

North East Forest Alliance (NEFA)

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CONFIDENTIAL MEMO ~ No. 2

Date: 25 September 1998

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To: **All groups & activists interested in the forest assessment process**

Re: **N.E. FOREST NEGOTIATIONS – FURTHER UPDATE AS PROMISED**

Dear Forest Campaign Network

This memo follows on from the urgent confidential memo issued on 8 September and is intended to provide an update on the range of activities pursued over the last two weeks.

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

- Following talks with the Premier's office, Bob Carr wrote to Dailan Pugh on 10 September postponing the NE negotiations until 6 October, following the Commonwealth's withdrawal. The Premier's letter is fairly nondescript and offers little by way of commitment or guarantee. It advises that *"Our repeated aim is to have requisite legislation dealt with in the Parliament by the end of November. Once in the Legislative Council the Government will make all efforts through normal negotiation and discussion to assist its satisfactory resolution."*
- Lobbying has been pursued to communicate to the ALP and cross-bench MP's our concern at the delay and to express our growing lack of confidence that the NSW Labor party will deliver the promised new forest reserves before the end of 1998. We've met with the following MP's: ALP - Bryce Gaudry, Sandra Nori, Pat Rogan; John Mills, Jeff Hunter, plus Independents Clover Moore Dr Peter Macdonald and MLC's Richard Jones and The Greens Ian Cohen. We've also met with Minister Kim Yeadon, advisers from Mr Knowles office and with RACAC Chair, Gerry Gleeson. Adjournment speeches and Questions Without Notice were also prepared for MLC's Ian Cohen and Richard Jones. We have sought further meetings in 3 weeks time, by which time the situation is expected to have substantially progressed.
- A demo of the Geographic Information System and the latest forest data was given on 22 Sept at NSW Parliament House by Susie Russell and Lyn Orrego. Attendees included: ALP MP's Bryce Gaudry, Pat Rogan, Stan Neilly, Jan Burnswood, Liberal Kerrie Chikarovski, Greens MLC Ian Cohen, Ind MLC Richard Jones & new Democrat MLC Arthur Chesterfield - Evans.
- A number of Briefing Notes have been prepared for these lobbying meetings. These include BN's on: Summary of events to date (from 1992 NFPS ->); Need for conservation reserves; An explanation of the GIS and forest data; These BN's are available from Therese at the NCC.
- 25 potentially 'on-side' unions were sent a letter and briefing note advising of the CFMEU's actions and encouraging them to communicate their support for a conservation outcome to the NSW Premier, and Labor Council boss Michael Costa. This is also available at NCC.
- Despite their refusal to hand over data and their non-participation in the negotiations, the Commonwealth Government recently offered a briefing on the outcomes of the Comprehensive Regional Assessment work being undertaken by ABARE and the Social Assessment Unit for (only) the Upper North East Region. This includes ABARE's mill survey and FORUM model, case study community profiles and the 'I Think' model.
- The NSW Government's response has been clear and categorical – they are most unimpressed with what is described as 'blatant political interference in the NSW process'. The conservation reps on the Economic and Social Technical Committee have written to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet declining to attend citing examples of the Commonwealth's lack of good faith and political manoeuvring.

- Due to the Commonwealth's refusal to participate in negotiations, it has not provided a range of information for social and economic assessments, withholding results of surveys, data sets and access to Commonwealth computer models such as FORUM. (It has also refused to provide completed projects intended for environmental and heritage assessments: e.g.: LandSat image compilations of disturbance, National Estate layers and the National Wilderness Inventory.)
- To fill the hole created by the withdrawal of Commonwealth's social and economic projects, the NSW Government has assembled a range of economic and social information and commissioned economic impacts assessments and social sensitivity studies. A progress report on these projects by the consultants advised that the whole of the timber industry (including processing and private lands operations) amounted to 1% of total employment in NE NSW. With a multiplier of 1.7 the total contribution of the industry is less than 2% of the regional economy. Further, even if all jobs reliant on public forests were lost, the consultants advise that 'background' regional job growth would generate an equivalent number of jobs in less than 6 months.
- A 3 person 'expert panel' which includes these consultants & ESTC Chair Dr David James, is to assess, in consultation with industry advisers, and report to the negotiations on, the likely social / economic impacts of the range of timber supply levels indicated under the 'information points'. These assessments are to be ready for the negotiations starting on 6 October.
- NEFA is currently developing a position paper outlining a range of employment creation opportunities based on forests and their ecologically sustainable use, and has some preliminary discussions with NPWS regarding the likely jobs opportunities in management, rehabilitation and tourism generated by the creation of new national parks. Input on this paper is welcomed. More details of this initiative will be provided in due course!

RESERVE DESIGN

- The most up-to-date information on the north east forests' environmental and heritage values is now loaded on RACD's central computer server and is accessible via workstations for viewing analysis and reconfiguration. In many ways this is the single greatest achievement of the forest assessment process. With most of the other stakeholders absent from the Francis Street negotiation premises, good progress has been made by a dedicated team of GIS jockeys to understand and decode the massive data sets now available to stakeholders.
- Through the Resources and Conservation Division (of DUAP) 22 maps have been generated to represent key 'information points' for the negotiations. These maps, showing compartments 'selected for reserve' and 'available for logging', encompass a very wide range of options for future forest management: from a restricted version of the ultimate conservation (as maximum JANIS) through two views of volumes committed under 'current contract', to maximum economic utilisation (worse case) scenarios proposed by the timber industry.
- Ably assisted by flora and fauna consultants, we are using the recently completed environment and heritage data to develop a reserve design, for the whole of north east NSW. We have been helped in this task by the provision of community reserve design proposals by local groups such as National Parks Association branches and by the personal advice provided by a number of regional reps who have visited Sydney for this purpose.
- It is intended to further develop this reserve design into a conservation option which can be publicly released by NEFA for community comment and public submissions.

CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES

SYDNEY: Numerous activities have been undertaken in the last two weeks to highlight the fact that our public forests are approaching a critical decision:

- Production (and sale) of a high quality printed poster and cool new Tshirts with the slogan '*Your forests too precious to plunder*' and the exquisite pen and ink drawings of Dailan Pugh.

- letter writing stalls have been held at functions in marginal seats and a growing number of submissions and handwritten letters are being obtained;
- banners have been dropped above busy Sydney roads;
- an old growth tree stump has been mounted on a trailer and is being exhibited throughout marginal seats with a challenge for candidates to put them environment policies 'on the stump';
- 70,000 postcards have been distributed via magazine inserts & handouts at railway stations;
- telegraph pole posters are appearing on busy Sydney streets... and much more.

NORTH EAST REGION: Many similar activities are being pursued in the NE. These include:

- letterwriting information stalls at local markets, gigs and dinner parties;
- distribution of promotional 'pockets' containing leaflets and sample letters;
- distribution of thousands of postcards to voters in key regional marginal seats;
- talks and slide shows to groups ranging from 'Visions of Nimbin' to the CWA & senior citizens;
- creating a Tiger Quoll costume which is 'larger than life' and guaranteed to turn heads.

MEDIA

A concerted effort has been made to generate media releases and media attention on the forest assessment process generally. After years of 'quiet on the forest front' some media have forgotten what went before or have arrived at their posts since the bad ol' days of blockades and court cases. Others have picked up the story where it was left off... The following releases have been put out: "Dates for forest talks welcomed" 18 Aug; "Water and catchment protection urgent priorities" 30 Aug.98; "Commonwealth pull out of CRA a 'power play'" 2 Sept; "Ugly politics threatens forest peace process" 8 Sept; "Unionists called on stand up for forests" 9 Sept; "Logging industry threatens tourism opportunities" 13 Sept; and "Forest policies 'on the stump'" 21 Sept.

Most of these releases have gained some media coverage, though it's hard to know what has been run. If regional papers' newsclippings can be sent to NCC it will greatly assist! As well as media releases, contact has also been made with TV, radio and publications seeking features and/or stories with 'off-beat' angles. A community service announcement for regional TV is also being developed.

WHERE TO FROM HERE

The next crucial phase in the CRA is our final preparations for the start of the rescheduled negotiations on Tuesday 6 October. This involves finalising our preferred reserve design outcome, as a map, stating our 'off-reserve management' policy and producing a report outlining social and economic decisions which are recommended in addition to the creation of new national parks.

It's difficult to tell what will happen after 6 October because it depends on if, which and when other stakeholders agree to participate in negotiations. If talks do not re-start or break down irrevocably, it's likely that the NSW Government will retreat to a 'State position' hammered out between National Parks and Wildlife Service, State Forests and Department of Urban Affairs and Planning.

Beyond negotiations, a set of new reserve boundaries, either as 'agreed' to by stakeholders or the 'state position', must be drafted into a Bill sometime in October in order to allow Parliament time to consider and pass it, before rising for the year. Once risen, Parliament will not sit again in 1999, in the last 3 months of Carr Government's term. This legislation phase is probably going to be just as crucial in achieving the creation of the national parks as is the present phase of designing them!

For now, it's important that we tell the community what going on and what we expect in a CAR reserve system. We must seek out signed postcards and handwritten letters to show the community's concern for real conservation outcomes. To do so we'll need to report on the current political situation and our prospects for success. But in doing so it's vital that we do not close off all chance of new national parks, by being negative and giving up on Carr now, this far from the state election.

While time is running out for NSW's "conservationist" Premier to pull a rabbit out of a hat we must retain hope & press for what we've been promised. Further reports will be provided in due course.

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