

WA's native forest degradation since signing of RFA (1999)

Prepared by Beth Schultz beth.schultz@amnet.net.au March 2018

1. Native forest logging unsustainable

Foresters estimate that there are 2.2 million ha of forest left in WA, of which 1.9 million ha are on public land, and 334,640 ha are old growth forest on public land. Old growth amounts to 15 per cent of the total. All the rest has been logged, much of it several times.

According to ABARES figures, in 2012-2013, WA produced 61,200 m³ of native forest hardwood sawn timber from 195,000 m³ of native forest hardwood sawlogs. It produced a further 149,000 m³ native forest pulplogs.

This means that of the 344,000 m³ of logs from WA's forests, **only 18 per cent became sawn timber**. Most of the wood from WA's native forests is pulpwood (karri and marri) or firewood (jarrah).

In Western Australia, sustainability applies to both quantity and quality. Native forest logging is not sustainable. Since WA's Regional Forest Agreement was signed in 1999, both the quantity and the quality of logs from WA's native forests have declined.

While the area available for logging has remained the same since 2004, the volume of native forest logs has fallen from 488,000 m³ in 2004-05 to 355,000 m³ in 2016-17, **a decrease of 27 per cent in the volume of native forest logs**.

In 2004-05, WA produced 22 m³ of high quality karri sawlogs and 58,848 m³ of 1st and 2nd grade karri sawlogs.

In 2016-17, it produced no high quality karri sawlogs, 5,046 m³ of veneer logs and 45,348 m³ of 1st and 2nd grade karri sawlogs, **a decrease of 23 per cent in the volume of 1st and 2nd grade karri sawlogs**.

In 2004-05, WA produced 418 m³ of high quality jarrah sawlogs and 108,052 m³ of 1st and 2nd grade jarrah sawlogs.

In 2016-17, it produced 310 m³ of high grade feature sawlogs and no 1st and 2nd grade jarrah sawlogs, **a decrease from 108,052 m³ to zero**.

Most of WA's forests are regrowth, which because of decreased rainfall is growing more slowly than anticipated. Furthermore, wood from WA native forest regrowth is not suitable for furniture or floorboards. It is fit almost solely for pulpwood (karri and marri) or firewood (jarrah).

2. Degraded forests

Endemic and introduced fungal pathogens are ravaging WA's forests and there is no way to effectively treat them.

Jarrah forest is infested with the introduced fungal pathogen, *Phytophthora cinnomomi*, which can kill jarrah trees and hundreds of jarrah forest flora species. Logging and associated burning introduce and spread the disease.

Karri forest is infested with the endemic fungal pathogen, *Armillaria luteobublina*, which can kill young trees and degrades the wood. It is spread by logging and is most prevalent in karri regrowth.

Marri trees are the most widespread forest tree species in WA's south-west and are a keystone species. They are now infested with fungal pathogens, *Quambalaria coyrekup*, which can kill the trees, and *Quambalaria piterika*, which attacks the buds and nuts. These fungi occur most frequently in disturbed forest such as forest impacted by logging and roading. Marri trees are dying across their range in all tenures.

3. Native forest logging a threat to biodiversity

Since WA's RFA was signed in 1999, several forest flora and fauna species have been listed as endangered or moved to a higher category of threat under State and Federal legislation.

Species	Date of Gazettal
Flora	
2006	
<i>Andersonia annelsii</i>	23 June 2006
<i>Laxmannia grandiflora subsp. brendae</i>	1 December 2006
<i>Reedia spathacea</i>	1 December 2006
<i>Stylidium semaphorum</i>	23 June 2006

2008

<i>Cryptandra congesta</i>	22 January 2008
<i>Eremophila glabra subsp. chorella</i>	22 January 2008
<i>Goodenia arthrotricha</i>	22 January 2008
<i>Grevillea fuscolutea</i>	22 January 2008

Fauna

2005

Calyptorhynchus banksii naso (red-tailed black cockatoo)
8 February 2005

2006

Phascogale tapoatafa subsp. WAM M434 (brush-tailed phascogale)
1 December 2006

2008

Bettongia penicillata (woylie) 22 January 2008

Listed threatened species that have moved to a higher level of threat since August 2008 in the area covered by the *Forest Management Plan 2014-2023* are:

Species	Date
<i>Trithuria occidentalis</i> (previously listed as <i>Hydatella dioica</i>)	23/2/2010
<i>Botaurus poiciloptilus</i> (Australasian bittern)	17/8/2010
<i>Rostratula australis</i> (Australian Painted Snipe)	6/11/2012
<i>Bettongia penicillata ogilbyi</i> (Woylie or Brush-tailed bettong)	17/9/2013
<i>Pseudocheirus occidentalis</i> (Western Ringtail Possum)	2/12/2014
<i>Banksia verticillata</i>	2/12/2014

On 15 February 2018, two WA forest-dwelling fauna species were moved from Vulnerable to Endangered under the EPBC Act:

Calyptorhynchus baudinii (Baudin's long-billed cockatoo)
Myrmecobius fasciatus (Numbat)

Karri regrowth is sensitive to fire for up to 25 years and jarrah regrowth is sensitive to fire for up to 10 years. As well as post-logging regeneration burns, prescribed burning is conducted in forest (including forest in national parks, which are burnt more often than State forest) to protect immature regrowth. Like logging, burning opens up the forests to feral predators.

4. Heavily subsidised native forest logging a threat to profitable industries

Research based in the annual reports of the Forest Products Commission shows that between 2013 and 2016, WA taxpayers subsidised the WA native forest logging industry to the tune of \$46 million.

Despite the subsidies, since WA's RFA was signed in 1999, several sawmills taking native forest logs, including the largest mill taking jarrah sawlogs (Deanmill) and the largest mill taking karri sawlogs (Pemberton), have closed.

WA's forests are a major resource for the highly profitable honey industry, which is seriously adversely impacted by logging and associated burning.

Smoke from regeneration burns and prescribed burns conducted to protect immature regrowth has serious adverse impacts on WA's important wine production industry.

WA would get more economic benefit from ending native forest logging and using native forests to generate carbon.

Note:

I have used figures from ABARES *Australian forest and wood products statistics* Mar/Jun 2017. Western Australia does not report annually to ABARES and its most recent figure for the volume of sawn timber dates from 2012-2013.

References supplied on request.