

Submission on the NSW Regional Forest Agreements. Harriett Swift. 23 February 2018

Background

1. The first Regional Forest Agreements date from the era of the chainsaw. Within a few short years, we were in the era of the mechanical harvester¹. Now, it's predicted that robots will soon take on the dangerous and often remote work of logging native forests.

This is no time to be watering down environmental protections and weakening compliance.

2. The NSW Regional Forest Agreements Implementation Report 2004–2014 provides an overwhelming case for transition out of native forest logging to plantations. Plantations were not part of the first RFAs and yet perhaps 70% of the Implementation Report is about plantations, including virtually all of the positive material.

Submission

Few now doubt that the industry is living on borrowed time. Governments can legislate for anything they like (eternal life?) but that doesn't make it real. Sustainable and economically viable native forest logging, especially for woodchips is not real and never will be.

There must be a clear and workable plan within any new RFAs to manage the closure of the woodchipping industry. When the time inevitably comes, woodchippers must not simply walk away from the environmental destruction they have caused or their obligations to workers, as mining companies have done in the past.

Some obvious measures would include, but not be limited to:

- a. A remediation bond payable by the owners of the Eden woodchip mill to cover costs of restoring the chipmill site for other purposes once the chipmill closes.
- b. A levy on the Forestry Corporation per hectare logged to provide for the restoration of native forests logged between now and the closure of the native forest industry.
- c. A water quality levy imposed on all logging operations undertaken in estuary catchments such as Wonboyn and river catchments.
- d. A road maintenance fee to ensure that roads used by log trucks cease to be a financial burden on other road users, councils and taxpayers until logging ends.
- e. A retraining fund payable by industry employers to entitle all workers currently employed in the logging industry to a retraining package to acquire new skills.
- f. A fire control levy payable by the industry to the Rural Fire Service per hectare logged, in recognition of the fact that dense regrowth forests are more fire prone than mature unlogged forests.
- g. Twofold Bay seabed damage prevention and remediation levy on woodchip carriers using loading facilities at the chipmill, in compensation for degradation of habitat of species such as the weedy sea dragon and green sea turtle by woodchip carriers.
- h. If the RFAs are renewed, Wood Supply Agreements should be for realistic timeframes (no more than 5 years), should not contain "take or pay" clauses and not carry unwarranted penalties for any early cessation of access to wood supply.

¹ Many of them bought with grants under the FISAP program, a part of the first RFAs.