

The Real Forest News

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Burning native forest logs for energy off the agenda - for the moment

The Federal Government has recognised the enormous contribution our forests make to reducing climate change and has removed the effective subsidy for 'native forest biomass', but similar threats still face our highly valuable and vulnerable forests.



Old growth karri forest at dawn, Warren National Park. Courtesy Simon Neville.

The Gillard Government's proposal for a price on carbon includes a provision that biomass from native forests will not qualify for Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs). This is good news for WA, where the Barnett Government's logging agency, the Forest Products Commission (FPC), has been conducting 'total extraction' and 'logging to waste' trials and making plans to sell hundreds of thousands of tonnes of native forest logs to energy companies as fuel for their furnaces.

This inherently wasteful proposition would never succeed financially without some form of government subsidy, and proponents have been pinning their hopes on the competitive advantage created through RECs.

Now that 'native forest biomass' has finally been removed from the list of eligible fuels there is very little chance that it will get off the ground here, or anywhere else in Australia.

This is a major win for forest campaigns around the country.

The federal carbon package also provides for a biodiversity fund worth \$948 million over the first six years to directly support projects that establish, restore, protect or manage biodiverse carbon stores. This includes funds for actions associated with the cessation of logging in publicly owned native forests.

This is further financial incentive for the State Government to protect WA's native forests, and implement long overdue industry restructure which properly supports the farm forestry sector.

However, the circumstances that have been threatening to deliver a 'biomass' industry remain and similar threats are still looming in WA.

One hundred and fifty years of mismanagement have left WA's logged forests with trees that will never produce quality sawlogs.

The jarrah forest has been ruthlessly mined, with loggers going back time and again to extract smaller and smaller logs, which today the sawmills can't use and don't want. As one sawmiller said publicly 25 years ago, jarrah cannot be logged commercially - it is too slow growing.

Karri regrowth trees are full of rot and no amount of thinning will get them to produce good quality sawlogs. With mature karri forest running out, the karri sawlog industry is in terminal decline. This leaves greater exploitation of poor quality logs as the FPC's preferred option for the future of native forest management.

There are currently no controls against turning native forest logs into pellets for export to fuel overseas electricity furnaces. Also, the native forest logging lobby is pushing for our forests to be used to generate ethanol and biochar - an agricultural additive whose usefulness has not been proved. Our forests are worth more standing than as cheap low-grade logs. Now that federal money is available, it is plainly in WA's interests to request our share of the available funds to protect them as the highly biodiverse carbon stores that we now understand them to be.

Losing forests, losing money

It is not simply bad economics or environmental vandalism; it is repugnant that clever accounting hides the fact that we pay to have our forests destroyed.

Every time you see a logging truck on the road loaded with jarrah or karri logs, remind yourself that those are your trees and that every load taken out of the forest makes a loss... for you.

The Forest Products Commission (FPC) was formed in 2000 and given, at no cost, our State native forests. At that time the FPC ascribed no value (\$0) to these forests. The FPC now values these forests at about \$110 million.

These valuations are done by projecting forest logging regimes over the next 50 years. They include some extraordinary assumptions (e.g., that rainfall will increase to mid-1970s levels), they employ some questionable accounting techniques (e.g., they do not include all forest administrative costs) and they assume growth rate estimates that are open to serious question (e.g., in 1987 the FPC (then CALM) estimated that in 2008 regrowth logs would provide up to 23 per cent of 1st and 2nd grade karri sawlogs whereas in fact they provided as little as 3 per cent).

The FPC pays some \$6 million interest annually, but none of this is debited to forestry operations in the current accounts or indeed for the 50-year forecasts. As well, in 2001 the impact of changing some accounting procedures alone added some \$67 million to the 'value' of these forests.

It does not take much to see that the value of our forests has declined. The way they are being managed is loss-making. They have been converted from an asset to a liability.

The claimed increase in value from \$0 to \$110 million has been progressively included in the FPC's profits from 2000 to 2010. Over that same period the FPC's reported accumulated profit was about \$34 million.

Without these highly questionable revaluations of the forests the FPC's results over that period would have amounted to a loss of \$86 million.

The purported increase in value is meant to demonstrate that forestry is sustainable. But native forestry is neither profitable nor sustainable.

The sooner it stops, the better.



Clearfelled karri forest, Crowea forest, near Pemberton. June 2011

Climate change threat to national parks exposed

A Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) report shows that climate change is threatening vast areas of the south-west forests.

A case in point is the Tone Perup Nature Reserve and the adjoining Greater Kingston National Park, where rainfall may decrease to less than 600 mm per annum by 2030 – below the minimum amount required for jarrah forest to survive.

This has led Bridgetown-Greenbushes Friends of the Forest (BGFF) to intensify its campaign to have the iconic Warrup Forest Block included in the Greater Kingston National Park.

About 15 square kilometres of Warrup are scheduled by DEC for intensive logging, commencing this year.

In the 2010 report, a panel of DEC experts identified the more vulnerable areas of our south-west forests under the influence of climate change, the risks for timber production and conservation and the measures that should be taken to mitigate the risks.

The report showed that some of the forest in existing and proposed conservation reserves is likely to have annual rainfall of less than the critical 600 mm by 2030 under the 'moderate' or 'severe' projections of a recent CSIRO rainfall study.

BGFF President Richard Wittenoom said that the threat to the Tone Perup Nature Reserve and other conservation areas is a compelling reason for the adjoining Warrup Block, which is less threatened by climate change, to be added to the Greater Kingston National Park.

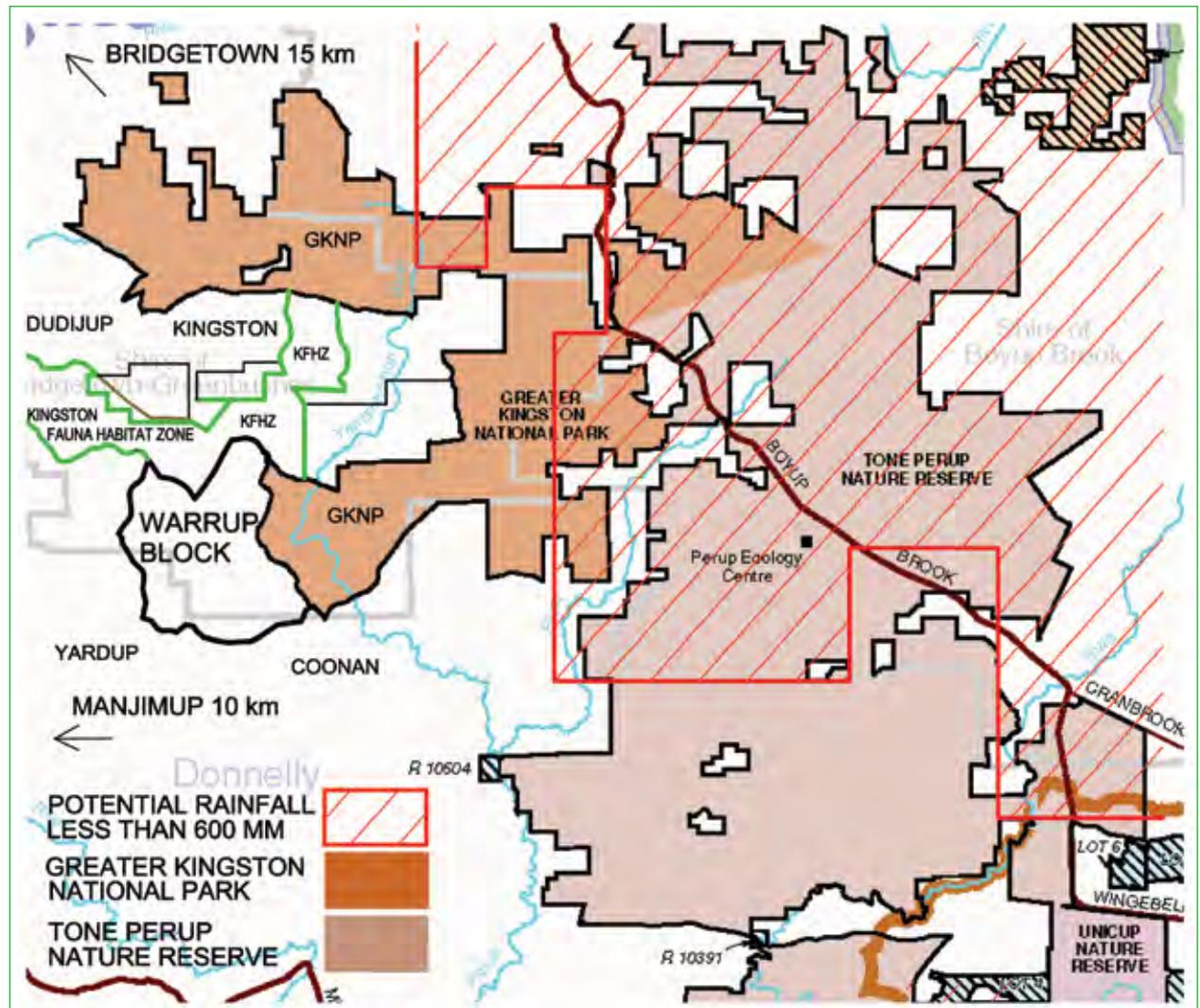
"This recommendation was supported by almost 200 submissions on the Draft Perup Management Plan, as well as by more than 1500 signatures on the BGFF petition to the Legislative Council," he said.

Reduced rainfall, increased temperatures and more frequent drought, as well as the stress imposed on the forests by logging, fragmentation and the spread of disease are compounding to have major impacts on forest health.

"Unfortunately in the DEC report the most frequently recommended response to the increased risks from climate change is 'No additional measures are proposed'," he said. "For DEC it's pretty much business as usual."

This is not adequate for Warrup and the Warrup forest region, which is recognised as one of the most important areas for conservation of threatened and endemic native fauna in southern Western Australia.

For further details please go to: www.savewarrup.com



The area predicted to have annual rainfall below 600 mm by 2030 in either the 'moderate' or 'severe' projections is shown hatched. To determine this area the coloured pixels shown in Figure 3 of the DEC Sustainable Forest Management Technical Report No 5 were superimposed on a plan of the reserves in the Draft Perup Management Plan.

Authoritative scientific views on reducing the impacts of climate change on forests support the retention of mature forests, expansion of reserve systems, improving forested corridors at landscape scales and protecting potential fauna refuges from threatening processes, such as intensive logging.

The proposed intensive logging of 15 square kilometres of Warrup, if it happens, will have long-lasting adverse environmental consequences. The high impact disturbance would significantly disrupt and deplete Warrup's value in the region as wildlife habitat, a fauna refuge and a forested corridor.

The obvious response proposed by the community and even some in the logging industry is to stop all logging of native forests. This will give our forests the best chance of surviving climate change.

Community resoundingly rejects DEC's proposal to increase karri logging

The Department of Environment and Conservation's hopes that it could fly under the radar and quietly increase karri logging have been dealt a blow with huge numbers of passionate submissions opposing the proposal sent to DEC.

Forest protection has traditionally been of high importance to Western Australians, and the community has taken this opportunity to send a strong signal to government that there are still deep concerns about forest management that need to be addressed. DEC claimed in July this year that the Forest Management Plan (FMP) would be amended to increase the allowable cut of low-grade (or 'other bole volume') karri logs. It made the statement as if the amendment was a fait accompli despite legal provisions which require a public consultation process before a final decision is made.

In just two days, more than 700 submissions were sent to the Premier and to DEC, calling for the proposal to be rejected and our forests immediately protected. Around 1600 submissions were entered before the cut-off date - a strong response that came as a surprise to the agency and government officials.

DEC will now consider the submissions and report to the Conservation Commission of WA which will then make a recommendation to the Minister for Environment. The Minister has the final say on whether the proposal will go ahead. However, if he changes the Commission's recommendation, he must provide a note to say that he has done so.



One of the key criticisms of the proposal is that to amend a single aspect of the FMP when it has less than two and a half years to run has the potential to pre-empt the preparation of the next 10-year forest plan. Our forests cannot sustain the timber industry for another 10 years – the industry is already financially unviable because of the poor quality of sawlogs.

The only rational approach is for the next plan for our forests to be a Forest Protection Plan, not a Forest Logging Plan. Any attempt to lock in logging before planning commences will not be taken kindly by a community already critical of the Barnett Government's approach to forest policy and management.

The campaign to protect our remaining native forests is attracting renewed and vocal support. There is no doubt that the community is opposed to the financially unviable and ecologically unsustainable native forest logging industry. All we need now is the necessary innovative leadership to get WA on the right track towards stronger, greener regional economies.

Scandalous misuse of rare jarrah timber -

Furniture-grade jarrah used for railway sleepers

The scandal was exposed in the July *Real Forest News*.

Responses to questions in parliament reveal that 98,717 timber sleepers will be installed on the freight line between Avon and Redmond, near Albany. The State Government is paying \$115.5 million towards the cost of re-sleepering and access for the south-west freight line. Of this sum, \$7.755 million is for jarrah sleepers.

The freight line is operated by WestNet Rail (now Brookfield Rail) as the lessee of the freight rail network, and WestNet Rail bought the sleepers. However, as the Barnett Government is paying for the re-sleepering, it could have directed WestNet Rail not to use timber sleepers.

The former Labor Government had a firm policy that WA's native timbers would not be used for railway sleepers.

Our irreplaceable native forests are still being logged and over 80 per cent of the wood is ending up as low-value products like woodchips and firewood.



Firewood

Precious old jarrah trees are being felled, chopped up and sold as firewood...



Woodchips

Magnificent areas of karri forest are still being clearfelled and woodchipped.



Charcoal

or sent to Simcoa where they are burnt as charcoal in the silicon smelting process.



Sleepers

Under the Barnett Government our native forest timbers are again being used for railway sleepers. Hundreds of thousands of new sleepers are being milled.



"Only after the last tree has been cut down
Only after the last fish has been caught
Only after the last river has been poisoned
Only then will you realize that money
can not be eaten"

Crowea forest. July 2011

Sawmills promised millions if logs not supplied

The State Government has given eight sawmills Investment Security Guarantees promising them millions should there be any reduction in the amount of native forest sawlogs supplied to them.

If all the sawmills succeeded in their claims, taxpayers would have to fork out \$77.25 million. The compensation is payable if the reduction is due to a change in government policy.

Thus the Government, behind our backs, has committed Western Australians to continuing to supply logs to sawmills regardless of public opinion about native forest logging, failing which it will pay them huge compensation.

There are only two exceptions. No compensation is payable if the change in government policy is influenced by climate change or by an increase in the estimated spread of dieback.

It would be interesting to see officers from the Department of Environment and Conservation in the witness box explaining to a Judge that sawlogs cannot be supplied because our forests are suffering from climate change and dieback infestation.

Not only do they deny that climate change has reduced tree growth rates and hence the sustainable supply of sawlogs; they even want to increase the volume of low-grade karri logs by 45 per cent for the next 10 years. In this situation there are only two rational responses: there must be no increase in the supply of karri logs and no compensation to any sawmills when the log supply dries up.

Managers have known for decades that native forest logging is unsustainable and now that the industry can no longer turn a profit it is outrageous that the WA taxpayer should be expected to foot the bill.

Given the high standard of timber required for sleepers, the timber should have been used for furniture.

Forest Products Commission's contracts for the sale of 1st and 2nd grade sawlogs contain a clause that requires the sawmiller to process the timber into value-added products. Sleepers do not meet this criterion.

WA Ministers try to hoodwink the public by saying that only 3rd grade sawlogs can be used to produce sleepers. They imply that the timber in sleepers is 3rd grade. However, the timber obtained from low-grade logs must still meet the high standards required for sleepers and would be suitable for furniture.

The jarrah forest is under enormous pressure from climate change and epidemics of pests and diseases. Logging in the jarrah forest must end soon and no more jarrah will be available for any purpose. In the meantime, it is a scandalous waste of precious jarrah timber to use it for railway sleepers.

Failing regrowth means the bell is tolling for native forest logging.

The evidence is piling up that jarrah and karri regrowth is failing as a sawlog resource.

Government forestry agencies and the native forest logging industry have, for many decades, tried to convince a sceptical West Australian public that their activities are sustainable. They have claimed that karri and jarrah forests regrow after logging and that the regrowth will provide sawlogs for the industry and habitat for wildlife in perpetuity.

These claims have been tested in recent years with more logging occurring in regrowth areas with increasingly poor results.

It is notoriously difficult to regrow jarrah forest and only the very few and rapidly diminishing areas of mature, high conservation value jarrah forest in State forest can still be relied on to produce good quality sawlogs.

A striking example is the regrowth in Warrup forest, near Bridgetown, where 182 hectares were logged in 1982 using the current logging techniques. After almost 30 years, what was a tall forest is now a woodland of spindly coppiced regrowth, with clumps of saplings sprouting from the stumps of trees that were felled. Much of the regrowth is marri, and a high proportion of this is infected with marri canker, which is killing the trees. This is not an unusual case.

The karri regrowth is faring no better. Armillaria, an endemic fungus which is kept in check in old growth karri forest, has infested the regrowth areas causing tree deaths and widespread rot. Other fungi also cause rot in the wood and degrade the timber. In some years as little as 3 per cent of the logs from regrowth karri forest were good quality sawlogs with most of the logs fit only for chipping. This means that these areas are being managed largely as pulpwood stands, worth next to nothing now that native forest woodchips have become undesirable overseas.

Despite all this bad news our regrowth karri and jarrah forests are doing some things well. They are drawing down and storing huge quantities of atmospheric carbon as they grow, and left alone they will continue to mitigate the risks of climate change. They also provide essential habitat for our unique wildlife.

With regrowth failing and mature forests fast running out it would be highly irresponsible to plan for another 10 years of native forest logging. The best hope for the logging industry is to be rapidly and equitably transitioned into sustainably managed farm forestry.



Failing regrowth in Warrup forest 30 years after logging



Thinned karri regrowth near Pemberton. The original forest was clearfelled 30 years ago

MARGARET RIVER CYCLE TREK

A MOUNTAIN BIKE ADVENTURE

BACK TRACKS SINGLE TRACK RIVERS FORESTS BEACHES
CAMP FIRES WINERIES SCRUMPTIOUS FOOD

This issue of the Real Forest News has been sponsored by Margaret River Cycle Trek and the Margaret River Regional Environment Centre.
Join us for a great ride this 16th October.



A WEEK IN OCTOBER

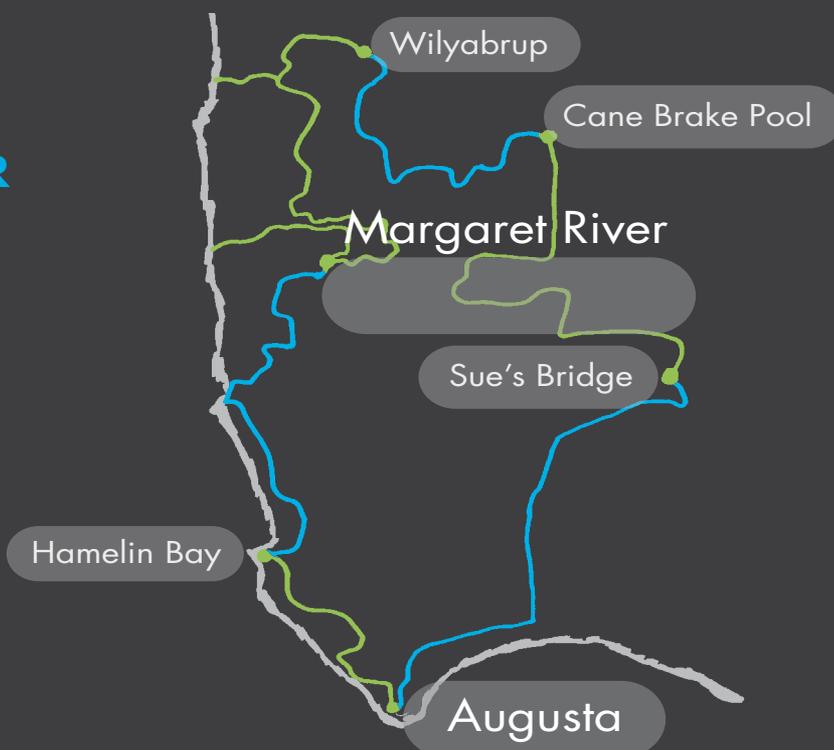
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WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

- 1. Make a donation to:**
WA Forest Alliance, City West Lotteries House
2 Delhi Street, West Perth 6005
- 2. Email:**
Hon. Colin Barnett, Premier:
wa-government@dpc.wa.gov.au
Hon. Bill Marmion, Minister for Environment:
Minister.Marmion@dpc.wa.gov.au
Hon. Terry Redman, Minister for Forestry:
Minister.Redman@dpc.wa.gov.au

- 3. Write them a short letter:**
Address to Parliament House, Harvest Terrace, West Perth 6005
and include some of the following points:
 - The native forest logging industry is not profitable or sustainable.
 - Plans must be immediately put in place to restructure the industry out of native forest logging and into sustainably managed farm forestry.
 - With decreasing rainfall, forests are not regrowing after they are logged.
 - Forests are playing a vital role in climate change mitigation and must not be logged or thinned so that they can continue to do so.
 - Our unique and beautiful forests are very important to me and I want them to be protected in secure reserves right now.