

EDWARD HILLS

The Regional Forestry Agreements

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I urge all parties involved in the current renegotiation of the Regional Forestry Agreements to implement a proper and effective critique of the sustainability and efficacy of the forestry practices that underpin the current agreement. I also urge the parties to abandon the current regime and implement a comprehensive approach to maintaining the sustainability and biodiversity of our native forests.

Most informed opinion indicates that current practices have been catastrophic from almost every perspective: whether we look at sustainability, biodiversity, environmental factors, economic viability, climate change, community needs and aesthetics the current agreement with regard to the Southern forests has failed to deliver.

Unsustainable logging of native forests for wood chipping has not only had a devastating impact on habitat and biodiversity but has also failed to be economically viable. It has been estimated that losses from logging native forests have cost the taxpayer nearly \$80m over the past seven years.

Keeping our native trees (which are carbon dense) in the ground would not only secure biodiversity thus enriching all our lives but would also contribute greatly to offsetting our carbon emission targets.

Not only that but the South East wilderness is becoming a popular destination for tourists of all kinds including those looking for an authentic wilderness experience. Eco tourism is a growth industry capable of employing many more people than currently depend on forestry for their income.

Shorter logging cycles have exacerbated the destruction. Neither the flora nor the fauna has time to recover before the forests are harvested again. Damage to water catchment, soils, habitat and biodiversity is pervasive and unsustainable. Even wild fire preparedness is compromised by the degradation of the forest including loss of undergrowth.

On a personal note, in August 2011, I witnessed the wholesale industrialised destruction of the forests just to the north of Bermagui. Once the earth movers had vacated the area the remaining site resembled a World War 1 battlefield. Not only was the intrinsic beauty of this place violated but it was also silenced.

Since that time there seems to have been very little movement or sound in those forests. I am reminded of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*.

The solution is obvious. Jettison the RFAs and implement an approach based on sound environmental and economic grounds, an approach exclusively based on sustainability and biodiversity.

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