

Wedding Bells State Forest - More illegal rainforest destruction.

July 2011

On 10th July, representatives of the Clarence Environment Centre combined with members of other environment groups to assess logging operations in Wedding Bells State Forest, just a stone's throw from northern NSW holiday town of Woolgoolga. This is what we discovered.



A landscape reminiscent of Tasmanian clear felling, with supposedly protected rainforest in the background, where major damage has been identified.



The investigation, which included professional ecologists lasted only a few hours, so a comprehensive assessment was not possible at that time. However in the short time available we once again identified widespread breaches of the Threatened Species Licence, under which Forests NSW is supposed to operate, and which we have asked the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH), the responsible regulatory authority, to immediately investigate.

The Crown Forestry Policy and Regulation (CFPR) section of OEH has already received a report on the logging from one of our members, but acting for the North East Forest Alliance (NEFA), which organisation has also forwarded a strong complaint relating to the clearing of unmapped drainage lines and its impact on the endangered Oxleyan Pygmy Perch whose habitat would have been adversely impacted by erosion and subsequent pollution of downstream waterways.



The tree crowns in the above photograph are from trees felled into the unmapped drainage line containing endangered Lowland Rainforest. Issues include unmapped drainage line logging upstream of Oxleyan Pygmy Perch habitat, machine damage to protected rainforest, and damage to at least 6 threatened Rusty Plums (*Amorhospermum whitei*) in the rainforest.

NEFA also demanded an immediate halt to logging until such time as the required Pygmy Perch conditions were enacted, and detailed other breaches relating to threatened Yellow-bellied Gliders and Koalas, both of which occur at the site. In view of the ongoing problems with Forests NSW's continuous refusal to comply with the Integrated Forests Operations Approval (IFOA), the Clarence Environment Centre echoed the call for a halt to logging activities.

Time was limited at the first investigation, but we were able to confirm that widespread damage had been done to rainforest verges. Nevertheless it was important to confirm the exact rainforest types, as the legal requirements for their protection vary from one to the other, so to this end it was determined to employ the services of an independent botanist to confirm the rainforest types present, and our belief that endangered and other supposedly protected forest communities had been seriously impacted.

So once again, despite OEH's promises to increase proactive monitoring, the Clarence Environment Centre has had to employ the services of a professional botanist to undertake OEH's work for it.

As expected, our botanist identified endangered Lowland Rainforest in some areas, while the comprehensive species list compiled from along just a 100m section of creek line, included 46 species listed by the NSW Scientific Committee as indicative of the presence of Lowland Rainforest community.

Flora listed as indicative species for Lowland Rainforest found at Wedding Bells

<i>Acacia irrorata</i>	<i>Denhamia celastroides</i>	<i>Morinda jasminoides</i>
<i>Adiantum formosum</i>	<i>Diospyros pentamera</i>	<i>Myrsine variabilis</i>
<i>Alpinia arundelliana</i>	<i>Diploglottis australis</i>	<i>Neolitsea dealbata</i>
<i>Alphitonia exelca</i>	<i>Doodia aspera</i>	<i>Notolaea longifolia</i>
<i>Archidendron grandiflorum</i>	<i>Doodia caudata</i>	<i>Parsonsia straminea</i>
<i>Archontophoenix cunninghamiana</i>	<i>Dysoxylum fraserianum</i>	<i>Passiflora herbertiana</i>
<i>Asplenium australasicum</i>	<i>Elaeocarpus reticulatus</i>	<i>Piper novae-hollandiae</i>
<i>Backhousia myrtifolia</i>	<i>Endriandra muelleri</i>	<i>Platycerium bifurcatum</i>
<i>Backhousia sciadophora</i>	<i>Eucalyptus grandis</i>	<i>Rhodamnia rubescens</i>
<i>Breynia oblongifolia</i>	<i>Ficus coronata</i>	<i>Ripogonum discolor</i>
<i>Callerya australis</i>	<i>Ficus rubiginosa</i>	<i>Rubus rosifolius</i>
<i>Ceratopetalum apetalum</i>	<i>Lastreopsis marginans</i>	<i>Rubus species A</i>
<i>Cissus antarctica</i>	<i>Lophostemon confertus</i>	<i>Schizomeria ovata</i>
<i>Cissus hypoglaucia</i>	<i>Malaisia scandens</i>	<i>Sloanea australis</i>
<i>Cissus sterculiifolia</i>	<i>Melia azedarach</i>	<i>Sloanea woollsii</i>
<i>Cordyline stricta</i>	<i>Melicope sp</i>	<i>Smilax australis</i>
		<i>Syzygium oleosum</i>

We believe a comprehensive assessment of the Wedding Bells logging operation will identify many kilometres of Lowland Rainforest verge that has been destroyed.

In the limited time available, some 130 species were identified at two separate sites, with 90 of those species also known to occur in Warm-temperate Rainforest, suggesting that community is also present within Wedding Bells State Forest.

Drainage lines have been bulldozed, threatened species destroyed (6 vulnerable *Amorphospermum whitei* were destroyed at the surveyed Lowland Rainforest site alone), and tree crowns and logging debris have been pushed into the rainforest.



We believe there are many kilometres of damaged endangered Lowland Rainforest, and possibly Warm-temperate Rainforest verges. The above picture, clearly shows Bangalow Palm and other rainforest debris pushed into the rainforest.

Therefore, we have also asked that a thorough investigation be undertaken along the many kilometres of rainforest verges that have been impacted upon by logging which appears to be an attempt to further diminish the area of protected rainforest.



In the Preamble to Forests NSW's Threatened Species Licence, we read that part of the “Intent” of the Licence is to ensure:

“Protection of features such as: rainforest, high conservation value old growth forest, habitat trees and riparian habitats (which) make substantial contribution to the conservation of a range of threatened species, protected fauna and protected native plants.”

Clearly there was no protection in this instance. That preamble also makes a clear statement that:

“This licence does not authorise the carrying out of an activity that is likely to:

- 1. Harm an endangered population or an endangered ecological community (as far as animals are concerned);*
- 2. Result in the picking of a plant that is part of an endangered population or endangered community;*
- 3. Damage critical habitat; or*
- 4. Damage to the habitat of an endangered population or endangered community.*

We contend that the above images confirm that this particular endangered community has suffered considerable “harm”, and “damage” to its habitat.

We took the opportunity to spell out the exact requirements of the relevant requirements relating to Warm-temperate Rainforest as set out in Section 5.4. of the Threatened Species Licence (pertinent sections underlined).

Section 5.4 Rainforest

- a) Specified forestry activities, except road and snig track construction in accordance with condition 5.4 (e), and road re-opening, are prohibited within all areas of Rainforest and exclusion zones around warm temperate Rainforest.
- b) A 20 metres wide exclusion zone must be implemented around all areas of warm temperate rainforest, as defined by RN 17 and mapped on Forestry Commission of New South Wales Forest Type maps.
- c) Trees must not be felled into Rainforest and exclusion zones around warm temperate Rainforest referred to in condition 5.4 (a) and b) above. If a tree falls into an area of Rainforest or a Rainforest exclusion zone, then no part of that tree can be removed from that area.
- d) Harvesting machinery is prohibited within areas of Rainforest, except for the purpose of routine road maintenance, road and snig track construction in accordance with condition 5.4 (e) and road re-opening.

Off-setting

Another matter of extreme concern is that the Operational Harvest Plan for Compartments 549, 552, 553, and 554, shows almost half the tract marked as “offset areas”, and are therefore excluded from logging at this time.

This allows the remainder of the net harvest area to be virtually clear-felled, and still comply with the Single Tree Selection requirement that logging of basal volumes not exceeding an **average** 40%. - And this is the result.



The above picture of a clear-felled landscape is the result of 'offsetting' whereby other parts of the forest are spared from logging at this time, allowing Forests NSW to comply with the requirement to log no more than the allowed 40% average across the net harvest area.

Large areas of Wedding Bells SF have been virtually clear-felled and parts then heavily disturbed and replanted with Blackbutt seedlings, a clear move to convert native forests into plantations. This is highly damaging to biodiversity, and to threatened species known to utilise these forests such as Yellow-bellied Gliders and Koalas, which have special food requirements that are not provided by Blackbutts.



The logging has been so severe that trees, such as that pictured, have simply fallen because of the lack of natural support of other trees against wind and rain.

Another concern is that there appears to be nothing in the regulations to prevent another harvest in two to three years time which could then remove similar quantities from the 'offset' areas. The Harvest plan for Compartments 536 – 7 and 548 claims that *“The stand has been regularly thinned from the 1950s until the early to late 90s where operations removed the highest quality and mature trees.”*

Incredibly, we are then told that *“Compartments 537 and 548 were last harvested in 2007... using STS (single tree selection) silviculture”*, just 4 years ago! Surely this cannot be described as the Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management, the principle that supposedly underpins the Integrated Forests Operations Approval.

So what is slowly being lost through this continual encroachment into the beautiful rainforests of the Coffs Coast hinterland?





John Edwards
Honorary Secretary.