

Call for a native forest logging moratorium as a result of unprecedented wildfires across NSW.

Jim Morrison, PO Box 30 Mallanganee NSW 2469

9/12/19

Dear Premier,

I am writing on behalf of a network of NSW Regional Forest Conservation Groups including the North Coast Environment Council, North East Forest Alliance, the Friends of Kalang Headwaters, South East Forest Alliance, South East Regional Conservation Alliance, The Great Eastern Ranges, The Colong Foundation, Nambucca Valley Conservation Association and Boral Green Share Holders.

NSW Regional Forest Conservation Groups are deeply concerned about the immediate and ongoing impact the extensive NSW bushfires are having on our environment. Already more than 1.7 million hectares of land has been impacted in NE NSW alone, including more than six hundred thousand hectares of National Parks and more than three hundred thousand hectares of State Forests. A third of native vegetation in NE NSW is mapped as being burned including half of our remaining oldgrowth and a quarter of all rainforests.

Across the firegrounds most of the leaf litter, logs and shrubs that are habitat for a multitude of wildlife have been consumed. Over extensive areas tree canopies have been burnt or scorched, with the loss of browse, nectar resources and invertebrates essential for so many species. Thousands of the biggest trees, including hollow-bearing ones, have been burnt out at the base and collapsed.

A third of the modelled high-quality Koala habitat on public lands in north-east NSW has been burned, including some of our largest Koala colonies on the Richmond lowlands, Dorrigo Plateau and around Lake Innes. Within the burned areas most leaves on the feed trees have been burnt, scorched or dropped, leaving surviving Koalas with little to eat. It is still unknown how many Koalas survived how many more will succumb to starvation, thirst or predation, or how long it will take for their trees to regenerate.

There has additionally been extensive loss of critical threatened species habitat, including thousands of mature hollow bearing trees removed through the establishment of hundreds of kilometres of containment lines, as well as significant additional loss of wildlife through back burning activities.

Following heavy rainfall in recent days there have been reports of an extensive fish kill in the Mole River west of Tenterfield as a result of sedimentation from the fire grounds entering water courses. The impacts of the fires on water quality will be detrimental to aquatic environments as well as town water supplies. Extensive fires have impacted the catchments of most of our Northern Rivers and also many flowing west from the Tablelands into the already stressed Murray Darling basin.

With summer only just beginning we can expect further extensive losses of our environmental values across eastern NSW due to ongoing drought conditions and the likelihood of more bushfires. The Bureau of Meteorology has put out a bleak outlook for eastern Australia for the coming summer, so the situation is likely get worse before it gets better.

Despite this unprecedented disaster unfolding in our public native forests, logging machines continue to destroy more forest. As recently as 28th November, even as helicopters and water bearing planes desperately tried to control a fire in conservation rich valleys of the Mid North Coast fringed by houses, logging machines were clear felling the adjacent habitat less than 500 metres away.

Furthermore, logging has been undertaken in public state forests throughout this emergency during days regarded as catastrophic and during total fire bans.

Similarly, the Currowan wildfire which is presently impacting forests on the South Coast has at least 6 logging operations nearby either under way or planned in the near future. Further wildfires can be expected to continue on the South Coast as summer progresses towards our normal fire season. Patches of apparently dying trees are now a common sight in North and South Coast forests. Wildlife are struggling in the severe drought and have enough of a challenge to survive even without logging to contend with.

One can understand the public asking the question:

“At what point will common sense prevail and this government determine to leave some habitat for wildlife, because it seems there is nowhere for them to go?”

We are gravely concerned for the future of our wildlife due to the extensive loss and degradation of habitat due to the wildfires. The NSW Regional Forest Conservation Groups believe that a continuation of logging activities in burnt public forests will greatly compound the impacts on surviving fauna, jeopardising their survival, while removal of riparian vegetation (up to 5m from streams) and ground disturbance will further add to the sediment entering our streams.

Areas of forest which have not been impacted by the bushfires are currently fundamentally important as refugia for our stressed and starving wildlife and must be retained undisturbed as source areas for recolonisation of burnt forests.

It is not known how the fires have affected available and future timber supplies and until this can be assessed the sustainability of harvesting operations cannot be guaranteed.

We therefore believe that as an immediate first step there needs to be a moratorium on logging of all public native forests in NSW until the impacts of drought and fire on our environment can be properly assessed and actions taken to mitigate losses and facilitate forest recovery can be undertaken.

We understand there is currently an existing over cut of more than 100,000 cubic metres of various classes of timber across the north coast CRA region which represents 6-9 months of logging so a moratorium could be put in place with no effect on Wood Supply Agreements in that region. The government (on behalf of taxpayers) also has the option of invoking the ‘force majeure’ clause of these agreements which allow non supply of timber, without penalty, if it doesn’t exist due to an unavoidable situation.

If logging continues in the now much reduced remaining unburnt areas of state forests the impact on biodiversity including the koala will be unconscionable. We urge you to declare the moratorium urgently and develop an exit strategy to permanently bring an end to native forest logging on public land in NSW.

Yours Sincerely

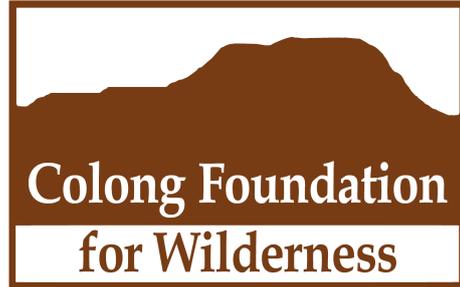
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Morrison". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.



NORTH COAST ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL INC.
NORTH EAST NSW - AUSTRALIA



North East Forest Alliance



GREEN SHAREHOLDERS