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Conservation groups now united in calling for an end to logging in state native forests

The state's leading forest conservation groups have united in opposition to native forest logging on public lands.

The North East Forestry Alliance (NEFA) has changed its long-held position of tolerating native forest logging on public lands under strict conditions. It is now calling for logging of publicly owned native forests in the northeast region of NSW to end by mid-2018.

NEFA's declaration means there is now a clear consensus and message to the government from both the north and the state's other key forest conservation organisation in the south, the South East Conservation Alliance, which has long opposed native forest logging.

"This momentous decision by NEFA means that for the first time the state's leading forest conservation groups are united against native forest logging in state-owned forests," said Nature Conservation Council CEO Kate Smolski.

"Individuals and groups aligned with NEFA had in the past been prepared to work with the government and industry to make logging sustainable. However, they have withdrawn their support because industry and the government's forest regulators have failed to competently manage this industry for many years.

"Native forests are hotspots for a huge variety of wildlife and should be managed to maintain and enhance this biodiversity. The conservation is now united in opposition to the continued destruction of forests and wildlife for low-quality forest products."

NEFA has also announced it is opposed to any extension or renewal of Regional Forest Agreements or Integrated Forestry Operations Approvals beyond 2018.

Forestry activities in publicly owned native forests are governed under 20-year Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) – bilateral agreements between Commonwealth and state governments signed between February 1997 and April 2001.

Logging covered by an RFA is not required to obtain approval under federal environment law (Environment Protection and Biodiversity (EPBC) Act). Instead state forest management processes are accredited, leaving the Commonwealth largely powerless to enforce compliance with the RFA, even where nationally endangered wildlife or environmental values are threatened.

A report by the national Environmental Defenders Offices in 2013 found the state regulators and managers had failed to adequately protect species and habitats under the Regional Forest Agreements. [See <http://www.edotas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/One-Stop-Chop-Final-report.pdf>]

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