

IFOA REMAKE SUBMISSION

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The Author

I live and work in a remote part of NSW, surrounded State forest and National Park. I am a registered native wildlife rehabilitator and regularly release wildlife on to my property which is a WIRES release site. I am involved in monitoring local FCNSW logging operations, collecting and documenting IFOA and TSL breach data and liaise with EPA investigators.

Introduction

It has been clear from the outset that the IFOA remake is driven purely by the need to acquire more timber resources, and not to erode environmental values of our State Forests. By exempting FCNSW from The Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016, the remake fails to offer protection to, let alone improve, State forest ecosystems for the benefit of all native fauna and flora species, whether common, threatened or endangered. This remake has not taken into account the important role State forests play as natural carbon sinks, mitigating the impacts of global warming/climate change. Despite the misinformation that appears in all of the promotion material espousing the great benefits of this IFOA update, the value of State forests to local communities, tourism, recreational activities and as important habitat for native species, has been ignored. It is clear that State forests are to be nothing more than de facto timber plantations.

Promotion material relating to this remake.

With regards to the blatant misinformation that appears in all of the promotion material relating to this remake, I feel compelled to draw attention to the following.

The photographs used in the printed material and online video, show a woman dressed for forest track walking, out in front as the prominent figure, followed by a forest worker, another woman holding a camera and lastly a mountain bike rider. This falsely gives the impression that the forests are used primarily for personal activities, when according to an IFOA remake statement, the reality is that the forests are "native timber production forests". When you consider that the new IFOA will allow up to 90% of the forest to be used exclusively for timber extraction, the imagery used does not in any way represent the true purpose of State forests.

The printed and online content states that integrating "four existing IFOAs with more than 2000 conditions, in to one comprehensive license", "...will improve clarity, transparency and enforceability". This is stated without giving even the simplest explanation on how this will be achieved and then makes the claim "it will provide a better outcome for the environment and timber production". All of the conditions in the current IFOA are there because the EPA felt they were needed to protect the environment. It would be apparent to any reasonable person reading that statement, that if a number of these existing conditions are not clear, then they should be re-worded. If they cannot be enforced, how is removing them a better outcome for the environment? And the claim that the new conditions will be "transparent" is meaningless, as the existing conditions are already transparent because the 4 IFOAs and their TSLs are formal and legally binding documents agreed to by all parties.

The content states that "workers will be able to use new technology, such as GPS" and "improved technology means more streams will be mapped and protected". The introduction of new technology in forestry operations is not reliant on changing the IFOAs, this technology can be introduced and used in the current IFOAs, as stipulated in the RFA 1999, Part 2, 70 (b) (ii) "Further introduction of new technology, enhanced utilisation of regrowth timber for sawn products, thinning of regrowth forests and more efficient utilisation of residue wood;". Whilst I understand that part 2 of the RFA is not legally binding, it does make provision for the introduction of new technologies.

The content states that the new IFOA "will maintain multi-aged forest across the landscape". This is misleading as it will only maintain multi-aged forest across 10% of the landscape.

The content states that “the forests are an important resource for materials in every day life, like hardwood timber for high end construction, furniture, fences and floors.” This is blatantly misleading. Only a small percentage of trees logged are used in this way, the vast majority of trees logged end up as wood chips which are exported to China, Taiwan and Japan to make paper products. And there is no mention of using the forests to supply firewood. From recently published data, in some forest compartments and coups this can amount to as much as up to 50% of trees logged just for firewood. So why is there such a focus on forests being logged for high end construction, furniture, fences and floors? The construction industry rarely uses hardwood timber. Concrete and steel is the main construction material used in commercial buildings and multi level high rise buildings. On the occasion hardwood timber is used, it is for decoration and certainly not for structural purposes. Chemically treated pine and manufactured timber such as MGP10, T2, H3, H4, LOSP, LVL OSB and particle boards, all sourced from pine timber plantations is the building material used in the construction of residential housing. Native hard wood is rarely used. With the majority of housing constructed on concrete slabs, using native hardwood timber floors is not the popular option. Manufactured, timber lookalike like flooring, bamboo flooring and tiles are by far the most popular choice. Whilst there is mention of fencing material, far more trees are logged to produce shipping pallets, yet there is no mention of this.

The IFOA Draft document

Ambiguous wording used in the IFOA draft.

This was an issue for the EPA when interpreting and enforcing compliance in the current IFOAs. It is obvious that this will still be a major issue in the IFOA remakes.

e.g. 25.1 FCNSW must take all “reasonable” steps to ensure...

The word “reasonable” and any ambiguous wording must be excluded from any statements in the IFOA.

Coastal IFOA - Conditions

16.2 - Biodiversity conservation license.

Logging operations should not be exempt from The Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016, or any Federal or State laws that protect native ecological communities, flora and fauna, regardless of whether they are common, threatened or endangered.

18.2 - The fisheries license.

Logging operations should not be exempt from The Fisheries Management Act 1994, or any Federal or State laws that protect native ecological communities, threatened species, ecological communities and habitat, regardless of whether they are common, threatened or endangered.

21 & 22. - Objectives of the environment protection license and fisheries license.

Since the introduction of the RFAs, the EPA has not been able to effectively monitor, audit and prosecute FCNSW logging operations that were in breach of current IFOAs and TSLs, therefore I am skeptical that the EPA has the ability to meet the objectives of 21 & 22. The only way this can be achieved is to allow citizens and communities to take legal action in the NSW Land and Environment Court against FCNSW and its contractors.

35, 36 & 38 Operations, Compliance and Complaints register.

These must appear on the FCNSW website where it is easily accessible by the general public and be up to date.

35 Operations register.

Harvesting plans must be made available online 3 months prior to logging operations commencing.

39. Annual plan of forestry operations

40. Environment protection licence annual return

41. Annual report on timber volumes

These must appear on the FCNSW website where it is easily accessible by the general public and up to date.

42. Notification of harm – biodiversity incident

43. Notification of harm – pollution incident

44. Written reports – threatened species or pollution incident

These must appear on the FCNSW website when the notification is made to the EPA. Notifications must easily accessible by the general public and up to date.

46. Operational records

These must appear on the FCNSW website where it is easily accessible by the general public and be up to date.

48. Public availability of documents

These must appear on the FCNSW website when they are made available to the EPA. Documents must be easily accessible by the general public and be up to date.

Division 2 – Distribution of harvesting across the landscape.

Allowing as much as 90% of a State forest to be logged will convert State Forests into de facto plantation forests. This is not in keeping with the Eden RFA's Principle 1 which states: "Maintain or increase the full suite of forest values for present and future generations across the NSW native forest estate." This has the effect of reducing the size of State forests to 10% of their present size - 90% of a forest for timber production and 10% for other activities! This will considerably deprive individuals, communities and organisations that require and enjoy State forests for their activities. Retaining only 10% of a forest for habitat will increase pressure on native flora and fauna species and could lead to the collapse of forest ecosystems. There is no provision in the IFOA for differences in forest ecosystems. The IFOA assumes all forests are the same and can regenerate at the same rate. The proposed changes assume a forest in sunny Bermagui with its rich soils, will grow back as quickly as trees growing 1km above sea level in Montane ecosystems, where the soil is gravel and contains little nutrients, where it regularly drops below 0° and it snows!

60.5 Each pre-operational plan for a forestry operation must be made available to the public, EPA and DPI, at least two business days prior to the commencement of the forestry operation.

This does not give the public enough time to evaluate the effect logging will have on that area. Plans must be posted on the FCNSW website at least 3 months prior to an operation commencing.

67.1 Rocky outcrops and cliffs

A reduction from 40m to 20m for large rocky outcrops is unacceptable. It is obvious that the EPA and FCNSW are unable to agree on how to determine the size of rocky outcrops, so a decision has been made to not consider the size of them at all and apply the current IFOA minimum exclusion zone to all rocky outcrops, large and small. Rocky outcrops are important protective habitat that require appropriate exclusion zones - 20m is not enough!

Conclusion

The twin commitments of no erosion to environmental values and no net change to wood supply is not achievable and changing the IFOAs is not going to provide sustainable timber resources or protect the environment. It is clear that these changes are not about protecting the environment, they are about giving FCNSW access to more trees. Trees that will mostly be chipped and sent to Asia to make paper.

- Those working in the native hardwood timber sector being moved into the plantation timber sector.
- Government subsidies to the industry must end.
- FCNSW must be held accountable for its operations like any other business is.