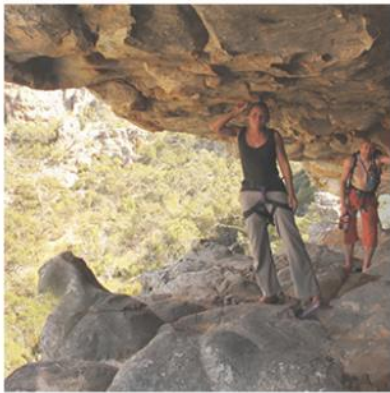


# Forests For All

Think BIG and see the benefits grow





# Forests For All: think big and see the benefits grow!

## NPA's vision for public native forests

*Our forests provide safe, well-connected habitats for native wildlife, the benefits forests provide to the people of NSW are maximised, and forests help NSW become a world leader in nature-based tourism, recreation and outdoor education.*

## The current state of play

The people of NSW have two million hectares of public native forests along their State's east coast. This beautiful country is home to diverse wildlife and myriad forest ecosystems. But the primary use of these forests is timber production. Native forest logging takes place under Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs), 20-year agreements between the NSW and Commonwealth Governments that permit logging. The aim of the RFAs was to allow timber production while protecting nature. Unfortunately, despite the intentions being good, they haven't worked as planned<sup>1</sup>.

With the RFAs coming to an end from 2019 the National Parks Association of NSW (NPA) believes it's time to think laterally about whether the focus on the forests as a timber resource is the best use of this precious shared asset. The expiry of the RFAs provides a glorious opportunity to shift the use of our forests from logging to conservation, recreation, tourism and education. This would provide a pathway for regional communities to make money from the protection of our most important and unique asset—nature.

Although all publicly-owned entities are exempted an obligation to pay rates, Forestry Corporation differs from other public bodies such as the NPWS by being a for-profit entity. A 2013 analysis of local government rates exemptions in NSW by Deloitte Access Economics concluded that this rates exemption for Forestry Corporation, unlike that of NPWS, is likely to be 'unwarranted on equity grounds' due to this goal of profit<sup>2</sup>. In Bega Valley Shire lost rates revenue to council from state forest is estimated at \$6.4 million per year. Local government also picks up the tab for infrastructure damage: log trucks are heavy and cause damage to roads. Were Forestry Corporation required to pay its way on rates and infrastructure, the \$20 million average annual profit would likely turn into a loss<sup>3</sup>.

Back in 1995, Prime Minister Paul Keating said "[our forests] are a national treasure and their management must be ecologically sustainable and economically clever". At the moment it's neither. But it could be both under our plan.

## Unleashing the potential of our state forests

Protected areas are already the economic powerhouses of regional economies<sup>4</sup>. The two million hectares of public forests currently locked up for logging have huge potential to complement existing protected areas by safeguarding nature and providing diverse recreation and tourism opportunities for the fastest growing segment of the tourism market.

NPA wants our state forests to be used for a major expansion of recreation activities and nature-based tourism, as well as providing more opportunities for outdoor education and field studies for young people. These forests are some of the most spectacular landscapes on the eastern seaboard, and some of the most attractive anywhere in the world for outdoor sports and recreation. Our plan would see their potential fulfilled. Many regional communities on the eastern seaboard are predicted to grow over the next 20 years<sup>5</sup>. This approach will help deliver recreation and employment opportunities for these growing populations.

Yes, State forests are currently available for recreation. But recreation plays second fiddle to the main game of harvesting timber. Only 4,800 hectares of the entire State forest estate are zoned primarily for recreation<sup>a</sup>. This hierarchy means it's inevitable that logging will undermine recreation and tourism. And we have already seen this happen: conflict arose in Tasmania last year over plans to log close to a valued mountain bike track<sup>b</sup> and in NSW

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<sup>a</sup>See page three of Forestry Corporation's sustainability supplement 2014-15:

[http://www.forestrycorporation.com.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/590340/FCNSW0281-SustainabilitySupp\\_FY15010216.pdf](http://www.forestrycorporation.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/590340/FCNSW0281-SustainabilitySupp_FY15010216.pdf)

<sup>b</sup><http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-04-09/logging-plans-near-mountain-bike-trails-spark-online-campaign/7313060>

community members were horrified when logging took place along a scenic drive near Narooma<sup>c</sup>. Mountain bike tracks in Currumbene State forest in the Shoalhaven are located in the harvest area<sup>d</sup> which means their future is not assured.

The fact is you can't build a high-value nature-based ecotourism industry without security that the scenic and natural values won't be wiped out overnight. Let's be honest: would you invest your hard-earned cash or try to build a business when the forest you depend on could be turned into this overnight?



Figure 1: Nadgee State Forest south of Eden, NSW, on 29th December 2016

Didn't think so. Hence recreation and eco-tourism infrastructure is often very poor and run down. That's why logging is a sub-optimal use of our forests: because other forest activities can't blossom in its presence and a potential source of jobs, fun and health is neutered.

The tourism industry is now one of Australia's most important: \$107 billion is generated every year and 534,000 people are directly employed<sup>6</sup> in 273,000 tourism businesses<sup>7</sup>. And for every tourist dollar spent 44 cents are spent regionally, and a further 87 cents are generated in other parts of the economy<sup>8</sup>. Yet only 14% of tourism investment is located regionally<sup>6</sup>, so there's huge room for improvement.

At the moment, national parks are heavily relied on to provide outdoor experiences—they receive almost 40 million domestic visitors every year<sup>e</sup>. In some cases, this reliance on national parks threatens to undermine the core function of those parks (the protection of nature) because the activity is too high-impact for sensitive environments, visitor numbers are growing and development to support the visitation threatens to damage natural values. And because nature is the key reason people want to go to parks, this threatens the visitor economy in the long-run.

Where declining threatened species like koalas occur, where state forests retain high conservation value and where there is a pressing need to connect up the landscape, national parks are the best option. As state forests are also public land, adding these high conservation value public forests to the national parks estate is simply a tenure swap. This is a really important step to protect the reasons people come to Australia in the first place, to deliver on Australia's international reservation commitments and to make sure nature can adapt to climate change.

But we're proposing that the remaining forests should become a mix of protected area categories under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act* and Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs). This would ensure that conservation and sustainability are primary objectives, while providing for greater flexibility in recreation activities to respond to community needs and increasing access to forests. This could include dog walking and horse riding opportunities close to urban areas, higher impact sports and recreation and ecologically sensitive infrastructure needed to support it. Importantly, this approach would promote joint and co-management arrangements, traditional management practices and provide opportunities for Indigenous peoples to benefit economically from forest products and businesses centred on forests.

With clever cross-tenure and regional recreational planning, regional parks and IPAs could be used alongside other protected area categories to support recreation, eco-tourism and major events throughout regional NSW. NPA

<sup>c</sup><http://www.naroomanewsonline.com.au/story/3715627/logging-operation-concern-at-narooma-scenic-spot-photos/>

<sup>d</sup>See map on page two of the Currumbene State Forest Harvest Plan: [http://www.forestrycorporation.com.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/456345/Harvest-Plan-Currumbene-Cpts-1038,-1039,-1040,-1041-and-1042.pdf](http://www.forestrycorporation.com.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0009/456345/Harvest-Plan-Currumbene-Cpts-1038,-1039,-1040,-1041-and-1042.pdf)

<sup>e</sup>See visitation statistics at: <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/research/NSWparkspopularity.htm>

envisages a scenario similar to that used in New Zealand, where the State Government puts forward initial investment to fund foundational public infrastructure (such as roads, signage, trail development, cabins, lodges etc), but small business is encouraged to take the lead in areas of service provision. Protection of the forests is key to stimulating small business, as the certainty that forests will remain attractive places to bring visitors is a pre-requisite to investing in a business.

NPA's plan closely aligns with several national and state strategic plans for achieving tourism and health outcomes.

### New Zealand offers a model

Let's face it, the Kiwis are miles ahead of us at the moment. They take tourism and nature conservation seriously and have recognised the inherent link between the two. New Zealand's Queenstown region is considered the adventure playground capital of the world. Yet NSW is a potentially superior attraction: the terrain is less steep for adventure sports and the weather's better meaning these sports could happen year-round. Plus we've got the advantage of more abundant wildlife like koalas, gliders, quolls and cockatoos!

In our forests, there are landscapes perfect for multi-day bushwalks, downhill mountain bike tracks, long-distance mountain bike tracks, multi-day four-wheel drive routes, hang-gliding launch spots, canyoning adventures, extreme events like rogaining, ultra-marathons and bungee jumping. Or, for the less active, there's great locations for idyllic eco-lodges and glampsites.

### Where can we do all this fun stuff?

Recreation tourism needs to be well planned. Because nature-based and adventure tourism is completely dependent on nature and a high quality environment, recreation can't come at the expense of nature. Conservation and recreation must be two sides of the same coin. This is vital, because nature-based visitors spend more money than other visitors<sup>9</sup> and expect a high quality product. But some forms of recreation aren't compatible with each other because one undermines another's enjoyment. This inevitably leads to conflict between user groups, and that's not a good start when developing a world-class tourist offering.

That's why tenure and planning are crucial elements of our plan. We see careful recreation planning as the key to both protecting the environment and making users happy by putting the right activities in the right places. This allows flexibility of forest uses to be applied depending on the landscape context, proximity to urban areas and roads and public transport. *The right activities in the right places*: that's the key to making this plan work and here's how we can do it.

NPA proposes an assessment of forest areas to ensure appropriate activities and infrastructure are developed. This would both locate activities in the right locations—ensuring negative impacts on Aboriginal cultural heritage and sensitive environments are avoided—as well as identify a framework for predicting and mitigating the impacts of activities. It's based on the simple premise that the satisfaction of an individual undertaking outdoor recreation is linked to how well their expectations were met. For example, if you go hiking expecting to see nothing but bushland and birds, noise from a road will ruin your experience—even if you can't see it. Similarly, if you're a mountain biker seeking an adrenaline-filled downhill run, slowing down constantly for walkers will ruin yours. NPA is committed to working with stakeholders to undertake this assessment to ensure that people and conservation are both adequately considered.

### Win-win in so many ways

Besides protecting nature and making millions for regional communities from an influx of nature-based and adventure tourists, there are several other valuable spin-offs from our plan:

#### Creating opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike

Using state forests to provide a new stream of employment opportunities and niches for small business would increase the employment base and provide high quality, rewarding jobs in areas with high unemployment. We believe our plan would also be better for the Indigenous community. Indigenous management approaches using

traditional ecological knowledge could be used and management carried out by Indigenous people in some areas. The Indigenous use of forest products—including for profit—is also possible under Plans of Management.

Arakwal National Park near Byron Bay is an example of joint-managed protected area. The Plan of Management provides for Aboriginal use of traditional foods and fibres<sup>10</sup>. The success of this approach has led to Arakwal being one of only three protected areas in Australia to be recognised on the IUCN Green List of protected areas—the ‘gold standard’ for protected area management. Given that many forests will likely need management intervention for restoration after decades of damaging logging, this is a huge opportunity for regional Indigenous communities. The logging industry cannot achieve this: logging now directly employs approximately 600 people in NSW<sup>3</sup> and employment is in long-term decline due to mechanisation and market forces.

Initial government investment would be needed to upgrade infrastructure, begin the restoration of forests and provide the certainty for the private sector to take advantage of the fresh opportunities. It’s important that small businesses are encouraged, because this would kickstart employment in regional areas and further the visitor economy by increasing the length of stays and diversity of opportunity. One way to help this to happen would be for government to provide low-cost loans to those that want to create new (or expand existing) businesses based on nature based tourism or recreation in forests. This model of private sector delivery on public land is used successfully in New Zealand and Europe.

### Health benefits

There is an ever-increasing body of evidence that contact with nature is vital for mental and physical wellbeing. A recent study in Australia showed that the magnitude of the benefit was linked to dose—how often people engaged with nature—and that such benefits could reduce the medical costs of depression alone by \$800 million per year<sup>11</sup>. Parks Victoria estimates that avoided healthcare costs in Victoria from physical activity being undertaken in National Parks is up to \$200 million per year<sup>12</sup>. The cost of infrastructure, like trails, to provide access to natural areas is outweighed by the savings in health costs<sup>13</sup>. Our plan will increase the opportunities for people to get out and play, improving both their physical and mental well-being. A NSW Premier’s Priority is reducing childhood obesity. This plan is one pathway to achieving that.

### Education

Outdoor education should be a key part of any child’s upbringing: it offers the chance to form bonds, build trust, develop problem solving skills and of course, play. Under this model, we could develop a network of outdoor education and field study centres where kids can be introduced to activities like orienteering, climbing, abseiling and kayaking and learn about the natural world. This would mean future generations of kids would be more likely to develop a love of the outdoors and an environmental education which in turn would lead to better health and conservation outcomes. Nature schools<sup>f</sup>, common overseas, are not yet recognised by the NSW Government as an education facility. But they may in future offer a complementary approach to educating children, and this plan would provide for that eventuality.

### Showcasing our cultural heritage

Cultural tourism is an element currently absent from much of the east coast—with some notable exceptions. Adding Aboriginal knowledge and skills to tourism offerings would deepen the tourist experience and be a major international tourist drawcard while recognising the cultural heritage of the first Australians. This would also provide genuine opportunities for Aboriginal self-determination, in the form of Aboriginal owned and operated businesses based on Aboriginal forest management and tourism.

### Logging is not the optimal use of our precious forests

In 2016, NPA conducted a thorough analysis<sup>1</sup> of the performance of the RFAs against their stated aims in order to evaluate how successful they had been as a mechanism for public forest management. Our key findings were:

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<sup>f</sup><http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-11-17/nature-schools-popularity-in-australia-growing/8035586>

- The RFAs have failed to protect threatened species (the number of threatened forest species has risen over the 20 years of the RFAs, and now threatened are iconic species like koalas, quolls, gliders and owls);
- Logging under RFAs is violating the principles of Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management, supposedly the key guiding principle for logging practices (logging disrupts the carbon and water cycles and drives Key Threatening Process including the loss of tree hollows and forest dieback);
- The RFAs have not delivered a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative reserve network of Forest Ecosystems (a key promise of the RFAs);
- The RFAs have not secured the native timber industry (jobs have steadily declined, governments have had to step in to buy out timber contracts and ratepayers shoulder substantial hidden costs);
- As a result of the above, the RFAs have failed to resolve the 'Forest Wars' because the public does not believe forests and wildlife are adequately protected.

Our analysis clearly showed that the RFAs have not optimised the use of forests for the entire community. Rather, timber extraction has been the overriding priority at the expense of all other forest values (nature, recreation, tourism, water supplies and carbon storage).

Yet despite being heavily favoured by the RFAs, native forest logging is an industry in decline and it's becoming increasingly less important to both wood supply and job provision. When water and carbon are factored into decision making, it often makes sense not to log forests at all<sup>14-16</sup>. This makes intuitive sense when you consider that every person living on the east coast of Australia relies on forested catchments for water. Unlogged eucalypt forests are the most carbon-dense on earth<sup>17</sup>, but logging drastically reduces these carbon stores<sup>18,19</sup>. This of course drives climate change and undermines efforts that ordinary citizens make to reduce emissions. The Paris Agreement, signed by 192 countries, afforded forests a separate article because they have such an important role to play in helping us tackle climate change. So timber is currently the only thing afforded any value in our public forests, but it's certainly not the only valuable thing forests provide to us!

Industry sources will tell you the future is in plantations: they're cheaper to plant, maintain and harvest and produce better pulp wood. Importantly, it's easier to achieve Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification via plantations than industrial logging of diverse native forests, and FSC is increasingly demanded by consumers. Almost all timber used in construction these days is plantation, and with engineered timber technology such as acetylation, fast-growing softwood timbers can have the strength and beauty of traditional hardwoods. And, unlike native forest logging, plantations are profitable.

The native forest logging section of NSW Forestry Corporation cost NSW taxpayers \$79 million over the seven years to 2014<sup>3</sup>. A 2016 report by PricewaterhouseCoopers in Victoria found that every single native timber job required over \$5 million in investment in infrastructure and returned just 14 cents to the economy for every dollar spent<sup>20</sup>. These costs don't include the hidden costs to society via impacts on water supply, climate change emissions or the burgeoning health costs of caring for an increasingly sedentary population. Nor does it count the money we spend on protecting threatened species. Take NSW's Saving Our Species (SOS) strategy for example: the 2015 State of the Environment Report puts the number of threatened species at 999, of which 572 are forest species. Assuming the \$100 million SOS funding is distributed evenly, over \$57 million would go towards recovering forest species. Logging their habitat at the same time as funding recovery efforts is not a good strategy.

Nature, the biggest attraction for overseas tourists, is being badly harmed by logging: koalas are becoming more and more scarce<sup>21</sup>, and the greater glider is the latest species to be added to the national threatened species list due to clearfell logging and loss of the tree hollows that it calls home<sup>22</sup>. The government agency Tourism Australia tells us that nature is the single biggest drawcard for international visitors<sup>23</sup>, yet we continue to support industries that directly harm our prize asset.

NPA has a plan to protect nature *and* allow NSW take advantage of its natural advantages to become a world leader in adventure and eco-tourism. Our plan would deliver real economic and social benefits to regional communities in NSW, as well as protecting our natural environment and helping in the fight against climate change.

## Conclusion

Public land is a scarce commodity and the public deserves it to be used in the best way possible. That means any use that compromises the natural values for future generations is not appropriate—because it's not consistent with the principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development which explicitly recognise the need to ensure that what we do today doesn't ruin the future for generations that follow us. Any rational analysis of logging shows that we're logging because we can and because we always have, not because it's of benefit ecologically, economically or socially.

That's why our Forests for All plan is a good idea: this way, current generations can have fun in forests and can gain economically. But because of the inclusion of careful planning and management the ecological values of forests can be protected indefinitely. That means future generations will have the same economic opportunities from forests, continue to enjoy forest wildlife and keep enjoying the clean water and clean air that our forests provide. You can't say fairer than that.



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