

NSW State Forest Management

Are our publicly owned forests in safe hands?

Contrary to the claim on the Glenugie State Forest sign, pictured below, that *“Your forests are in safe hands”*, our forests have never been under greater threat than they are now, and as a result state forest management is increasingly coming under the spotlight. The Clarence Environment Centre has been at the forefront of efforts to reveal the truth.



One can hardly fail to appreciate the irony of that brand new sign which stands on the recently opened 7km long upgraded section of the Pacific Highway, south of Grafton, that saw some 80 hectares of the Glenugie State Forest cleared to bare earth.

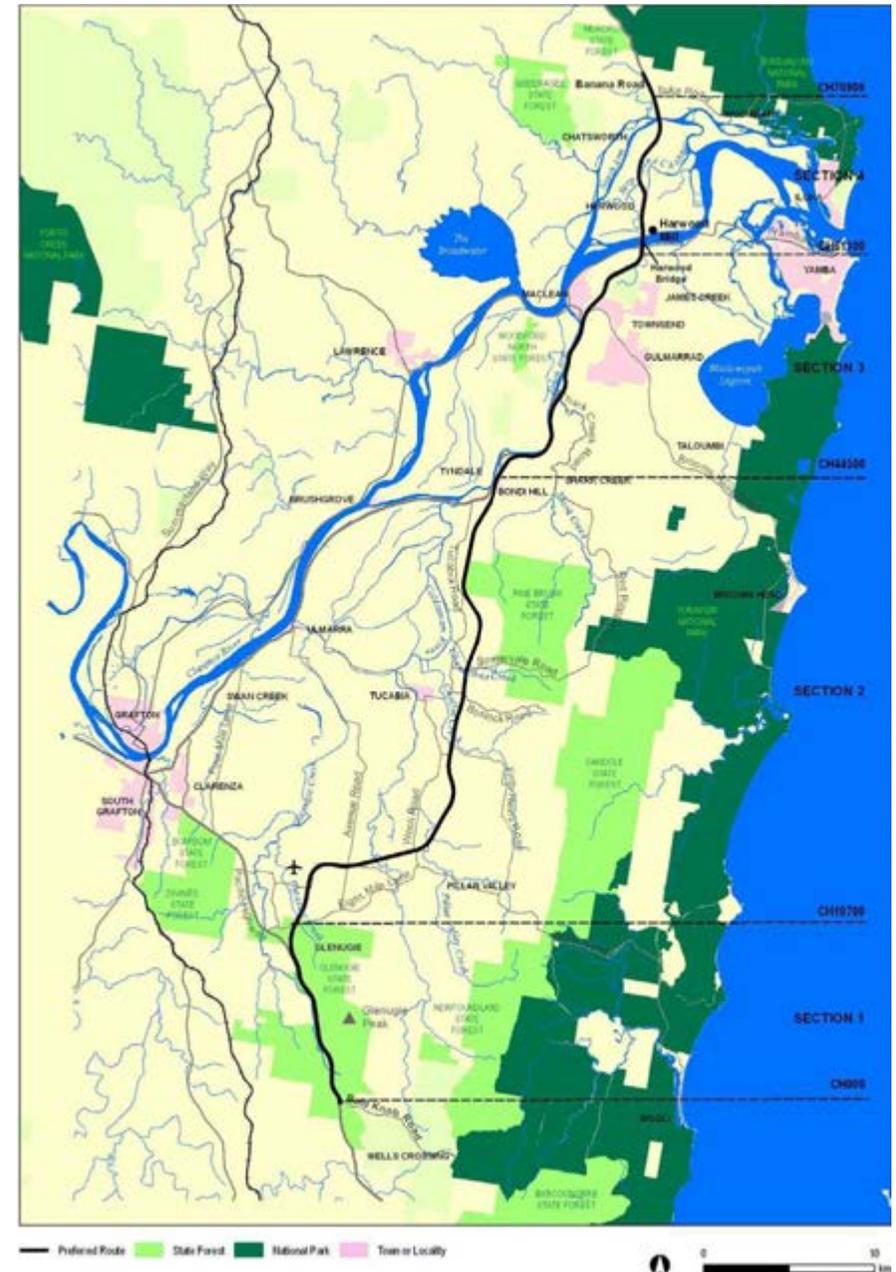
And that is just the start of the destruction planned for the Clarence Valley, with another 500 hectares of forest, much of it publicly owned, awaiting destruction to construct this monstrous new motorway from Halfway Creek to Iluka Road. Further south towards Coffs Harbour, and north to Ballina, the environmental destruction is even worse with a swathe of forest destruction, measuring well over 100 kilometres, already under way.

We have repeatedly asked the Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) to justify the need for a separate motorway which, by their own admission, will only cater for 30% of the traffic that currently uses the Pacific Highway. The existing roadway will remain in place to cater for commuters from the lower river around Maclean and Yamba.

We have received no credible response, so **are our forests in safe hands** when the upgrade could have been constructed generally along the existing Highway route, incorporating the existing 2 lanes as one half of a divided road with barely any forest loss at all?

Are our forests in safe hands when we see the corridor for the new motorway cleared to a width upwards of 100 metres, while the motorway's footprint, the distance between the outside of the concrete drains on either side of the motorway, is only 38 metres?

The map at right shows the meandering dark black line of the new motorway route, which clearly identifies the fact that it does not reduce the travel distance to any significant degree. In fact, once the Grafton and Ulmarra bypasses are taken into consideration, along with other minor straightening, the lengths of both routes are almost identical.





Are our forests in safe hands when the exit for Lookout Road to Glenugie Peak is sited more than a kilometre north of the nearest point, meaning Lookout Road now runs parallel to the new highway (see left) requiring additional forest clearing to incorporate it?

Over the past 2 years, the North East Forest Alliance, the North Coast Environment Council, The Clarence Environment Centre and The National Parks Association, have combined to undertake a number of audits of state forest logging, along the upper north coast beginning with the Yabbra State Forest in the State's north.

As a result of the Yabbra audit, Forests NSW was issued with a number of Penalty Infringement Notices PINs, one for the logging of rainforest, which resulted in a paltry \$300 fine. **Was Yabbra State Forest in safe hands?**

Doubleduke State Forest, north of Maclean, was the next operation audited. The findings have resulted in a decision to prosecute Forests NSW over the logging of 120 trees in 7.5 hectares of an Endangered Subtropical Coastal Floodplain Forest Community. The Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) also issued a caution for failing to adequately mark up an area prior to logging, and two Penalty Infringement Notices for \$1,500 each for water pollution. **Can we really accept that Doubleduke State Forest was in safe hands?**





The destruction that was found to have occurred to a supposedly protected Endangered Lowland Rainforest Community at Grange State Forest west of Grafton, allowed Australia to join the infamous list of countries around the world that log rainforest for hand full of dollars.

For the Grange breaches OEH issued Forests NSW two PINs with fines of \$300 for logging 8 trees in the protection zone of a fourth order stream and \$3,000 for logging 0.5 ha of the Lowland Rainforest EEC, an area that is still in dispute, with the Clarence Environment Centre claiming the area of rainforest logged was at least 20 times larger. We are yet to find out what action Fisheries took for the breaches their officers identified.

The Harvest Plan for Grange mapped the rainforest as dry sclerophyll – Blackbutt – Scribbly Gum species, neither of which occurred at the site. This means that everyone involved in the operation knew that the logging was illegal. **It is clear that Grange State Forest was not in safe hands?**

For Girard State Forest, the Fisheries Department acted on reports from environmentalists by issuing a PIN for works in an unmapped watercourse and two cautions for works within the buffer zones of mapped streams. OEH issued Forests NSW with a formal Warning Letter in relation to the selection and marking of hollow-bearing and recruitment trees, snig track construction and rehabilitation, and protection of exclusion zone boundaries.

By the time the agencies investigated Girard, Forests NSW had been forewarned and had already undertaken a large number of rehabilitation works around streams so the investigators could not confirm the reported breaches and issue appropriate PINs.

OEH forgave Forests NSW's failure to mark up trees at Girard prior to logging due to the "thick impenetrable understorey". All those who have trudged through the forests witnessing and recording the devastation that is occurring, know that these are pathetic responses to what are systematic and widespread breaches.

Girard State Forest was not in safe hands.

In recent months, independent audits by environment groups have identified dozens of breaches in Wedding Bells State Forest, west of Woolgoolga, where once again protected communities have been impacted, with kilometres of rainforest verge damaged.



Threatened species prescriptions for Yellow-bellied Gliders and Koalas have been ignored, and there has been a complete breakdown of communications between the Fisheries Department and Forests NSW, with the former failing to alert Forests NSW that the Wedding Bells State Forest is within the catchment of endangered Oxleyan Pygmy Perch habitat. This has allowed unmapped drainage lines to be logged throughout the forest, with clear signs of erosion and stream sedimentation occurring as a direct result.

We found the unmapped drainage lines were not just logged. Time and again, the audit crew came across drainage lines that were completely cleared, such as that below.



Other areas have been virtually clear-felled. **Certainly Weding Bells State Forest is not in safe hands!**



The Integrated Forests Operations Approval (IFOA) allows a maximum of 40% of the basal area of trees to be taken from each compartment during each logging event. Basal area is calculated by estimating the area of timber in all trees with a diameter greater than 20 centimetres, measured at breast height. The virtual virtual clear-felling that has occurred at Wedding Bells, which we estimate is at least 80%, has been declared legal because Forests NSW has left half the compartments unlogged, calling it an “offset area”, meaning that when averaged across each entire compartment, only 40% has been taken.



However, there is nothing written into the IFOA that stipulates a minimum period that must elapse between logging events, which allows Forests NSW to return in a few years time to log the remainder.

This is actually occurring at Clouds Creek State Forest where logging resumed on October 1, 2011, just 18 months after logging was suspended in those same compartments, where an estimated 80% of timber was taken (see photograph at left)

Logging up to 80% of timber from a forest will have a highly negative impact on these moist sclerophyll forests, which will likely never recover to their original state, and placing biodiversity at risk.

Exotic weeds and dieback are taking their toll of state forests across the entire east coast of NSW as a direct result of this mismanagement.

Your state forests are not in safe hands, and Forests NSW, along with the regulatory authorities that are allowing their destruction, must be called to account.