

The 2018 - 2019 Annual General Meeting of the South-West Forests Defence Foundation Inc. will be held at 5.30 pm on Monday 2nd December 2019, at 112 Eric Street, Cottesloe. Please note the starting time and venue.

The agenda is as follows:

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of previous AGM
3. President's report
4. Treasurer's report
5. Auditor's report
6. Election of office bearers and committee members for 2019
7. Other business

Nominations for the positions of President, Vice-president, Secretary, Treasurer and five committee members are called for.



SOUTH-WEST FORESTS DEFENCE FOUNDATION INC.
PO BOX 203, NEDLANDS WA 6009
www.southwestforestsdefence.org

NEWSLETTER – November 2019
Notice of Annual General Meeting

Please check the message on the mailing label to see if your subscription is due. We thank all those who have renewed their membership.

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Editorial

The South-West Forests Defence Foundation and other non-government organisations face a big problem when the relevant government organisation, in our case the Forest Products Commission (FPC), does not tell the truth.

According to the 2018-2019 Annual Report of the FPC, all is well in WA's forests, logging is sustainable and the FPC's operations are profitable. For our native forests, none of this is true.

All is not well in WA's south-west forests. They are under threat as never before. Climate change has brought higher temperatures, declining rainfall, increased risk of more frequent, intense and extensive wildfires, and heavier frosts.

Fungal pathogens are attacking all the major tree species:

- Jarrah – *Phytophthora cinnamomi*, *P. multivora*
- Karri – *Armillaria luteobubalina*
- Marri – *Quambalaria cyrcup* (marri canker), *Q. piterika*
- Tuart – *Phytophthora multivora*

There is no successful treatment for any of these pathogens. Furthermore, they are hybridising, and new pathogens are emerging. Most are exacerbated by logging and associated roading and burning.

Far from being 'sustainable', there has been a big decline in the amount of logs the FPC has sold each year. In 2004-2005, it sold 289,724 tonnes of sawlogs. In 2018-2019, from the same area of forest available for wood production, it sold only 163,893 tonnes – a 43 per cent decrease. Over the same period, the amount of other bole volume has also fallen, from 321,452 tonnes to 264,035 tonnes – an 18 per cent decrease.

The FPC claims it made a profit in 2018-2019. Overall, it did, but that came from the sale of plantation logs (\$1,201,000) and sandalwood (\$5,979,000). As in almost every year since it came into existence, it made a loss on its native forest operations, this time \$1,759,000.

Ever keen to keep going and growing, the FPC seeks markets for low-grade products, for example as 'biomass' for so-called renewable energy. This is the last straw for our over-exploited, over-stressed forests and their threatened wildlife. And burning wood is worse for climate change than burning coal.

We in the SFDF are at a loss. The FPC, along with the logging industry, feeds Ministers and the public misinformation and outright falsehoods,¹ and Ministers refuse to heed the truth. Can anyone tell us where to turn?

Wrong-doing exposed

With the help of whistle-blowers and local members, Wafa has exposed the export of whole logs by Nannup Timber Processing Pty Ltd (NTP), the second largest sawmilling operation in the South West.

This is possibly a breach of its contract with the Forest Products Commission, which requires all native forest sawlogs sold by the FPC to be processed locally.

One explanation given by NTP was that the logs came from private property. However, the FPC 2018-2019 Annual Report shows that no native forest logs came from private property. It also shows that no native forest logs were exported.

Wafa's complaint has resulted in the FPC holding an inquiry and the suspension of the FPC's contract of sale of native forest sawlogs to NTP. We await the outcome of the inquiry.

¹On the Forest Products Commission website (with our response):

**Wood is a natural solution to tackle climate change
(ONLY IF THE WOOD COMES FROM PLANTATIONS!)**

It is a renewable resource and once it is harvested it continues to store carbon during the lifespan of the product.
(THIS IS MISLEADING. NEARLY 90 PER CENT OF THE WOOD FROM WA'S NATIVE FORESTS BECOMES PAPER OR FIREWOOD, PRODUCTS WITH A VERY SHORT LIFESPAN.)

After harvesting, replanted forests and plantations provide more carbon storage because growing trees act as a sink to absorb carbon dioxide (CO₂).

(THIS IS MISLEADING. OLD TREES STORE MORE CARBON THAN YOUNG TREES.)

When forests get older they reach a state of carbon equilibrium and the carbon they capture each year equals the amount they release through decay.

(THIS IS WRONG. OLD TREES CONTINUE TO CAPTURE CARBON AS LONG AS THEY LIVE.)

This means that a harvested and regenerated forest or plantation captures more carbon from the atmosphere than forests that are not harvested.

(FOR FORESTS, THIS IS FALSE. OLD TREES STORE MORE CARBON THAN YOUNG TREES AND CONTINUE TO CAPTURE CARBON AS LONG AS THEY LIVE.)

Choosing wood supports the ongoing harvest and regeneration cycle allowing for the continued removal of carbon from the atmosphere while providing environmentally-friendly products.

(UNLESS THE WOOD COMES FROM PLANTATIONS, THIS IS FALSE. LOGGING NATIVE FOREST RELEASES MORE CARBON FROM THE VEGETATION AND SOIL THAN IS RECAPTURED BY FOREST REGENERATION IN 100 YEARS OR MORE.)

Achievements of the WA Forest Alliance

The Foundation is pleased to give financial support to the WA Forest Alliance Inc., the principal forest conservation organisation in WA. Wafa's recent achievements include:

- Identification and protection of significant areas of old-growth and other high value forests that missed out on reservation in 2001;
- Securing the protection of all large marri trees for wildlife during jarrah logging operations;
- Requiring the logging industry to protect old trees with obvious nesting hollows and to carry out fauna surveys for special nesting and food supply areas in karri clearfelling operations;



Nelson Forest near Manjimup. Wafa has had this forest taken off logging plans.

- Stopping imminent logging in Nelson, Lewin, Channybearup and Barrabup forests;
- Preventing the logging industry from pushing back on our gains, specifically efforts to wipe 50,000 ha of Fauna Habitat Zones off the map; and
- Exposing the wrongful export of whole logs from public forests by Nannup Timber Processing Pty Ltd.

Don't Dam the Donnelly

Farmers in the Manjimup/Pemberton area have begun yet another attack on our forests and natural environment. They want a dam on the Donnelly River!

The Southern Forests Irrigation Scheme (SFIS) proposes:

- A weir and pumping station plus road and power line on the Donnelly River at Record Brook.
Ø Result: loss of forest, spread of dieback, exacerbation of marri canker, interruption of the flow of the Donnelly River.
- 30-metre high dam on Record Brook.
Ø Result: loss of 160 ha of forest, interruption of the flow of Record Brook.
- Dams at Graphite and Middlesex Roads.
Ø Result: loss of forest.
- Construction of 250 km of irrigation pipelines.
Ø Result: loss of 215 ha of forest, spread of dieback, exacerbation of marri canker.

For this privatisation of a public asset, the proponents of the SFIS are seeking government funding: \$40

million from the Federal Government and \$19 million from the State Government.

While a recent change to the proposal has reduced the pipeline development envelope from 30m to 20m wide, it has increased the volume of water to be extracted annually from the Donnelly River from 9 billion litres to 9.3 billion litres.

The proposal is a threat to unique aquatic habitat in the Donnelly River and Record Brook and, by destroying and fragmenting hundreds of hectares of forest wildlife habitat, to forest biodiversity and several at-risk species of fauna.

Along with other concerned people and groups, the Foundation asked the Environmental Protection Authority to require a full environmental assessment of the proposal (a Public Environmental Review – PER). The EPA agreed, and we now await the PER so that we can participate with many others in showing why the proposal should not proceed.

Given the tragedy of the Murray/Darling Basin being played out before our eyes due to massive over-allocation and probable theft of water and to political, bureaucratic and corporate mismanagement, it is inconceivable that in WA there be any suggestion that precious water from one of the few remaining freshwater rivers in the South West be allocated to a few land-owners for private profit at taxpayers' expense.

Burning native forest 'biomass' for energy an environmental disaster

To successfully keep climate change to 1.5 or 2 degrees of temperature rise we must achieve two things: deep cuts to greenhouse gas emissions and removal of carbon from the atmosphere.

Burning native forest 'biomass' to produce energy at an industrial scale poses serious threat to the climate, and to Australia's unique forests and forest dependent species. It also hinders the capacity of nature to remove carbon from the atmosphere and the introduction of genuinely clean, renewable energy technologies.

The only proven method of pulling carbon out of the atmosphere at scale is through sequestration in natural ecosystems. Forests contain enormous stocks of standing carbon which must be kept out of the atmosphere. Their continuing growth coupled with strategic ecological restoration of degraded forests is a significant source of carbon capture fundamental to addressing the climate crisis we face. Big trees store large amounts of carbon, which they continue to capture as long as they live. To cut and burn forests is to undermine the potential for removal of CO₂ from the atmosphere whilst contributing to large, immediate emissions.

Burning native forest biomass to produce electricity emits more carbon per unit of energy produced than burning coal.

The claim that the large greenhouse gas emissions generated by burning wood biomass are recovered by subsequent regrowth of forests ignores the crucial point that regrowth takes time – a lot of time. Furthermore, logging and associated burning involved in producing native forest biomass release the large amounts of carbon stored in the soil. This all creates a carbon debt that will take many decades or even centuries to repay even if the forests are able or ever actually allowed to return to their carbon carrying capacity.

Using forest biomass is not simply cleaning up 'waste' or 'residues'. Large volumes are required ongoing basis. The feedstock comes directly from logging operations in the forest at much larger volumes than the volume of sawlogs. This 'waste' could be up to 70 or 80 per cent of what was a standing forest before logging. Only a small fraction of feedstock is sawmill residues.

Subsidies directed to burning biomass can displace those available to solar, wind and other energy solutions. Burning wood in coal-fired power stations either by co-firing or by complete conversion hinders the transition to carbon-neutral energy production.

For all these reasons, the Foundation is totally opposed to burning native forest biomass to produce electricity in Australia or overseas. Our forests are worth far more standing than as firewood.

WA's Regional Forest Agreement scam

In March 2019, just before the Federal election, the WA and Australian governments quietly renewed WA's 20-year long Regional Forest Agreement (RFA).

This was done without any public consultation or independent scientific input. Not only has the RFA been extended for another 20 years; there will be rolling five-year extensions, which means it could continue in perpetuity.

The extended WA RFA purports to deliver a more outcomes-focused five-yearly review process and strengthened communication between the Australian and WA governments

Given the futility of past reviews and the exclusion of referrals to the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, this does not inspire confidence.

Specific clauses referring to climate change won't help because its impacts are consistently downplayed and ignored.

The vaunted objectives of the WA RFA have not changed. The "comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system" has not been achieved. "Certainty of resource access and supply to industry" is unachievable because, after 150 years of overcutting and mismanagement, native forest logs other than stunted disease-ridden regrowth just aren't there in any quantity, and "ecologically sustainable forest management for areas outside of reserves" is a sick joke (see "Big increase in number of threatened fauna and flora under Regional Forest Agreement").

As anyone who visits the forests knows, RFA stands for "Routine Forest Abuse".

Big increase in number of threatened fauna and flora under Regional Forest Agreement

Between 1999, when the WA Regional Forest Agreement was signed, and 2019, when it was renewed in perpetuity without any public consultation or independent scientific input, there have been big increases in the number of fauna and flora species in the RFA region listed on WA's threatened species lists.

Fauna

	1999	2019
Vulnerable	12	13
Endangered	4	17
Critically Endangered	2	12
Extinct	1	0 ²
Total	19	42

² One species listed as extinct in 1999 is now known to exist.

Flora

	1999	2019
Vulnerable	25	31
Endangered	28	41
Critically Endangered	25	41
Extinct	1	0 ²
Total	79	113

Sources: Western Australia, Legislative Council, Question On Notice No. 1883 of 2019; Tabled paper No. 2555 of 2019

Logging and associated roading and burning in native forests are the most extensive disturbances in the three south-west forest regions. They also open up the forest to predation by cats and foxes.

These figures give the lie to the claim by the Environment and Forestry Ministers and their departments that native forest logging has had no adverse impact on biodiversity.

Western Australia burning

The WA government has committed \$35 million towards bush fire mitigation on Crown land in an effort to reduce the possibility of severe fires this season. Most of this money will be spent on prescribed burning.

The principal objectives of prescribed burning are fuel

reduction and risk mitigation. The full costs, harmful health and environmental impacts, risks and futility of the practice are denied or ignored.

Full costs of prescribed burning not addressed

Smoke from prescribed burning is a serious health hazard. People throughout south-west WA are subjected to smoke for days on end yet the Government has no record of the number of people going to doctors, admitted to hospital or dying during smoke events from prescribed burning or wildfires. Smoke from prescribed burns kills more people than wildfires.

Prescribed burning imposes costs on industries like honey and wine production, tourism and recreation, which all suffer financially from it but in discussions about prescribed burning, these costs are not mentioned.

Millions of dollars are spent on prescribed burning in the south-west forest region but the full amount is unknown. The question of whether this money could be better directed must be addressed.

Harmful environmental impacts

The extent of burning in the south-west forest region is so large and its frequency so great that the survival of native flora and fauna in this internationally recognised biodiversity hotspot is seriously threatened. Many species of native fauna need long unburnt (>30 years)



Prescribed burn in Mt Lindesay Priority Protection Area, October 2018. Conservation reserves have been burnt more often than State forest.

vegetation to survive. Quokkas need thickets unburnt for more than 10 years and a fire frequency of 25-30 years is necessary to maintain populations of the tamar wallaby. Full recovery to pre-fire densities would take honey possums >25 years.

However, the response to fire for most species is unknown. To operate on the basis that everything can survive frequent, extensive burning is dangerously irresponsible.

Fuel age not an accurate indicator for fuel load

The number of years since the last fire ('fuel age') is widely used to determine the tonnage of flammable native vegetation ('fuel load'³) across the landscape. This figure is then used in decisions about the timing of burns. However, fuel age is a crude measure of the fuel load for many reasons. The rate at which litter accumulates depends on many factors other than age.

The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA), which is charged with implementing the Government's fire policy and determining the conduct of prescribed burns, has litter accumulation tables based on fuel age for only four gross vegetation types: karri, jarrah and wandoo forests and pine plantations. The tables list annual leaf fall for only 25 years (30 years for wandoo) so should not be applied to litter accumulated for 50 or 100 years. Furthermore, these tables were developed before 1985 and have not been updated.

In any event, tonnes per hectare say little about how ignitable or flammable the vegetation is. The fuel load in long-unburnt old-growth forest may be less flammable than the fuel load in recently burnt forest.

The last remaining areas of long-unburnt forest are precious and valuable and should be protected, not targeted for burning.

Fixed inflexible targets should not be applied

The WA Government has adopted a target for prescribe burning of 200,000 ha a year in the south-west forest. Other government agencies and private land managers also conduct prescribed burns so the area burnt is much larger than the area prescribe burnt by DBCA.

In 1994, a panel of respected scientists reported that comparing the gross area treated annually in fuel-reduction burning—that is, for a whole agency, region or state—with a published target is not a good basis for assessing performance and is likely to be counterproductive.

The target could be reached and exceeded without reducing the risk to people and property if the burns are not conducted in appropriate places. Furthermore, some people may think that if the target is reached, they have enough protection and don't need to take any measures themselves.

³ Crops, pasture and plantations are flammable but are not considered to be 'fuel'.

The need to meet the target has undesirable consequences. Pressure on DBCA from pro-burning lobbyists may encourage it to burn large remote areas rather than small difficult peri-urban areas in real need of fuel management because the latter do not contribute enough towards the target. In addition, DBCA may be pushed to take risks and conduct burns in dangerous conditions in order to reach the target.

The State Government has decreed that in the south-west forest region, 45 per cent of the landscape vested in DBCA is to have a fuel age maintained at less than six years. This policy defies all the scientific research on the adverse impacts of frequent, extensive fire in the natural environment.

Alternatives to prescribed burning for fuel management

There are ways of addressing the risk posed by fires in the south-west forest region other than frequent, extensive prescribed burning:

- Fuel management around susceptible sites by means other than fire (replacing flammable vegetation with fire resistant native species; pruning, raking, grazing animals). Because of the rapid growth of fire weeds, burning may increase, not decrease, the fuel load.
- Rapid detection and attack before small fires become large. With spotter planes and drones, it should be possible to detect fires within hours of their starting. An Air Crane helicopter (7,000 litre drop) should be located in each of Perth, Bunbury, Manjimup, Albany and Esperance for rapid response.
- Helping the recovery, return and increase of the digging mammals (woylies, potoroos, quendas) that reduce the fuel load naturally. One woylie can turn over 4.8 tonnes of soil in a year.
- Reducing the number of fires. Most fires are started by people, legally and illegally, deliberately and accidentally. The serious problem is not addressed.
- Protecting long-unburnt (>30 years) forest and increasing the area of forest that has not been burnt for >30 years.



Prescribed burn in Mt Lindesay Priority Protection Area, October 2018