

SUBMISSION TO THE OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE ON THE MURRAH FLORA RESERVES DRAFT FINAL WORKING PLAN

To: NPWS Planner | From: Dr Bronte Somerset, Quaama, NSW 2550

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STANDPOINT

I present my opinions on the Draft Final Working Plan as a Biamanga neighbour and as a community member who respects, loves and is concerned about protecting the natural environment.

BACKGROUND COMMENT

The long held theoretical stance which the Office of Environment and Heritage assumes, in conjunction with Forestry Corporation, and which drives their activities is that: despite the Aboriginal people having managed the land for approx. 60,000 years successfully, they can do it better. In some State and Federal Government decisions regarding the environment, this attitude persists despite the mistakes that have been made since colonisation with consequent detrimental, and sometimes irreparable, impact on the natural landscape, its flora and fauna.

However, the act of ‘doing it better’ should provide opportunities for both streams of thought to share and benefit, and the creation of the Murrah Flora Reserve presents such an opportunity for consolidating these dual practices into the management of a reserve; an opportunity which would go part way to metaphorically ‘saying sorry’ to the Traditional Owners, and to the wildlife and species which once inhabited, and could once again inhabit, this small holding.

SUFFER THE KOALAS

The shooting of our harmless and lovable native bear is nothing less than barbarous... No one has ever accused him of spoiling the farmer's wheat, eating the squatter's grass, or even the spreading of the prickly pear. There is no social vice that can be put down to his account...He affords no sport to the gun-man... And he has been almost blotted out already from some areas.ⁱ

Page 13. *Koalas were protected from hunting in 1927.* Note: this happened after US President Hoover ordered that the abominable fur trade from Australia should cease.

RECOGNISING OPPORTUNITIES

The creation of the Murrah Flora Reserve:

- Is the beginning of this land tenure to continue on its evolutionary journey
- Is the beginning of an admission by the Governments that all the southern region's forests, their wildlife, water, soil, and carbon, need protection
- Is a recognition by State and Federal Government that logging destroys the natural ecosystems
- Should protect flora and fauna
- Provides opportunities:
 - to solely implement Traditional forest management practices
 - to get Aboriginal youth back on Country to participate in Traditional forest management practices
 - to support community being involved in research activities
 - for developing educational and cultural tourism initiatives
 - for research initiatives to be undertaken to document changes in natural native forests post logging.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Management

1. Creation of the Murrah Flora Reserve was 'green spirited' but embarrassingly 'mean spirited' not to return the Murrah Flora Reserve to the Aboriginal owners. I recommend returning the Murrah Flora Reserve to the Traditional owners.
2. The Biamanga Board of Management and the National Parks and Wildlife Services to cooperatively care for Country on Murrah Flora Reserve.
3. Apply only the Fire management principles of Aboriginal cultural mosaic burning.
4. Incorporate Bermagui State Forest north of the Bermagui River as part of the Murrah Flora Reserve.
5. Section 8, Permissible activities should include no commercial timber harvesting in perpetuity.

Community

1. Develop a cognitive apprenticeship program for young Aboriginal people which supports learning in Traditional forest management practices and culture on the Murrah Flora Reserve.
2. Develop infrastructure on the Murrah Flora Reserve for a whole of community immersion in cultural events including, story-telling, photography, art, craft, bushfood, etc.
3. Design and construct forest exploration infrastructure and learning and cultural activities to suit people who have a physical or learning disability.

Economics

1. Stop subsidies to FCorp to compensate for not logging the Murrah Flora Reserve and Fund Murrah Flora Reserve initiatives out of the \$2.5 million subsidy for FCorp to log more intensely elsewhere.
2. The logging industry to fund reparation of the impact of all logging activities in the Murrah Flora Reserve including to roads, log dumps, invasive weeds post logging and replacement of multi-species trees where mono-species trees have resulted post logging.

BLUEPRINT FOR MANAGEMENT OF ALL NATURAL NATIVE STATE FORESTS

1. The Murrah Plan of Management shows much respect to the flora and fauna of the Murrah Flora Reserve. If the purpose of creating this Reserve was for species protection, the State Government should admit that all State Forests should be protected.
2. Page 8. If Hindell and Lee (1987) and Jurskis and Potter (1997) suggest that koalas prefer larger trees, then all trees where koalas lived, now live or could live should be protected within the Southern Forest Region.
3. Page 8. *The discontinuation of timber harvesting in the Murrah Flora Reserves is expected to improve this aspect of the koala's habitat.* This is an admission that logging damages koala habitat.
4. Page 10. One could take any State forest and make the same claim: *...it is a priority to manage the mountains as a single landscape and increase the connectivity and protection of land between them.* The same principle should apply State wide.
5. Page 14. Section 7, Management should be based on Traditional Owners' practices.
6. Page 14. Section 7, *implement the koala monitoring program and contribute to the enhancement of koala habitat.* Such Koala Habitat improvement program should apply to all State Forests.
7. Page 14. Section 7, *manage wildfire, fuel loads and response capabilities in partnership with fire authorities, surrounding landowners and NPWS wildlife ecologists.* Return to Traditional Owners' fire management only.

A FEW ANOMALIES

- Page 1. *The plan is couched in the emerging policy and science of the NSW Government's whole-of-government NSW Koala Strategy.* A whole-of-government koala strategy would stop logging in all native forests where koalas lived, live or could live again. This rhetoric is tedious.
- Page 2 para 1. *The dedication of the Murrah Flora Reserves provides important connections between adjoining Aboriginal-owned lands and national park estate held sacred by the traditional owners.*
The National Park estate wasn't held to be very *sacred* to FNSW (FCorp) when they logged Mumbulla on various occasions.
Important connections for Aboriginal people aren't drawn on a map – the land, the forests and all they hold are all connected. It is an insult to the Aboriginal people to

say that something is now ‘dedicated’ when it has always been sacred to them. Ascribing a region as ‘dedicated’ by giving it a ‘white tick of acknowledgement’ is poor form.

- Page 12. *Aboriginal owners of the Biamanga and Gulaga national parks will have opportunities to undertake traditional burning within the Murrumbidgee Flora Reserves.* This suggests two types of burning. That NPWS is hedging its bets about where fire ‘might’ occur is unacceptable – it should cease and be replaced by traditional mosaic burning.
- Page 13. *No formal visitor facilities exist in the Murrumbidgee Flora Reserves but there are informal opportunities on the Bermagui River for camping and picnicking.* This does not show much potential as indicated on Page 3 *Tourism potential from its location in the northern portion of Australia’s Coastal Wilderness as designated by the Australian Government’s National Landscapes Program (DEE 2016).*

OMITTED FROM THE PLAN

- The Government’s \$2.5 million subsidy to log more intensely elsewhere
- Economic value of the value of protected forests
- Funding mechanisms of new forest restoration jobs
- Funding mechanisms for new tourist opportunities

Thank you for this opportunity to express a few opinions.

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ⁱ Novelist and social critic Vance Palmer, *The Courier-Mail*. *Koala: A Historical Biography*. By Ann Mozley Moyal, Michael Organ, CSIRO Publishers