



SUBMISSION

to

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

**National Parks and Nature
Reserves in NSW**

COMMENTS FOR SUBMISSION

Gunnedah Shire Council supports the opening up of National Parks and Nature Reserves throughout NSW, but in particular in NSW for the following reasons:

- 1) We believe that all the available evidence suggests that carefully controlled selective removal-and subsequent use by wood mills-is the best way to sustainably manage the Parks , particularly Cyprus Pine forest areas, in NSW.

We would particularly refer you to the 30th Anniversary Edition by Eric Rolls of the book “A Million Wild Acres” which depicts the effect of 200 years of Man on an Australian forest, in this case The Pilliga. Since his first edition of the book was published in 1981 Eric Rolls has been acknowledged as an authority on this forest .

As Tom Griffiths writes in his introduction to the 30th Edition (page xx): “When Rolls was writing “A Million Wild Acres”, the conservation battlegrounds in Australia were the rainforests, most notably at Terania creek in 1979. As Rolls acknowledges in his final chapter, woodchipping was also an issue and had become shorthand for indiscriminate forest clearing and exploitation. Rolls considered it a necessary industry committed to unnecessary destruction. So his book was written in the midst of these campaigns, when forests were depicted as timeless and primeval, and human disturbance meant the destruction of trees. He wrote a detailed regional study showing that forests could also be the creation of settlement. He wasn't the first to notice this phenomenon: the anthropologist, naturalist and explorer Alfred Howitt, for example , presented his observations of the increasing density of forests in the Gippsland to a scientific audience in 1890. The power of “A Million Wild acres” was that it gave voice to a myriad of these earlier observers. And rolls told a multi-causal story of how it had happened in one region, a place he knew intimately. He saw system and pattern and creativity in it. His book attracted little scientific or green criticism for over a decade and a half, awaiting another political context. By the mid to late 1990's , the frontline of conservation battles had moved from the logging of old growth forests on public land to the clearing of native vegetation for farming on private and leasehold land. In this new context, Roll's argument about the history of tree density was misinterpreted for political purposes by both farmers and scientists.”

As such, as Griffith goes on the state on page xxii: “And he (Rolls) is just as ready to run the gauntlet of the conservationists as he is the developers or the bureaucrats.”

In Chapter 14 entitled “Wood Chips and International airports” Rolls outlines how the Pilliga has been sometimes abused , whether by ignorance or intent, and how some of those intent on its' preservation have encouraged its' mismanagement.

For example, on page 403 he describes “the management of the Pilliga State Forests by the Forestry Commission has been mostly sound.” He further describes how thinning was essential to the growth of the forest and (page 405) “every forest, every reserve must be assessed and an honest programme designed for it. If politicians have the final say it will be a politically expedient program. Too many environmental impact studies are carried out by dubious scientists willing to substantiate whatever is desired of them”.

Rolls goes on to explain how the forests-under whatever label they may be-should be managed –including the use of logging/thinning in the best interests of the areas long term environmental sustainability.

EPILOGUE

Recognised historian and author, the late Eric Rolls, had this to say on his last visit to the Pilliga on 10 July 2003:

“It is vital that the Pilliga Forest be kept open otherwise it will just become a dead white cypress pine forest. If the NSW Government decides to make the Pilliga into a National park the cypress pine will just come up in masses, they will not compete for growth, and they lock up so eventually you will just have thousands of cypress pine trees to the hectare. These will only be 3 cm in diameter and 100 years old. The forest will be dead. The areas containing remnant woodland are not found in the Pilliga, but on the plains country to the west of Dubbo and in the far northern and southern areas of the Brigalow Belt south Bio Region. There are few koalas found in the Pilliga Nature Reserve because the undergrowth is too heavy to allow movement on the ground. There is also little opportunity to find the patches of sand that supply calcium. The worked forest gives them room and allows them to eat sand on the logging tracks. The magnificent Barking Owls are not found in the Nature Reserve. They need room to find their prey and heavy undergrowth does not suit them.”

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Rather than attempt to re-write the book or provide further definitive information, we would request that the Commission read the book in its' entirety and recognize the expertise and knowledge that Eric Rolls had gained after living a lifetime in The Pilliga- both "on the eastern fringe of the forest" and "hard against the western border- and both places were good places to live."

We believe that the book amply demonstrates that the controlled management by "appropriate thinning of Cyprus" is in the best interests of the parks and reserves environment.

- 2) The attached Mayoral Minute and recommended Motion (which was carried unanimously) demonstrates this Council's support for the sustainable continuation of Cyprus Pine logging in the Pilliga area.

Read in conjunction with (1) above it demonstrates this Councils commitment to maintaining National Parks and Reserves in our area , and statewide, whilst recognizing the necessity for environmental management of the which will assist in maintaining long-term saw milling in the area.

CYPRESS PINE INDUSTRY

SUBJECT: Representations on behalf of Gunnedah Timbers Pty Ltd to NSW Departments of Environment, Minerals & Forest Resources and Agriculture requesting they:

- a) Consider the impact the current cypress pine harvesting operations are having on the long term sustainability of the Brigalow South Bio Region cypress pine industry; and
- (b) Approve the proposed transfer of approximately 18,000 hectares of Zone 3 (Conservation, Recreation and Mineral Extraction) to Zone 4 (Forestry, Recreation and Mineral Extraction) in exchange for approximately 70,000 hectares of Zone 4 to Zone 3 of the Brigalow South Bio Region.

BACKGROUND

The Brigalow South Bio Region was established in May 2005, following two proposals considered by the then NSW Government put forward by a committee established in 1999.

Stage 1 option involved the possibility of constructing a Charcoal Plant in Gunnedah. Following objections by the Green movement this option was discarded in 2001.

Stage 2 involved the assessment of the Brigalow Belt Bio Region and the Committee was expanded to 30 stakeholders.

The Committee provided 8 options with all but one of the Committee (the Green's representative) voting for Option 8 (known as the BRUS Option). The proposal went to then Premier Carr indicating unanimity could not be achieved.

The Proposal provided for a 2% reduction in the then sustainable yield and the transfer of some 150,000 hectares to National Parks.

The Government agreed to a demand by the Greens for a MORATORIUM from logging over some 500 forest compartments (200,000 hectares) of the area.

This resulted in logging operations being forced to return to areas recently logged and not scheduled to be re-logged for another 30 years – resulting in the harvesting of smaller logs and endangering the long term sustainability of those areas.

In late 2005, a report by Mr Ian Sinclair (the so called BRUS Review) was made but was apparently ignored and declared a 'Cabinet Document'.

Finally, in May 2005, the Premier announced the re-distribution of the Brigalow Belt with 348,000 hectares allocated to National Parks and Conservation Areas, reducing sustainable yields by some 55%.

ISSUES

- During the initial debate concern had been expressed about the sustainability of the resource after losing 348,000 hectares of State forest.

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- What had not been anticipated was the impact of the moratorium whereby the most productive forests in the Baradine, Inverell and Gunnedah Forest Management Areas was lost to Forests NSW. Only forests with smaller diameter trees remained.
- The fires of December 2006 and January 2007 further impacted on sustainability with some 70,000 hectares of the Pilliga forests (including 20,000 hectares of cypress forests) lost. This represented between 8-10% of sustainable yield.
- There is also potential loss from the impact of mining in the Gunnedah basin, in particular the Leard, Doona and Vickery Forests and from gas in the Pilliga East.

Result

Forest NSW is now incapable of supplying logs of a size suitable to meet market requirements.

Sustainable yield was assessed by Forests NSW in 2005 as 40,000 m³ whereas the pro rata yield is really 32,400 m³ – an over-commitment of 12,200 m³ – a figure which guarantees the destruction of the cypress forests within a short period of time.

What did occur as a result of the conservation movement pressure was that the better managed forest areas, with larger volumes of standing cypress were selected as National Parks/Community Conservation areas.

Interestingly enough, Blackjack Forest (197 hectares) which is likely to be impacted by Gunnedah town expansion and is also habitat to koalas and kangaroos was not considered for its conservation values and remains today a state forest.

ANTICIPATED IMPACT FOR GUNNEDAH

After five years of a 20 year contract with the NSW Government for the supply of cypress pine logs from Forests NSW the continued viability of both the mills at Gunnedah and Baradine are in serious doubt.

The jobs of some 50 sawmill workers and some 30 contractors are in doubt (and potentially some Forest NSW employees) should the sustainability of the supply not be guaranteed beyond 2014.

THE SOLUTION

The transfer of approximately 18,000 hectares of Zone 3 (Conservation, Recreation and Mineral Extraction) to Zone 4 (Forestry, Recreation and Mineral Extraction) in exchange for approximately 70,000 hectares of Zone 4 to Zone 3.

COUNCIL'S INVOLVEMENT TO DATE

Following representations by Mr George Paul and subsequent investigation and discussion with Deputy Mayor, Mrs Gae Swain, I made representations to the Minister, Ms Robyn Parker, re the matter.

This took the form of a private discussion during the 2012 Tidy Towns Award Evening at Kyogle on Saturday 3 November and on the following Monday 5 November during a formal meeting held in Tamworth during the Cabinet Forum on that day.

During the second meeting I was accompanied by Mr Michael Silver, Mr George Paul (Director, Gunnedah Timbers Pty Ltd) and Mr Patrick Paul (Director, Baradine Sawmilling Co Pty Ltd).

During this discussion Ms Parker indicated:

1. That revoking National Parks was a difficult task and that an alternative would be easier and should be sought.
2. That she understood that Forests NSW were looking for alternative logging areas for the Gunnedah and Baradine operations. Mr Paul indicated that he did not believe there are practical, sustainable alternatives.

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3. That should Mr Paul's assertion that the failure of long term sustainability of alternatives were to be supported by Forests NSW, that that information should be conveyed to her formally so that she could take that new information into consideration when determining her own Department's response.
4. That Mr Paul contact the Minister for Agriculture, Katrina Hodgkinson seeking her support in identifying further sources of cypress pine log supply.

RECOMMENDATION: That Gunnedah Shire Council continue its support and lobbying on behalf of Gunnedah Timbers and Baradine Timbers in order to ensure sustainable log supply to those mills until 2025, and beyond, in order to guarantee the contract entered into by Forests NSW on behalf of the NSW Government and to ensure the maintenance of employment for the workforce of these two important local industries.

Councillor OC Hasler
MAYOR