



Forests or Firewood? Bio-certification or Bio-massacre?

Mark Selmes

Vice-President Goulburn Field Naturalist Society

National parks alone are not enough to prevent biodiversity loss. More than 90% of land in NSW is outside the reserve system. Our native wildlife do not care about the tenure of land they live on. In many regions native vegetation has been highly modified or cleared, with remaining vegetation having significant conservation value.

Private Native Forestry

The *Private Native Forestry (PNF) Interim Act* was introduced to regulate

logging on private lands and has been in operation since July 2007 with over 225,000 ha of logging approvals issued.

The *PNF Act* requires no environmental surveying prior to logging approval and unlike other Property Vegetation Plans (PVPs), no input is required from local Catchment Management Authorities. Landowners who agree to abide by the PNF Code of Practice (PNF COP) are automatically granted bio-certification by the NSW Environment Minister and as such do not need separate

approvals under the *Native Vegetation (NV) or Threatened Species (TS) Acts*. The Code of Practice relies on claims that it provides an extensive suite of protective prescriptions for threatened species. While any list of protective measures is problematic when no surveys are required to identify them, the release of the final draft PNF COP has revealed a flawed document with many forest dependent species absent or left with inadequate protections.

One such species is the Gang-gang Cockatoo *Callocephalon fimbriatum*.

In NSW this species is listed as Vulnerable under the *TS Act* but does not rate a mention on the PNF COP for Southern NSW.

Policy Making on the Run

This interim forestry act is the classic example of policy making on the run, but after nearly six years of logging you would expect that the department could have managed to at least list correctly the known threatened species of our forests and woodlands.

My own experience of PNF comes from approvals for commercial firewood logging on lands in the Mount Rae Forest, a known breeding area for the Gang-gang Cockatoo.

Mount Rae Forest consists of over 850 ha atop the Great Dividing Range between Crookwell and Taralga. It contains the Tablelands Basalt Forest Endangered Ecological Community (EEC). Only about 280 ha of this EEC is currently preserved in conservation areas. Mount Rae Forest is also habitat for 11 threatened species and was previously targeted for protection by NSW Government ecologists, who opposed felling of this rare forest's trees by a non-resident (but full time firewood merchant) landowner.

Under the *PNF Interim Act* the same logging operation was approved under a process that takes on average 28 days, overriding all past opposition and involving no community consultation or notification. PNF ludicrously

relies on the developer - in this case a firewood merchant - to identify and protect threatened species.

To protect parts of this rare forest from the possibility of future firewood logging, several residents have had their lands declared "national park like" by entering legally binding agreements in perpetuity with the Conservation Partners Unit of Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH). Entering agreements with one department of the OEH to protect against logging approvals by another department in the OEH? Sounds bizarre? Welcome to the PNF world of perverse outcomes.

Islands of Biodiversity

These forests on private lands are stepping stones and islands of biodiversity between areas of national parks and reserves, helping to provide landscape connectivity at a regional scale. The local award-winning Roslyn Landcare Group has received over \$360,000 of grant money to create an extensive network of wildlife and vegetation corridors focussing on Mount Rae Forest.

Local Forestry Networks

Local forestry networks have publicly stated their aims of using this legislation to access over a million hectares of private lands to supply firewood markets in Canberra and Sydney. When laws purporting to protect biodiversity are used to streamline firewood logging in threatened species habitat

and EECs then that law is a farce. If such a product came from overseas we would ban it. In NSW it comes with the Environment Minister's approval. The native trees of the Southern Tablelands are rarely saw log quality and have been largely protected because of the lack of an economic driver.

In My View

The OEH, who we once turned to for protection, has become just another politicised agency, approving the rise of a co-ordinated firewood industry. The response from OEH is that the end product, firewood, is not their concern and does not alter environmental outcomes.

PNF is nothing more than a means to facilitate logging. Is this the future under streamlined processes and self regulation?

Faunal Emblem of ACT

The Gang-gang Cockatoo is the faunal emblem of the ACT, where it is not yet considered threatened. Many Gang-gangs breed in remnants of forest and woodland in the Southern Highlands and Tablelands before wintering in the lower altitude of Canberra. The people of Canberra can console themselves with the thought that while less of these charismatic cockatoos will be coming down to Canberra this winter, more firewood will be - burning threatened species' homes to warm theirs. All thanks to the NSW Government.



Another threatened species of this forest - the Buttercup Doubletail Orchid *Diuris aequalis*. Listed as endangered in NSW and vulnerable under commonwealth legislation. Less than 200 plants are known from seven sites in NSW.
Photo: Mark Selmes



Gang-gang Cockatoo *Callocephalon fimbriatum*, Faunal Emblem of the ACT.
Photo: Julian Robinson



Swamp Wallaby *Wallabia bicolor* in logged forest **Photo:** Mark Selmes