

## **Talk by Suzanne Foulkes, Murrah, near Bermagui, Far South Coast of NSW 18.09.2008**

I am not a scientist but I would like to speak to you as an eye-witness who has lived in Murrah State Forest for over 30 years.

When we first went there we were besieged by wildlife. The abundance was just amazing. Nothing we planted survived the possums, wallabies, and parrots. The bandicoots dug things up and the wombats caved in the best of fences.

We kept bees at the time and the sugar gliders, several kinds came in groups at the first sniff of honey, and the bush rats and mice moved in, and bats.

We could not leave the windows open in summer because of possums at night, and goannas by day. The bird life was abundant, and hugely varied. The bush just hummed with life.

The river had a stony bottom and lush aquatic plant life, small fish and deep pools with eels and redfin. And bass. And the native cray the marron.

Sleeper and mine prop cutters had been through and there had been selective logging. We found huge old stumps. The integrity of the forest had survived these earlier incursions. They had been moderate. Then came the logging for woodchips.

After only a short time the river began to silt up.

It was gradual at first. Then after a heavy rain event massive amounts of soil came off the slopes. The logging went on relentlessly and the river just filled with sand, over the next 15 years.

There are no more deep pools and mostly the water is not even visible but runs deep under the sand which is all moving inevitably to the estuary.

The wildlife is now so diminished that I can leave home at 6 am and not see one living creature.

The poisoning of wildlife after a coupe is logged to stop the regrowth being eaten has been very successful. The flocks of parrots that came in hundreds are now less than a dozen. We only rarely hear the owls and gliders at night.

The koala colony in the gully behind us vanished after their habitat was demolished by Forests NSW. Of course the follow up burning would have made certain.

Many eucalypt-dependant species like potaroo, Christmas beetles, and cicadas have also gone.

The diversity of the forests tree species has been intentionally reduced to a virtual mono-culture of silver top ash and the highly volatile forest casuarinas.

FNSW and DECC knew full well of the presence of those koalas. Just as they know full well that koalas are in the Bermagui compartments now targeted for logging. [The Bermagui compartments have been logged since this was written.]

This is a very sorry tale to tell and in the time frame of just 30 odd years. It is just a moment in the life of a great ecosystem.

It is a modern tragedy and an environmental crime.

This is the story of virtually all our coastal forests and water catchments.

## **A CLASH OF CULTURES: The Fate of Myrtle Creek Catchment Area**

Residents of Wyndham and the Myrtle Creek catchment area had campaigned vigorously against proposed timber harvesting in Yurammie State Forest, so Forests NSW (FNSW) agreed to a public consultation session on 11<sup>th</sup> May.

Wyndham Hall overflowed with locals, blow-ins, loggers and truckies. Shire Councillors and FNSW's CEO, their regional planning manager, a hydrologist, a soil specialist and an ecologist also attended. An hour and a half presentation of scientific data may have been intended to bamboozle with acronyms, figures and graphs. Why was I thinking 'smoke and mirrors'? Predictions were made regarding future conditions yet disregarded reference to climate change. Black figures on digital screens attempting to justify the destruction of a living breathing forest were ironically incongruous.

Each topic was disconnected from the next. It was as if studies of the 'bones, flesh and blood' of the forest were undertaken independently and not on how they interacted. It reminded me of Suzuki's 'sacred balance'. It seemed to be thought that the integrity of the forests would be retained despite removing part of its flesh and exposing its bare bones, disconnecting the blood and nerve flow and expecting that the body of the forest would not alter or suffer.

FNSW's map showing areas of incidence of native species overlaps the map of the proposed logging area. Some areas are designated as being less valuable because **only** swamp wallabies, lyrebirds and wombats were observed there. During logging this wildlife will lose habitat or could be killed. If forest logging continues their existence will be threatened.

As local knowledge and passion were pitched against data, heated debate ensued. Questions flowed from people who were well aware of the potential impact of logging on the catchment area. They pointed out that the February 2010 rains were not indicative of typical seasons yet were included in FNSW's hydrology figures and predictions. FNSW commented that if the water flow was affected post logging, they would consider rebuilding a new water supply. It did not appear rational to them that the existing naturally occurring water supply should not be threatened.

Had there been an adjudicator, the opposition would have won the debate by not only having a comprehensive and clear understanding of the issues, and in some cases a lifetime of knowledge of the area, but by their expressions of love and passion for the beauty of their home land.

On 5<sup>th</sup> May 2010 Ben Cubby, Sydney Morning Herald, reported that Australia is ranked 9<sup>th</sup> worst for its absolute impact on the natural environment according to a study of over 200 countries<sup>1</sup>. The top reasons for this result were: destruction of forest, loss of habitat and species extinction. The NSW Government should hang its head in shame for condoning the escalation of Australia's ranking by permitting ecocide such as is proposed in the Myrtle Creek catchment area.

Bronte Somerset  
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<sup>1</sup> Research by Adelaide University, Princeton University US, National University of Singapore University. <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/05/100505092006.htm>  
Corey J. A. Bradshaw, Xingli Giam, Navjot S. Sodhi, Stephen Willis. Evaluating the Relative Environmental Impact of Countries. PLoS ONE, 2010; 5 (5): e10440 DOI:10.1371/journal.pone.0010440