' of the flora and fauna that is contained in the area. These areas should remain undisturbed so that they are conserved. Our club feels that the only things required in these areas would be the removal of significant weed species, maintenance of fire trails and the removal of feral pests such as wild pigs, goats and foxes by trained people when ecological studies deem this to be necessary. When needed these things should be done with as little impact on the natural environment as is possible.

Opening up our forests to logging for any purpose has the potential to cause significant environmental damage and diminish the conservation value of fragile ecosystems. One of our main concerns is that this 'thinning' may have the reverse effect and actually reduce the biodiversity value of these forests. Australia is a unique continent with a huge range of endemic flora and fauna species that are found nowhere else in the world. We have an absolute responsibility to protect, preserve and maintain these areas for future generations to enjoy.

Yours Sincerely
Michelle Rower
Conservation Officer
On behalf of Illawarra Birders Inc.