

The 2019-2020 Annual General Meeting of the South-West Forests Defence Foundation Inc. will be held at 5.30 pm on Monday 14th December 2020, 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 2020
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 – December 2020

Cry of the Forests

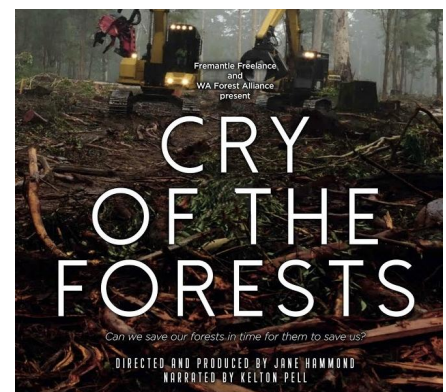
The *Cry of the Forests* documentary, produced by award-winning filmmaker Jane Hammond, is being screened in Perth and at venues throughout the South West, and its powerful message is having a real impact.

The forests of the south west of Western Australia are found nowhere else on earth. They are part of one of the most biodiversity rich hotspots on the planet but they are under threat.

Logging is decimating these special places, turning the forests into wastelands. We are logging our forests at an alarming rate, and most of the logs end up as sawmill waste, charcoal or wood chips. Just 15 per cent becomes sawn timber with only small amounts turned into quality furniture.

Meanwhile climate change is impacting on the South West and rainfall is declining. The forests play a vital role in creating the rain that feeds the streams, environment and agricultural industries. If left standing these magnificent forests are excellent stores of carbon.

To view the official trailer, go to cryoftheforests.com.au



2020 in review

This year has seen forest activism find a new lease of life in Western Australia.

The WA Forest Alliance (WAFA) began its Forests For Climate, Forests For Life campaign with enthusiastic launches in Denmark, Margaret River and Fremantle.

WAFA's Forests For Climate team of champions is putting the forests for climate message onto the State agenda in the lead-up to the State election.

Direct action stopped logging in Helms and McCorkhill forests, and two forest protectors were prosecuted for their actions. Logging resumed in spite of the very wet conditions and the increased risk that winter logging would spread dieback throughout the forest.

Now the Nannas for Native Forests movement has brought in scores of new supporters who have the time, the skills and the energy to take the forest protection message to the Government and the public.



Judy Blyth's banner for the Nannas for Native Forests

You can find out about the Nannas at www.facebook.com/Nannas4NativeForests

What SFDF is doing

Throughout the year, SFDF continued to give WAFA financial and research support.

In April we made submissions to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster (the Bushfires Royal Commission),¹ in June to the EPA asking for a Public Environment Review of Alcoa's expansion, which is now required, and in November to the Forest Products Commission (FPC) WA Sandalwood Taskforce on the Advancement of Aboriginal Economic Development Using Wild Harvested Sandalwood (2020).

We made a Freedom of Information application to the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions for full documentation on the November 2019 prescribed burn on the Denbarker Road, and we received at no cost much more than we asked for

¹ Available at naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au/submissions/published-submissions

(details of the planning, conduct and outcome of this disastrous burn). A Freedom of Information application to the FPC has asked for a copy of the Draft Biodiversity Management Program for sandalwood, which should have been finalised three years ago. The response is due within a week. The FPC's profits from the sale of sandalwood hide its losses on its native forest operations.



FPC's sandalwood pulling at Walling Rock Station

In November, representatives of WAFA and SFDF met with the Environmental Defender's Office to discuss taking legal action to expose the insanity of native forestry and to reduce/stop logging in whatever way possible. Conservationists in Victoria and Tasmania have had significant successes in the courts, and we hope to achieve similar results in WA.

Western Australian Climate Policy

The Western Australian Climate Policy was released on 20 November 2020. In dealing with native forests, it is seriously deficient.

There is only one mention of forests: a commitment to "implement the Enhanced Prescribed Burning Program to reduce the frequency and size of bushfires in forests in south-west Western Australia, meet prescribed burning targets and protect the community and the environment from the impacts of bushfire."

The CO₂ emissions of logging and post-logging burning of native forests and the loss of large areas of forest that were capturing and storing carbon are ignored.

Also ignored are the huge environmental costs of current prescribed burning and the fact that it may actually be counterproductive.

While completely disregarding the important role of native forests, there is a commitment to "Expansion of the softwood plantation estate: Provide opportunities for private sector investment to support an expansion of Western Australia's softwood plantation estate, storing up to 7 million tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent." The CO₂ emissions of plantation management and harvesting are not taken into account.

The policy and electric vehicle strategy can be accessed here:

www.wa.gov.au/service/environment/environment-information-services/western-australian-climate-change-policy

www.wa.gov.au/service/environment/environment-information-services/electric-vehicle-strategy

Alcoa and the jarrah forest

In June, along with 1588 other concerned people and organisations, SFDF made a submission to the EPA asking it to require a Public Environment Review (PER) of Alcoa's proposal to increase production at the Pinjarra Alumina Refinery and increase the rate of bauxite mining at the existing Huntly Mine.

The proposal comprises the following:

- an increase in alumina production at the refinery by 5 per cent, from 5.0 Mtpa to 5.25 Mtpa;
- a transition of the Huntly mine into the Myara North and Holyoake regions; and
- an increase in the rate of mining within ML1SA to supply up to 2.5 Mtpa of bauxite for export.

The proposal will require clearing of up to 6,700

hectares (ha) of native vegetation within a 42,415 ha development envelope associated with mining, and an additional 10 ha of native vegetation associated with the refinery.

In July, the EPA's Chairman determined that there should be a PER. Preliminary Environmental Factors to be assessed are: air quality; greenhouse gas emissions; social surroundings; flora and vegetation; terrestrial environmental quality; terrestrial fauna; and inland waters.

Because of its adverse impacts on each of these factors alone, the proposal should be rejected. We are collaborating with WAFA, the people of Jarrahdale and Jarrahdale Forest Protectors to ensure that it is.

Alcoa's State Agreement Mining Lease covers 702,261.85 ha. The total area mined to December 2019, including Jarrahdale, Huntly and Willowdale mines, was 26,311 ha. The whole area mined required the clearing of native forest.

To date, 20,381 ha have been rehabilitated, 16,419 ha using jarrah forest species, the remaining 3,962 ha predominantly with eastern states *Eucalyptus* species because they are resistant to *Phytophthora dieback*, and pine in some areas.



Bauxite mining in the jarrah forest, Photo: Bushfire Front

World Heritage listing for the karri forest

For some years now, a proposal to seek World Heritage listing for the karri forest has been coming from several quarters and is now gathering momentum.

World Heritage status is conferred by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) on natural areas of outstanding universal value that meet at least one Selection Criteria. The karri forest would qualify under three criteria:

- Applicable UNESCO Selection Criteria (x) relating to conservation of biological diversity:
- Applicable UNESCO Selection Criteria (ix) relating to ongoing ecological and environmental evolution processes:
- Applicable UNESCO Selection Criteria (vii) relating to exceptional natural beauty:

However, there must first be initial nomination for National Heritage status.

The SFDF will give full support to this proposal.

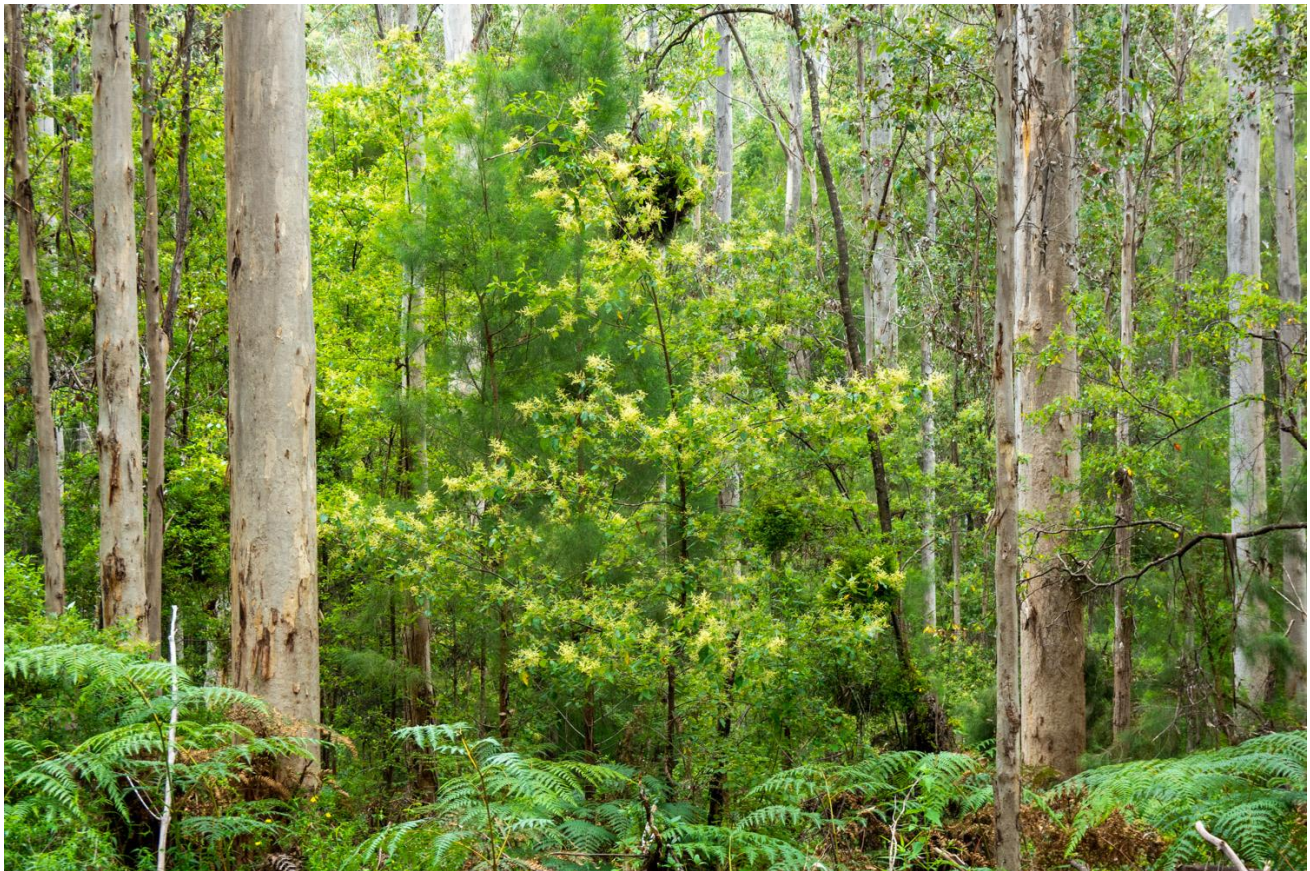
Save Our Donnelly River

The Southern Forests Irrigation Cooperative Ltd (SFIC) has prepared a proposal to dam the Donnelly River to irrigate members' crops in the Pemberton area. The proposal involves a weir and pumping station plus road and power line on the Donnelly River at Record Brook, and would require extensive clearing and fragmentation of native forest.

The SFIC has succeeded in obtaining a commitment of \$40 million from the Federal Government and \$19 million from the State Government.

After significant public pressure in which SFDF participated, the EPA decided to require a Public Environmental Review (PER), and we await the release of the document and the opportunity to comment on it and give all the reasons why the proposal should be rejected.

There is now a Save Our Donnelly River Association opposing the proposal. It can be contacted at www.saveourdonnellyriver.org



Old growth karri forest

Denmark Fire Study Group

A combined group of scientists and local activists concerned about the harmful impacts and futility of current prescribed burning has formed in Denmark under the auspices of the Denmark Environment Centre. The Denmark Fire Study Group (DFSG) organised a statement signed by 24 scientists that was sent to relevant Ministers, and in August submitted a petition to the Legislative Council calling for action needed to reduce and improve current prescribed burning. These initiatives and powerful letters to the Premier and Ministers were quickly rebutted with the usual indefensible justifications.

DFSG monitors and records prescribed burns and wildfires, and sponsors the Red Tingle Forest Flammability and Vegetation Research Project, which appears to show that long unburnt tingle forest is less flammable than forest with a 'fuel age' of five to 20 years.



Edge burn, prior to prescribed burn in Mt Roe National Park

Departmental bias on fire management

In July, DBCA released its Fire Management Strategy. The document was prepared allegedly with public consultation. However, SFDF's Question in Parliament revealed that feedback on the Strategy was sought and received from the following external stakeholders:

- The Department of Fire and Emergency Services;
- The Pastoralists and Graziers Association of Western Australia;
- The Western Australian Farmers Federation Inc. – Beekeeping Section; and
- The Bushfire Front Inc.

Feedback on the strategy was sought, but not received from the following external stakeholders:

- The Conservation Council of Western Australia;
- The Western Australian Local Government Association;
- The Association of Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades of Western Australia Inc.

DBCA Biodiversity and Conservation Science staff provided input into the strategy. This sector coordinates and delivers science in the Department, providing science and biodiversity knowledge to support the functions of DBCA.

No input was sought from any independent authority such as scientists in universities or CSIRO.

The Bushfire Front Inc. is dedicated to supporting and increasing the use of prescribed burning. Its vociferous propaganda can be found at www.bushfirefront.org.au/

The six main fire management priorities for DBCA are, first and foremost, reducing bushfire fuel loads predominantly through prescribed burning.

The other priorities are:

- Responding to bushfires;
- Maintaining ecosystem health;
- Investing in fire management capability;
- Working together; and
- Improving management knowledge and innovating.

Given DBCA's insistence on having 45 per cent of the land it manages in the forest regions with a 'fuel age' of less than six years and an annual burn target of 200,000 ha, it is clear that it

cannot maintain ecosystem health and is unwilling to work with scientists outside the Department or improve management knowledge or innovate.

Its response to bushfires is too slow to reach most ignitions in time for at-source suppression. Too much investment goes on prescribed burning and too little on rapid detection and the immediate deployment of appropriate aerial fire-fighting equipment to extinguish fires at source.

Case against thinning regrowth forest

Thinning of WA's native forests to improve their health and growth rates is unnecessary as jarrah and karri forests self thin over time. It does not increase water production, it has adverse impacts on forest health through soil compaction and disturbance and on biodiversity, it releases large amounts of stored carbon and decreases carbon capture, and it increases the 'fuel load' and the risk of wildfires.

The push to thin regrowth is related to proposals to turn jarrah and karri thinnings into pellets for export to the massive international market for so-called 'renewable energy'. A company called Plantation Energy Australia Pty Ltd has prepared a supply base report, in which it sets out its expectation that 4 per cent of its feedstock will be FPC karri and marri and 85 per cent FPC radiata and pinaster pine. Inexplicably, it appears to believe that the FPC manages 180,000 ha of karri forest for wood production. The correct figure is 59,000 ha.

A letter to Forestry Minister Dave Kelly and the Premier setting out the case against 'restoration logging', a euphemism for thinning, remains unanswered and even unacknowledged.

Every effort will be made to prevent thinning of regrowth and the development of a market for jarrah, marri and karri pellets to be burnt as 'renewable energy' when burning wood is as bad as burning coal.



Old growth jarrah forest

Bushfire Royal Commission report

The report of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (the Bushfire Royal Commission) was tabled in Parliament on 30th October.

Many of the key recommendations, as listed by the Emergency Leaders for Climate Action, address how to help communities prepare for and adapt, respond and build resilience to natural disasters, and to assist emergency services to deal with them. Governments should:

- produce climate projections and address climate change;
- boost firefighting capability;
- provide community education and warnings;
- ensure national consistency on information and advice;
- include health and mental health in the services provided;
- ensure greater consistency and collaboration in data on Australian flora and fauna;
- engage further with Traditional Owners.

There are two issues of particular concern to SFDF: prescribed burning and rapid detection and immediate at-source suppression.

The Commission found that there is strong interest in, and polarising views on, fuel management activity, particularly prescribed burning to manage fuel loads. It heard many perspectives from public submissions that describe prescribed burning as, in effect, a panacea – a solution to bushfire risk. It says bluntly that it is not.

According to the Report, research suggests that prescribed burning is most effective in reducing the severity of bushfires in the first 1-4 years post-treatment. Depending on the severity of the weather and forest type, it can aid suppression for up to approximately 15 years. This accords with research being conducted in the tingle forest by the Denmark Fire Study Group.

The evidence provided to the Commission suggests that the effectiveness of prescribed burning varies in different ecosystems and climates.

It found that the lengthening of the fire season is reducing the opportunities to undertake prescribed burning, and this is likely to get worse in the future.

On the issue of fire-fighting, the Commission recommends that governments develop an Australian-based and registered national aerial firefighting capability, support ongoing research and evaluation into aerial firefighting, and adopt strategies that support and develop a broader Australian-based aerial firefighting industry.

Over the years, there have been more than 100 bushfire inquiries in Australia, including state and federal parliamentary committee inquiries, COAG reports, coronial inquiries and Royal Commissions.

We now await the actions governments take in response to this Royal Commission.