

MEDIA RELEASE: Let's keep Bermagui's future options open

We call on the Commonwealth and NSW Governments to cease logging in Bermagui State Forest. Two compartments on the northern entry to Bermagui were logged and burnt last summer and autumn, and left in an ugly and blackened mess. Two of the remaining three compartments have now been listed for logging this season. Logging has already started in Coupe 10 of Compartment 2002.

The issue of logging in these native forest areas is hotly debated and has many adverse implications for climate change, catchments and biodiversity.

If it proceeds it will also severely damage Bermagui's tourism potential, damage that cannot be undone for many, many decades.

The Commonwealth and NSW Governments have no coherent forest policies for this region. They have given primacy to timber supply that destroys the natural beauty of the area, its environmental integrity, and its water supplies. At the same time they are seeking to encourage national and international tourism, and specifically into the 'Coastal Wilderness' region from Bermagui to Bairnsdale in Victoria.

The coupes in both compartments 2001 and 2002 have many beautiful, large old spotted gums and stringybarks, the most valuable for supporting wildlife. These are the main target of logging operations that will see half the canopy removed and the understorey and soils severely disturbed.

New machinery makes it possible to log steeper slopes and gullies that escaped previous logging. The coupes drain into protected waterways and rainforest gullies. They provide habitat for many bird and animal species, including sea eagles, glossy black cockatoos, sooty owls.

Located right on Bermagui's doorstep, they could be a major drawcard for tourists.

This winter migratory Swift Parrots used the winter-flowering coastal Spotted Gums as a feeding refuge when their usual box-ironbark woodlands further west failed to produce flowers and lerps, presumably because of drought. They are listed as rare and endangered by both NSW and the Commonwealth. The food resource for the parrots was limited, because few spotted gums were flowering. To be reducing this limited potential resource seems to go against all reason.

Coupe 10, like many other areas scheduled for logging is a relatively steep spur containing mixed stringybark and spotted gum forest, 21.7 ha of which is 'available for harvesting'. It has Narira Creek to the north and Black Lagoon to the east, both with a mere 50m strip of protected ground between them and the

harvesting operations. The waterways are in the Batemans Marine Park and the lagoon is a fully protected Sanctuary Zone.

The adjacent Compartment 2001 scheduled soon to be logged also drains into Black Lagoon or into the wetland of Long Swamp.

In the event of a heavy storm after the logging and post-logging fires it would be inevitable that soil and debris from the disturbed areas would be washed into them.

The strips of land exempted from logging are far too narrow to provide adequate protection for waterways and rainforest gullies and the plants and animals they support.

Evidence is accumulating that logging such as we are experiencing at Bermagui should be halted for sound environmental and economic reasons, and in the interests of other regional activities. Plantation supplies could meet most of Australia's needs.

ANU forest ecologists have found that Australia's south east forests are the most carbon dense in the world, and drawn attention to their importance as huge carbon stores, and their capacity to increase that role if left unlogged.

The NSW Auditor-General last April found that Forests NSW was logging at an unsustainable rate, and running its native forest operations at a loss. Areas logged are increasing each year.

The head of Treasury has queried whether native forests can be considered a renewable resource, because recovery times are far longer than logging rotations allow for.

Bermagui and Murrah State Forests form what should be priceless links between three coastal parks, Gulaga, Biamanga and Mimosa Rocks. The links have cultural, biological and catchment value far exceeding that from sawlogs and woodchips.

Allan Hawke's recent interim report for Environment Minister Garrett has raised serious questions about whether Regional Forest Agreements adequately protect environmental values and biodiversity. One could equally ask why their damage to other industries, to the climate and to vital natural resources is not taken into account.

Issues involved in logging of Bermagui forest provide a prime example of what is wrong with current forestry practices. The logging should be called off by the two Governments before further damage is done.

Bermagui 14 September 2009

Dane Wimbush
Heather Kenway
Members of the South East NSW branch, National Parks Association and of the
South East Region Conservation Alliance