



## Forest Connections - a Corridor of Beauty

Bega River mouth, Mumbulla Mountain to Gulaga Mountain, far south coast NSW  
Forest Connections by Richard Green, [www.richardgreen.net.au](http://www.richardgreen.net.au)

### **Planning and Environment Committee - DA No.2011.0035: Instillation of a pilot wood pellet manufacturing plant - Lot 16 DP 1066187, Edrom Road, Eden.**

#### **Address by Prue Acton, a member of South East Region Conversation Alliance (SERCA).**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak regarding Nippon Paper's application to approve Australia's first native forest wood pellet plant at their Twofold Bay chip mill.

Most of you know I was an internationally recognised fashion designer, and consulted for major events including Australia's Olympic Games and World Expos, and companies such as Dulux Paints, CSR wood panels and the Melbourne City Council.

I am a designer – and designers are concerned with how things look and how things work – so I am asking, what is the “New Look” Bega Council wants to project to the world? And what can you do to make it work?

No doubt you all read last Friday's Bega Rural News and saw the article “Sapphire Coast's reward for effort” on Tourism receiving massive exposure – 7 million readers – with headlines such as Bermagui the new “foodie” capital, and “on the coast of small miracles”.

#### **The world is watching us.**

Forty years ago, a joint company Harris Daishowa was given approval to build Australia's first native forest woodchip mill. The initial agreement was for Harris to take 5,000 tons per year of forest waste for a Japanese paper producer for five years. In recent years under majority ownership by Nippon Paper, they have been exporting up to one million tonnes per year – 2000-3000 trees are cut down every day, supplied by the NSW and Victorian Governments below cost.

- The result has been to kill off local small saw mills and to change State Forests from mature diverse forests to single-aged, single-species forests suitable for the woodchip mill not saw mills.
- This industrial scale logging affects downstream industries. It causes siltation of the estuaries so critical for oyster growers and for the fish nurseries vital for fish stocks and the marine environment.
- Koalas, who once lived across the landscape, were almost hunted to extinction; the 30-50 remaining koalas are now confined to forests.

Australia's great international tourism draw card is the Koala. Logging, driven by woodchipping is killing off our coastal koalas.

**Employment:** Now around 140 people are employed in local saw mills, 75 at the chip mill, around 100 odd are contractors and jinker drivers, with crews now coming from Tassie and Victoria, under cutting local contractors.

Compare this with new employment opportunities in tourism, the arts, service providers, with true renewable industries, with the sea and tree changers, and retirees attracted by the beauty of the far south coast.

**Pilot Plant:** 40 years on Nippon is asking for you, to approve Australia's first wood pellet plant using native forest wood. They call it a “pilot” plant but this is the first step in moving from the dying business of native forest woodchips to getting a toe in a “back to the future” market:

burning forests for heating and so called renewable energy. They say it will use manufacturing waste but we know they are pushing to use whole trees; already Victoria is flagging this.

**Markets:** The native forest sector, from Tasmania, to Victoria and NSW is struggling to find markets as Japanese paper makers move from native forest to plantation fibre whilst China and Korea buy cheaper plantation woodchips in SE Asia and Brazil.

So the native forest sector is desperate to find a new market and if they think Australia will accept burning our forests for energy - well not without conflict .

**And the world is watching.** Our SERCA web site had hits from all over the world, the USA, India, China, even Russia and Brazil during the conflict over logging Mumbulla State forest in 2010.

Last year our photographic exhibition Natural forests – Australia’s wilderness coast attracted thousands in Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne and received national coverage, including the Weekend Australian Magazine and Opinion pages as well as ABC 7.30 report and TV News.

SERCA continues to get thousands of hits at [www.serca.org.au](http://www.serca.org.au)

So I am saying approving the pilot pellet plant will not a good look for Bega Shire.

Instead let us work for the future.

Let’s build on her natural beauties, not exploit them.

Let us listen to the scientists and economists who tell us burning native forests for energy is worse than dirty brown coal.

Our forests are worth more in the ground as carbon stores, water catchments and as habitat for Australia’s unique animals.

**Bega Valley Shire Council can be seen as a Council with true vision.**

Bega Council can get behind the management boards of Gulaga and Biamanga National Parks, get behind the National Trust of Bermagui, Clean Energy for Eternity, Four Winds Festival, the B &Bs, the artists, the new restaurants and coffee shops, the regional food producers and the majority of the community who don’t want our natural temperate forests logged for woodchips or for wood fired energy.

So instead of approving this test case for wood pellets, wouldn’t it be better if the forests of from Gulaga, Bermagui, Murrah, Tanja, Tathra and Mumbulla all due to be logged soon, could be left to recover and to provide habitat for our last remaining unique coastal koalas to repopulate – a greater Biamanga –Gulaga forest region would become a world class attraction and for many of the remaining original peoples, there will be jobs in ecological and cultural management.

A town like Eden could finally reach its potential as the woodchip market declines and instead beautiful Twofold Bay, the world’s third deepest natural harbour will attract cruise ships with the new middle classes for our Indo – Pacific region to come see our natural forests and unique koalas.

This matter is serious. The world is watching. Will we protect our great natural assets, including our coastal koalas?

**Koalas listed as Vulnerable:** On 17 February 2012, the Federal Environment Minister will decide whether to list koalas including our coastal, Strzelecki koalas as Vulnerable. Sure the NSW Government might decide to stop logging in a small area, and go in hard around them instead, but that won’t save koalas from regional extinction – they need a greater forest area.

I ask you to delay approval until after the Federal Government brings down their findings on the Senate Inquiry into Koalas.

I ask Councillors: listen to the people, scientists and economists, to the tourism industry. Are we home to the dirty, polluting, degrading industry that is woodchipping and the latest, wood pellets or a place of natural forests, wildlife, clean waters and of great, natural beauty.

The world is watching.

Prue Acton OBE