



Minister for Water; Fisheries; Forestry; Innovation and ICT Science

Our ref: 75-02657

Hon Matthew Swinbourn MLC
Chairman
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Chairman

PETITION NO. 024 – OPPOSE LOGGING IN NANNUP

I write in response to your letter of 12 October 2017 in relation to Petition No. 024 Oppose Logging in Nannup. I am pleased to provide the attached advice and comments on the key areas identified as they relate to my portfolio.

I note that a number of the issues raised are the responsibility of the Minister for Environment therefore I have forwarded him a copy of my response.

Should you wish to discuss any issues further, I would be happy to organise a detailed briefing for the Committee.

Yours sincerely



Hon Dave Kelly MLA
MINISTER FOR FORESTRY

12 FEB 2018

Att.

Attachment

Terms of the Petition

The petition provides five specific reasons opposing the harvesting of the Barrabup coupe. I would like to take this opportunity to provide these comments on the terms of the petition:

- *Barrabup is the main gateway and less than 5km to the tourism town of Nannup.*

The Barrabup 0317 coupe is close to Nannup, however, timber harvesting does not occur on the roadside and additional visual buffers will be put in place so that the harvesting will not have any visual amenity issues for visitors entering the town.

- *Significant indigenous and early pioneering heritage has been identified.*

As part of the planning and preparation of coupes identified in the *Forest Management Plan 2014-2023* (FMP), the Forest Products Commission (FPC) undertakes work to identify heritage issues.

Provisions are made to ensure Aboriginal and European heritage areas are not disturbed. This process has been completed at Barrabup 0317 and one modified tree (potentially from the production of a yandi bowl or shield) was identified and has been protected from damage from any future harvesting operations. The results are detailed in *A report of the Aboriginal archaeological and ethnographic survey of the Forest Products Commission Barrabup 0317 Harvest Coupe Survey Area, Western Australia*.

- *Large portions of the coupe are ancient jarrah and marri forests containing areas of old-growth.*

In June 2017, the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) received nominations from both the FPC and a member of the public to review the old-growth status within the coupe. Of the 530 hectares contained within the timber harvest coupe boundary, a total of 43 hectares (comprised of 12 separate patches) of minimally-disturbed jarrah forest was found to have met the definition of old-growth forest. These areas have now been excluded from any timber harvesting activity.

- *Tourism and recreation proposed in this area would potentially generate far more long-term income for Nannup.*

The timber industry provides for skilled employment in a sustainable industry. The timber industry remains an important employer in the Nannup region. Well managed timber harvesting is compatible with tourism and recreational uses of the forest.

- *Barrabup is a biodiversity hotspot, home to rare and threatened flora and fauna.*

Whilst this is the responsibility of the Minister for Environment, in regards to areas for timber harvesting the FMP ensures that forests with high conservation values are adequately represented in both formal reserves and within areas available for timber harvesting. Formal reserves within a 20 km radius of Barrabup 0317 occupy an area of approximately 62,500 hectares. This includes areas within the Blackwood River, Wiltshire-Butler, Milyeannup, Easter, Dalgarup and Whicher National Parks.

Outside of the formal reserve system the FMP also requires other areas to remain undisturbed such as proposed reserves, Fauna Habitat Zones (FHZ's), old-growth forest, river and stream zones, diverse ecotype zones, less well reserved vegetation complexes and poorly reserved ecosystems. Of the total area of the Barrabup forest block of approximately 5,350 hectares, 1,640 hectares or approximately 31 per cent is unavailable for harvesting. In addition, the planning and preparation of harvesting coupes also requires consideration of maintaining high conservation values. This is achieved through the implementation of mapping for the presence of dieback disease, flora and fauna assessments and the retention of habitat legacy elements such as habitat trees, ground logs and secondary storey flora species.

Identification of old-growth forest within the coupe

You have requested information about identification of old growth forest and how this will impact the harvest for Barrabup Coupe.

The FMP identifies the Barrabup forest block as available for a range of activities including timber harvesting.

Extensive harvesting from before 1920 until the late 1970s has made the identification of the small patches of old-growth challenging, even for experienced forest managers. The definition of old-growth includes the absence of activity, free from dieback (in jarrah forests) and also areas of minimal disturbance. A range of information is available to forest managers including aerial imagery, corporate records on harvesting, mining and, the presence or absence of dieback. Other information used includes the silvicultural history and knowledge of types of harvesting and equipment used in specific areas. The DBCA is responsible for old-growth assessment and can provide further details on the assessment process.

As stated previously, in June 2017, the DBCA received nominations from both the FPC and a member of the public to review the old growth status within the coupe. The DBCA undertook an assessment of the area that found that, within the 530 hectare coupe, 43 hectares contained minimally disturbed jarrah forest which meets the definition of old-growth forest and 1.2 hectares of this area had been impacted by roadworks.

The DBCA report notes there is a significant number of historic stump cavities and burnt remnants of stumps, in addition to large stumps of varying conditions and other evidence of previous forestry activity such as historic tracks, landings, gravel pits and stacks of decayed and fire damaged railway sleepers.

It also noted that the recorded number and distribution of stumps is highly likely to be an underestimation due to the significant time since last harvest and the frequency and intensity of fires in the area. The DBCA uses a precautionary approach to stump assessment, the FPC supports this approach.

Impact of old-growth identification on the coupe harvest plan

The DBCA has updated its records to include the additional areas of newly identified old-growth forest and provided this information to the FPC.

The FPC has amended the Barrabup 0317 coupe operations map on the basis of this information, in-line with the FMP, and all areas of old-growth forest will be excluded from the harvest area.

Additional information on the proposed timber harvesting

You have requested comments on the submissions from the principal petitioner(s) and tabling Member. The following additional information has been provided to address the issues raised.

- *Protection of threatened fauna*

Whilst this is the responsibility of the Minister for Environment, in regards to areas for timber harvesting the FMP identifies the approach adopted to protect threatened and priority species and communities and how specific measures necessary to protect them are determined, approved and included in conditions. The FMP also details specific additional protection measures that have been included in undertaking disturbance activities to improve the overall management of the threat to threatened species.

The FMP provides for nature conservation values on the vested lands by setting aside lands on which biodiversity conservation is a priority or dominant use and setting the conditions of access to other lands to ensure that the biodiversity values are maintained.

Where harvesting is permitted, strict procedures and policies apply in-line with the FMP. A detailed review of all forest values is undertaken by the FPC as required by DBCA. This review is also endorsed by the DBCA prior to operations commencing. One of the values considered in the review and planning checklist is the identification of the likelihood of threatened species being present in the coupe, and where appropriate, measures taken to protect these values.

Harvesting is managed to preserve important habitat elements including mature trees with hollows (habitat trees and potential habitat trees), hollow logs, and secondary storey flora species.

- *Tourism in multiple use State forest*

Tourism and recreational activities continue to occur in managed forests around the world. State forest is an appropriate land tenure for many of recreational and tourism activities, including mountain biking, hiking, horse riding etc. The FPC is working with local and State wide recreational groups to ensure State-operated forestry practices can occur alongside other important users of Western Australia's State forests.

- *Prevention of dieback spread*

The FPC is committed to preventing the spread of Phytophthora dieback. Harvesting operations of the FPC are covered by hygiene management plans approved by the DBCA, and all areas are interpreted for dieback presence prior to disturbance and operational measures are taken to avoid spread are captured into a Hygiene Management Plan.

- *Protection of Aboriginal Heritage*

The procedures adopted in the planning of the Barrabup 0317 coupe fully meet the requirements for the protection of Aboriginal heritage. The FPC works closely with the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council (SWALSC) to identify and protect Aboriginal heritage. A protocol regarding this consultation process has been developed.

In regards to the Barrabup 0317 coupe the FPC has consulted with Aboriginal family representatives as identified by the SWALSC. No concerns were raised with respect to the proposed timber harvesting operations and Aboriginal family groups have consented to harvesting proceeding.

A report has been produced of the Aboriginal archaeological and ethnographic survey of the FPC Barrabup 0317 Harvest Coupe Survey Area, for the FPC and the South West Boojarra Agreement Group (SWB). As a result of the survey (this included members of the SWB):

- One newly identified Aboriginal archaeological site, BHC17-01 (modified tree) was located in landing site number 15.
- No newly identified Aboriginal ethnographic sites were located.
- No heritage values were found to be associated with the six potential Aboriginal heritage sites identified by a member of the public.
- No isolated artefacts were recorded.

The FPC will ensure that its employees and contractors are informed of the recommendations of the report, including the existence and location of the one newly identified Aboriginal archaeological site (modified tree). This site will be protected from disturbance by implementing a buffer from disturbance activity.

- *Sustainability of the timber industry*

The production and sale of timber from Barrabup 0317 will generate economic activity that is spread throughout the south-west region. The industry provides direct employment in the management of the forests, the harvesting and the delivery of logs, the processing of logs into timber, the processing of timber into products for consumption, the processing of residues into firewood and charcoal, and the final consumption of wood in housing. Each of these phases of the production chain has indirect demands for resources and services.

The products of the timber industry are widely used as part of the tourist industry in the furniture and artisan galleries throughout the region. Some of the finest artisans in the State manufacture and display their work based in part on local timber supplies.

Research demonstrates that the forests are sustainably managed. The FORESTCHECK long-term research and monitoring program conducted by the DBCA has demonstrated the response of the south-west native forests to timber harvesting. Many areas of State forest have been previously harvested two to four times and long-term monitoring shows that these ecosystems recover from disturbance and continue to provide the full range of environmental, economic and recreational benefits to the community.

The FMP states “species assemblages in harvested forest return to those typical of unharvested forest as the structure of the forest, and species habitats, re-establish. The length of time required for this process may vary from a few years to several decades, depending on the intensity of disturbance and the requirements of particular species”. The FMP further states, as quoted from Abbott and Williams, “*the imprint of harvesting 40 or more years earlier on species composition had become indistinguishable from that on grids never harvested*”.¹ The FPC regenerates all areas harvested to ensure that these valuable State resources are available for future generations.

There is no net loss to the State from forestry activity. There is approximately \$100 million of economic activity generated each year through the native forest industry, with much of it supporting regional communities.

¹ Abbott, I. and Williams, M.R., (2011). *Silvicultural impacts in jarrah forest of Western Australia: synthesis, evaluation and policy implications of the FORESTCHECK monitoring project of 2001 – 2006*. Australian Forestry 2011, Vol 74 (4), pp 350-360.