

*RMB Wapengo,
Wapengo NSW 2550*

The Hon. Peter Garrett A.M., M.P.,
Minister for Environment, Heritage and the Arts.
PO Box 6022,
Parliament House,
Canberra ACT 2600

17th August 2009

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you as an ecological scientist, as a leader in the Australian and global environment movement, and as a concerned rural citizen who lives in one of the most beautiful parts of Australia which is currently under enormous threat.

I am speaking of the locality of Wapengo on the Far South Coast of New South Wales – part of the declared National Wilderness Coast. The catchment is characterised by one of the most pristine coastal estuaries in the State whose \$1 million/yr Sydney Rock Oyster industry needs no purification systems, and by national parks on the coast (Mimosa Rocks NP) and in the headwaters (Biamanga NP). The latter is an Aboriginal handback National Park, upon whose Board I proudly sit as a representative of conservation interests. The local Aboriginal peoples have many significant sites in these two Parks, and also in the intervening Mumbulla State Forest.

Despite having been intensively logged for woodchips in the 1970s & 80s, this largely regrowth forest has recently been identified as providing core habitat for the very last known koala population on the Far South Coast. A population that studies show is breeding and in recovery. However, Mumbulla State Forest is due to be intensively logged for woodchips yet again this year!

Hearing your comments upon the 7.30 Report yesterday on koalas, and also on how a whole-of-landscape ecosystem investment is critical, and how you wished to strengthen the National Reserve System, I am writing to you to see if there is any way in which you can act to not only save this koala population from destruction, but also save the health of the estuary and the oyster industry, in addition to retaining the vast carbon sequestration potential of this forest and retaining the tourism economic potential of the area.

Unfortunately, all representations to the NSW Government have met with a brick-wall response that since the forest is in the Eden RFA, nothing can be done to save the koalas. But the situation has dramatically changed since the RFA were declared: we now know that we must act pro-actively to build resilience to the effects of climate change in order to give our plants and animals a fighting chance. In the case of the Wapengo catchment, it is clear, to use your own words, “there will be an economic cost if we do not look after our natural systems”. All the analyses that our experts have undertaken indicate that the cost of losing the koalas, the oysters, the water yields, the inspiration for the local artists community, and the tourism potential of this part of the Wilderness Coast will far outweigh the tiny economic benefit of logging this relatively small area of forest.

Only the Federal or the relevant State Government can act to revise any RFA –all public avenues have been precluded. The NSW Government has refused to follow the brave lead of the Bracks Labor Government in Victoria in cancelling part of an RFA (The Otways). This leaves the ultimate fate of the Far South Coast koalas solely in your hands, Minister.

You spoke yesterday that you believed there was a need to re-examine the conservation status of koalas, and that you agree that it was not appropriate for the Commonwealth to always sit at the end of the decision-making chain.

You stated passionately and forcefully that it was time “to show some leadership” and that your legacy would be judged by the “best that I can do for the environment”.

I am thus appealing to you, Minister Garrett, to intervene in the case of the koalas of Mumbulla State Forest, to add this forest to the National Reserve System, thus also reuniting the lands of the Yuin traditional owners through linking Mimosa Rocks National Park with Biamanga National Park.

Generations to come would admire such a legacy.

I urge you to act before we lose yet another irreplaceable component of our natural heritage,

Yours faithfully,

John Hibberd
Wapengo