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Submission on the Eden Regional Forest Agreement.

I welcome the opportunity to comment on the RFA process and review. Despite legislation saying that there would be five yearly reviews when the agreement was entered into, this review is long overdue. I suggest that this is indicative of the lack of accountability and foresight for the process and also indicates a scant regard for the integrity of our forest estate and its management.

I trust that the independent Assessor gives full consideration to the process, without a political bias to the industry.

Information that is now available shows that State Forests vastly overestimated the forest resource and its potential yield when negotiating the RFA. This was argued about during the process, but little regard was given to the voice of conservation or science.

This is a constant source of frustration for those of us who are speaking about ecological values, which include the flow of water into our catchments, as well as the considerations necessary to protect the habitat of endangered species.

Many of us also choose to live in this part of the world because of the natural values of the landscape, and personally I hate seeing it destroyed for a low value product such as woodchips. Our forests are worth so much more than that.

There are a number of other industries that provide valuable income to the shire and its residents. These run on a sustainable basis. They include the obvious growth of our tourism market as well as vibrant oyster industry that includes some of the best oysters to be found in the state.

These are important industries, with many jobs in these areas being threatened by the degradation of the landscape and the sedimentation which occurs in logged catchments. Oysters need clean water.

These industries also need to be included in the big picture view of creating a healthy economy in this area. The social values of the whole community need to be considered in this review of resource use.

The “timber industry” is in fact running on an outdated model and fast moving into the industrial logging model, which gives scant regard for the environment. The majority of forest felled ends up as logs at the woodchip mill. It ignores the real potential of Australian hardwood timbers for value added product, instead choosing to take all there is, and call it “waste”, and chip it or burn it as biomass, with the profit going to multi national companies overseas.

State Forests have continually logged over quota since the implementation of the RFA. The areas now on the logging schedule are opposed by the majority of the community, who have been attempting to protect these iconic forest areas for the future, and also because they recognize the wider values of

natural landscape aesthetic, and the interconnectedness of healthy catchments to healthy lives and industry.

State Forests need to be investigated as their “best practice” is far from good. They need to be investigated on a financial basis, as ratepayers and the general public are subsidising an industry running at a loss. State Forest do not even pay rates on the lands that they conduct their business. They refuse to separate out the financial data of income and expenditure from plantation timbers as separate from the native forest logging costs. They seem to be unaccountable in this regard.

Currently there is a loss of money, a loss of resource potential, loss of habitat, and a loss of species. There is also a loss of opportunity to do better. 77% of Australians now oppose the continued logging of native forests and call on the Federal Government to stop it. There is a need to plan for the future and adapt to the big changes that are occurring on the planet.

Climate change is upon us, and again, science tells us that forests are invaluable in storing carbon and that if we were to stop logging native forests now, we would see a radical drop in Australia’s carbon emissions. According to the Stern Review into the Economics of Climate Change, “ The loss of native forests around the world contributes more to global emissions each year than the transport sector. Curbing deforestation is a highly cost effective way to reduce emissions.” This is now also a real possibility as we have sufficient plantations of timber to replace virtually all of our timber requirements, both domestically and for export. (see J.Ajani)

There are significant opportunities to shift State forests into a new model of operation. It is time for a thorough review of the whole native forest and timber industry.
There are economic, environmental and social benefits to be had from making a move away native forest logging; to valuing timber as a long lasting renewable product; and moving logging operations into the existing plantation estate.
The RFA has not protected wildlife, habitat, catchments or jobs, they should be ceased as a flawed model.

Yours Sincerely,

Skye Etherington