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By the time this Journal reaches your mailbox the Federal Election should be upon us. However, while regulation

of land use remains a State function the attitudes of State governments are more important in determining the future of the remaining natural land in Australia.

In NSW, we shall, of course, have a State election early next year so now is the time to remind our politicians of how you feel about national parks, nature conservation and the environment generally. The environment has to compete with other interests and various fashionable causes for both funding and political attention.

At this time in the electoral cycle, politicians value recognition of their good works while they seek to avoid contentious decisions. The news in our State is not all bad; the Carr government has already delivered a very substantial increase in the area of protected land in NSW. While attention has been focused on extensive delays in restraining the woodchipping of old-growth forest, good work has been done elsewhere, particularly in protecting some of the remaining natural land west of the Dividing Range. This is all the more commendable as there are not as many votes in these parts as near the more accessible coastal and mountain parks.

In this Journal you can learn about the forests of the NSW South Coast. Visit them while they are still there!

Tom Fink
NPA President

Forests at the Frontline

So, the epic struggle for the future of NSW's forests has now defined itself as a dilemma of choice for Bob Carr between a powerful union and conservation supporters.

The unsustainable logging of old growth forest generates only temporary employment. Sustainable forestry generates sustainable jobs. This point is lost on the giant Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU), which has just forced the Carr government to suspend the critical negotiations on the north-east forests until early October. Ostensibly this is to allow time for certain social and economic data to be considered. The truth is that the timber union is fighting a determined, no-holds-barred battle to delay the negotiations until the Howard government – or a beholden Beazley government – can come to its assistance after the Federal election. It has already made the extraordinary statement that it will not support the ALP in the Federal election in three key seats unless the negotiations are suspended.

Many rank-and-file unionists oppose the continued logging of old growth, wilderness and threatened species habitat as sought by the CFMEU. But to its shame the NSW Labour Council has backed the CFMEU all the way. Union opponents such as the South Coast Labour Council and the NSW Teachers Federation have been trampled underfoot.

The CFMEU has also made it known that it wants a decision to its liking on the Eden forests – the South East Forests – before it resumes negotiations. NPA is deeply worried that Bob Carr is about to cave in on the long-overdue Eden decision.

Meanwhile the NSW Government has declined to announce any new forest national parks on the South Coast between Narooma and Nowra before the government seeks re-election next March. This is extraordinary as these forests were clearly part of the fiercely

contested areas, along with the north-east and Eden, on which Bob Carr based his election promises to protect old growth and wilderness forests.

The Carr government is afraid to take on the union; but delay in protecting the core areas on the South Coast will leave them vulnerable to the insatiable Daishowa wood-chipping operations. They must not be used as election hostages.

The voters of NSW in 1995 gave Bob Carr a mandate to protect the forests and restructure the timber industry. They also gave their approval to spend \$60 million of NSW environment trust funds. But the CFMEU, in a joint strategy with the industry, has blindly pursued a policy of grab the money, log the old growth forests to exhaustion, and only then deal with the inevitable collapse of the native forest resource. In the meantime, the precious opportunity and funds to facilitate a transition of both workers and timber companies into plantations are being wasted.

We could never replace the fast-diminishing old growth and wilderness forests. But we can rapidly create a new plantation-based timber industry and new and more jobs for timber workers. In the Eden region alone there are 250,000 m³ per annum of unallocated plantation pine sawlogs, while the union fights over a few thousand m³ of native forest logs at most.

Bob Carr's dilemma is real, but its resolution is simple if he takes a long-term view of employment and conservation.

Noel Plumb
Executive Officer

What can you do? See the articles and special inserts in this edition on the north-east and South Coast forests.

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