

Development Application (10-2024-276-1)

South East Fibre Exports DP1066187 Proposal to make the existing temporary log storage yard a permanent land use at part Lot 17

Submission from Harriett Swift

The original purpose of this facility when it was funded by the NSW State Government after the 2019/20 bushfires was to accommodate a temporary over supply of pine logs resulting from the fires.

It is not clear from the current Development Proposal whether the permanent log storage area will provide for the storage of both hardwood and softwood logs.



Sign on the chipmill fence referring to the NSW Government funding for the pine log storage yard

Relevant Issues

1. Conservationists would have few concerns about the approval of a permanent log storage area if it is only for pine logs and cannot be used for hardwood logs. While there are questions about the export of whole pine logs rather than domestic processing of them into higher value sawn timber products, this is not the time or place to explore those issues. However if there is any prospect of using the space for hardwood storage, the approval of this DA presents a number of controversial issues.
2. Community opposition to native forest logging has a very long history in this area and in New South Wales and Australia generally. The industry has lost any social licence it ever had and has steadily lost public support over many years. Clause 4.12.6 (Public Interest) in the DA asks: would approval of the development be in the public interest? The answer given is 'yes.'

If there is any possibility that the yard might be used for the storage of native forest hardwood, I am sure public opinion would not support a 'yes' response to that question. Indeed, a very recent poll¹ affirms this. It shows that 60% of Eden-Monaro voters are opposed to native forest logging and want to see a plantation based industry supplying Australia's timber needs. Already about 90% of Australia's timber needs is sourced from plantations.

3. Countries such as New Zealand, Vietnam and Chile have long since stopped native forest logging. Australian States. Notably Western Australia and Victoria have also recently ceased native forest logging. It is only a matter of time before New South Wales follows suit.

Against this background, this is not a time to be providing storage space which might be used for native forest hardwood logs, when there are huge doubts about whether the industry has a future at all.

When the chipmill owner originally received taxpayer funding under the NSW Government Bushfire Recovery scheme for the storage yard, the understanding was that it would be for pine logs.

That funding was provided because there was a temporary glut of pine logs following the 2019/20 bushfires.

4. Pentarch Holdings, the ultimate operator of the facility stated in its Annual Financial Statement to ASIC in 2019/20 that its insurance coverage for the bushfires had been "adequate"², which raises questions about why taxpayer funds were provided at all.

5. In Clause 4.12.6 (Public Interest) of the DA, there are questions posed:

- Have the principles of ecologically sustainable development under the Environment Planning & Assessment Act 1979 . The answer given was 'yes.'

☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A

- Has the precautionary approach been considered in the assessment of this development? The answer provided was 'not applicable.'

☐ Yes ☐ No ☒ N/A

As the DA points out, "the subject land is heavily disturbed." The area for which approval as a permanent storage area is being sought is already totally cleared and there is, in effect, no environmental value to be protected. But if there is any possibility that hardwood from native forests might be stored there, it would be providing a service to an industry which would not exist without wholesale, industrial scale destruction of the environment – to biodiversity, soils, water quality and quantity and climate, and is thus in conflict with the Bega Valley Shire Council's Climate Resilience Strategy.

Recommendation

It should be made clear and explicit that the storage area cannot be used for native forest hardwood.

¹ https://www.forestfutures.org.au/polling_reveals_voter_support_for_a_new_national_forest_policy

² Pentarch Holdings Pty Ltd ABN:21 064 165 635 Annual Financial Statement to ASIC 2019/20:1