

World Forestry Day protest action in Grafton

21st March 2011

The North Coast Environment Council (NCEC) together with the North East Forest Alliance (NEFA) held a protest outside the Grafton Offices of the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (DECCW) on Monday to highlight the lack of progress in the resolution of problems with forestry regulation on both public and private land.



Setting up for the protest on the lawns in front of the Government Office Block in Grafton.

The protest organisers were encouraged by the sizable crowd that arrived from all over the north coast from as far afield as the upper Hastings, Byron Bay, Lismore, Ballina, Glen Innes, Clouds Creek, Port Macquarie, the Lower Clarence and all points in between. One person, complete with Koala suit travelled all the way from Crookwell southwest of Sydney, to join with the “Friends of the Koala” mascot in adding a threatened species perspective.

After acknowledging the traditional owners, the NCEC's Honorary Secretary, John Jeayes, addressed the crowd, explaining that it was appropriate, on this the World Forests Day, to highlight the failure by DECCW to monitor the actions of the timber industry on both public and private land, where old-growth forests, rainforest, endangered ecological communities (EEC), and core koala habitat were still being subjected to logging.

John Jeayes then introduced the NCEC President, Jim Morrison, who made an impassioned speech highlighting the unacceptable changes the Private Native Forestry (PNF) Unit of DECCW has managed to introduce to the PNF Code of Practice. These include the logging of EECs, and previously 'protected land' (steep slopes), under the claim that it maintains or improves ecological values.

Jim Morrison warned against the current push by the PNF Unit to grant “bio-certification” to logging under the Code of Practice, which would then allow any logging approval on private land to proceed without any need for flora and fauna assessment, or regard for threatened species legislation, under the 'assumption' that logging under the Code maintained or improved ecological values.

Mr Morrison lamented that the most damaging of all actions currently being undertaken by the PNF Unit was the reclassification of mapped old-growth forests, protected under the Code, to a lesser value thus allowing them to be logged. To date, he explained, more than 8,000 hectares of mapped old-growth forest had been so treated, with contracts granted to landowners to log those forests over the next 15 years.

Add to this scandal, Mr Morrison explained that the PNF Unit had also granted licences to landowners to log almost 2,500 hectares of mapped Koala habitat in the Coffs Harbour district in contravention of the Council's Koala Plan of Management, and failed to respond to Council's letters of concern for 16 months.

Jim Morrison's speech was followed by renowned forest campaigner and artist, Dailan Pugh, who was heavily involved in the drafting of the historic Regional Forest Agreements in the late 1990s, and is now appalled at the systemic widespread breaching of the agreement that he has found to be occurring, and being condoned by an ineffective forests investigation unit, another section under the DECCW.



Concerned citizens with some of Dailan Pugh's protest posters.

Acknowledging the work of the Clarence Environment Centre in exposing the logging of supposedly protected Endangered Subtropical Coastal Floodplain Forest at Doubleduke, and Lowland Rainforest at Grange State Forest, Mr Pugh detailed a horror story of breaches his NEFA team had previously uncovered at Yabbra State Forest where their report of logging a protected rainforest resulted in Forests NSW being fined a paltry \$300.

Mr Pugh also referred to the unacceptable situation where DECCW's forest inspectors are not qualified to identify threatened plants or endangered communities, which means that, unless private citizens are prepared to risk arrest and prosecution by entering a logging site, and do DECCW's work for them, these infringements would never be identified.

Applause and unanimous approval was given at the protest's close with the reading of a list of demands made to the Director General of DECCW, Lisa Corby, which are as follows:



Renowned forest campaigner, Dailan Pugh addressing the assembly.

On Private Native Forestry the demands are:

- Dissolve the present PNF Unit of DECCW and employ suitably qualified staff with an ecological background.
- Remove Bio-certification for Private Native Forestry as the Code of Practice has failed to protect the high conservation values of forests including most threatened species habitat
- Return to the requirements of the 7 Part Test before granting Property Vegetation Plan approvals for logging.
- Require independent pre-logging surveys to determine site specific requirements for threatened species.
- Cease all logging in core koala habitat.
- Revoke all "old growth" reassessments which have recently released over 8000 ha from protection through incorrect declassification.
- Make available a public register of all PNF PVPs and reclassifications of forest types.
- Ban all logging in Endangered Ecological Communities.

In order to better protect threatened species and water quality during logging on public lands DECCW must:

- Clarify, improve and monitor licence conditions;
- Audit at least 10% of plans and operations;
- Ensure that Foresters tasked with undertaking pre-logging assessments are adequately trained and mark all required trees and exclusion areas before logging starts;
- Ensure that Bell Miner Associated Dieback areas are identified and rehabilitated;
- Ensure that all stream banks are duly and adequately identified and protected;
- Fine Forests NSW for each breach, rather than counting multiple breaches of a licence condition as a single breach;
- Require the protection of equivalent compensatory habitat and trees for each area and tree illegally logged.
- Require the rehabilitation of all areas illegally logged; and
- Make all relevant documents publicly available on the internet.



A group, including both Koalas then entered the DECCW offices and handed the letter of demands to DECCW's regional head of the PNF Unit, Greg Lollback.

On behalf of the Clarence Environment Centre, I would like to say a special thank you to members of the public who have conveyed information to us, and pay especial tribute to those who, by their vigilance in monitoring logging operations in our public forests, have made the public aware of what is really going on. Even though many would, and already have, put their hands up, it is unfortunate that, in the current climate, I am unable to identify all those who have helped in this campaign.

I also extend our sincere thanks to all who answered the NCEC's call for action and attended Monday's protest, especially the Greens candidates who added their considerable support, our own Janet Cavanagh for the seat of Clarence, and Jeremy Bradley from the seat of Oxley, who travelled all the way from the Hastings district to attend. I also thank all those who phoned or sent letters and emails of support, but who could not make it on the day.

Finally, my appreciation to Robert who loaned us his PA system and to Jay, Simon and Jimmy who set everything up, and provided their considerable filming and editing expertise, which will soon allow the world to witness the day's events on this web-site.

John Edwards
Honorary Secretary