

Talk by Suzanne Foulkes, Murrah, near Bermagui, Far South Coast of NSW 18.09.2008

I am not a scientist but I would like to speak to you as an eye-witness who has lived in Murrah State Forest for over 30 years.

When we first went there we were besieged by wildlife. The abundance was just amazing. Nothing we planted survived the possums, wallabies, and parrots. The bandicoots dug things up and the wombats caved in the best of fences.

We kept bees at the time and the sugar gliders, several kinds came in groups at the first sniff of honey, and the bush rats and mice moved in, and bats.

We could not leave the windows open in summer because of possums at night, and goannas by day. The bird life was abundant, and hugely varied. The bush just hummed with life.

The river had a stony bottom and lush aquatic plant life, small fish and deep pools with eels and redfin. And bass. And the native cray the marron.

Sleeper and mine prop cutters had been through and there had been selective logging. We found huge old stumps. The integrity of the forest had survived these earlier incursions. They had been moderate. Then came the logging for woodchips.

After only a short time the river began to silt up.

It was gradual at first. Then after a heavy rain event massive amounts of soil came off the slopes. The logging went on relentlessly and the river just filled with sand, over the next 15 years.

There are no more deep pools and mostly the water is not even visible but runs deep under the sand which is all moving inevitably to the estuary.

The wildlife is now so diminished that I can leave home at 6 am and not see one living creature.

The poisoning of wildlife after a coupe is logged to stop the regrowth being eaten has been very successful. The flocks of parrots that came in hundreds are now less than a dozen. We only rarely hear the owls and gliders at night.

The koala colony in the gully behind us vanished after their habitat was demolished by Forests NSW. Of course the follow up burning would have made certain.

Many eucalypt-dependant species like potaroo, Christmas beetles, and cicadas have also gone.

The diversity of the forests tree species has been intentionally reduced to a virtual mono-culture of silver top ash and the highly volatile forest casuarinas.

FNSW and DECC knew full well of the presence of those koalas. Just as they know full well that koalas are in the Bermagui compartments now targeted for logging. [The Bermagui compartments have been logged since this was written.]

This is a very sorry tale to tell and in the time frame of just 30 odd years. It is just a moment in the life of a great ecosystem.

It is a modern tragedy and an environmental crime.

This is the story of virtually all our coastal forests and water catchments.