

The Eden woodchip debate: Part II (1987-2004)

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ABSTRACT: The Eden export woodchip debate, which appeared in the newspapers in the period 1987-2004 as a continuation of the initial 1969-1986 phase of the public debate, can be identified as one of the most enduring and bitter environmental conflicts in Australia. The review of Part II of the debate (1987-2004) takes the same approach as in Part I, namely an examination of the newspaper articles, principally in the local press (the *Imlay Magnet* and the *Bega District News*), and in the NSW newspaper, the *Sydney Morning Herald*. The focus of the woodchip debate in the 1987-2004 period was on jobs and wealth versus the environment, with the environment represented principally by the image of old-growth forest in National Estate areas, particularly from 1987 to 1995, and the case for its dedication as a national park being the desired best result. In the late 1980s, the anti-woodchip lobby consistently argued for national parks and consequently won its demand for the transfer of State Forests to National Parks in the Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) process in the 1990s. However, even this large transfer of forested land did not quell the debate over the export woodchip industry; the unresolved questions of the competing values of an export woodchip industry versus a range of environmental values continue to drive the debate and keep the issue in the public mind.

1 INTRODUCTION

The primary objective of this account of the Eden woodchip debate Part II (1987-2004) is, as it was for Part I, to present a review, summation, analysis and interpretation of the coverage of the debate by the newspapers both in the local press (the *Imlay Magnet* IM and the *Bega District News* BDN), and a NSW-based national newspaper, the *Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH). The coverage was broken into three periods (1987-1990; 1993-1995; and 2000-2003), with the SMH limited to the two periods between 1987 and 1995 as these covered the major expansion of the debate from the local to the State to the Federal political arenas. The debate was sustained at a local level, even when there was little interest at the State or Federal levels, so the third phase of the debate reported here was confined to the reports in the local press. The purpose for selecting three separate phases was avoid repetition of the main points and to focus more closely on new and important dimensions in the debate. There were more than enough newspaper reports in these three periods to provide a powerful sense of the dominant elements of the debate as well as to see new strands emerge. The number of articles found in the three designated periods was 1179. All articles were selected on the basis that they were confined to, or incorporated, the Eden woodchip debate. Some reports were

listed as “neutral” because they did not favour either side of the debate. A secondary theme in this review was to interpret the history of the conflict ecologically to provide a test of the continuing relevance of our long-term wildlife research into this vexatious environmental issue (e.g. Lunney *et al.* 2001; 2002; and Lunney and Matthews 2002 in the previous set of AFHS papers, which included the land tenure maps of the region showing the number of hectares affected by each state government policy change to the boundaries of state forests, national parks and nature reserves).

The beginning of the woodchip operations near Eden in 1969 marked the onset of one of Australia’s most prolonged land-use conflicts. The public debate, principally as it appeared in the local press in the Bega and Eden districts from 1969 to 1986, was traced by Lunney and Moon (1987). The basis for that analysis was a total of 1,040 newspaper articles from 1969 to 1985 inclusive. There were 364 articles for woodchipping, 252 against and 424 that were either neutral, or reported arguments both for and against. The peak year of 1977 coincided with the publication of the findings of the Senate Standing Committee on *Woodchips and the Environment* (Commonwealth of Australia 1977). Lunney and Moon (1987) recounted that, following the Senate report, NSW Premier Neville Wran established an advisory committee called the Ashton Committee to “investigate the environmental conditions under which woodchip and other logging should be permitted” in the coastal forests near Bega. It was the findings and recommendations of this committee that prompted our study of the long-term impact of woodchipping on the fauna of the coastal forests near Bega. Lunney and Moon (1987) also noted that conservationists had criticized the terms of reference of the enquiry, which required the Committee to maintain the supply of pulpwood and sawlogs.

Eden gives its name to the local region, which comprises about 800,000 hectares on the south coast of New South Wales, adjacent to the Victorian border. The forests of the Eden region are often referred to as the South-East forests because they are in the south-eastern corner of NSW. The public forests (State Forests, National Parks and Nature Reserves, and Vacant Crown Land) comprise about 453,000 ha, and the division among these three categories changed markedly from 1968 to 2002 (Lunney and Matthews 2002). The region includes the major towns of Eden, on Twofold Bay, and Bega in the Bega Valley. Swinbourne and Winters (2001) present a valuable pictorial history of the region.

Part I was undertaken to report on what had been published in the 1970s prior to the start of our wildlife research in 1980 (Lunney and Moon 1987), and to complement other research on the ecological history of the forests undertaken at the time (Lunney and Leary 1988; Lunney and Moon 1988). The historical research enabled issues of enduring public concern to be identified. On the pro-woodchip side, the perennial issues were the increased local wealth generated by many facets of the export woodchip industry, and jobs in an area of high unemployment. On the pro-conservation side, the issues were the objection to the rapid transformation of major areas of native forest of national park quality into even-aged stands of regrowth that retained little of the original character of the forest, as well as the lack of research on such issues as impact on wildlife, cultural values, national heritage status, and the long-term viability of the hardwood sawmill industry. Lunney and Moon (1987) concluded that if the Federal Government renewed the export licence for Harris-Daishowa (the export woodchip company based in Eden) in December 1989, it would be fair to conclude that environmental constraints on the industry would need to be greater than those in place at the time of publication (January-February 1987) if there were to be any compromise between industry and conservationists.

2 THE EVIDENCE FOR THE PUBLIC DEBATE – THE NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

An analysis of the information in Table 1 reveals three critical elements: the debate persisted for the entire period; the numbers for, against and neutral were roughly equal over the period, but exhibited marked differences at certain times; and, the local newspapers reliably carried the debate and provided vital continuity. A comparison between the periods covered by Parts I and II shows that the rate of articles per year rose from an annual average from 61/year to 107/year, but that the

between-year variation remained high. This analysis provokes questions such as what is it about the Eden woodchip operation that appears to elude all policy decisions on the matter; what is the difference between local and national reporting on the subject; and what are the elements not clearly identified in the press that help propel the debate? The first two questions can be discussed with the newspaper articles on the table with different parties applying different interpretations, but if the answer to what continues to fuel the conflict lies beyond the level of newspaper reporting, then a higher degree of interpretation is required. This paper concentrates on the conflict as reported, but highlights other published ideas and views that may present policy options for future analysis. It covers each of the three periods selected to identify the main elements in the debate of each period, then amplifies some sub-themes as potential entry points for future research or policy development.

Table 1. The number of newspaper articles that appeared in the press over 11 years in the period 1987-2004 on the Eden woodchip debate. An article was categorised either as for woodchipping or reporting material that was pro-woodchipping, or as anti-woodchipping or reporting anti-woodchip events or statements. The “neutral” category contains those articles reporting on the conflict over woodchipping, which were neither for nor against woodchipping. The numbers represent the articles found in the local press — the *Imlay Magnet* (later just called the *Magnet*, but recorded in here as IM for consistency), the *Bega District News*, and an occasional article in the late 1980s in the *Wyndham Observer* — while the numbers in brackets are the numbers of articles in the national newspaper, the *Sydney Morning Herald*. The SMH numbers are part of the total, not an addition to it. The SMH was not covered in 2000-2003. The year 2004 was incomplete and it was not recorded here, although one article from the year was noted in the text because it gave a vivid update on a key theme.

| Year | For | Against | Neutral | Total |
|-------|---------|----------|----------|-----------|
| 1987 | 72 (1) | 45 (3) | 28 (4) | 145 (8) |
| 1988 | 143 (3) | 34 (6) | 68 (20) | 245 (29) |
| 1989 | 19 (10) | 121 (27) | 53 (43) | 193 (80) |
| 1990 | 8 (4) | 23 (17) | 36 (26) | 67 (47) |
| 1993 | 17 (0) | 38 (1) | 27 (8) | 82 (9) |
| 1994 | 27 (2) | 53 (9) | 43 (12) | 123 (23) |
| 1995 | 42 (10) | 57 (25) | 86 (58) | 185 (93) |
| 2000 | 6 | 29 | 5 | 40 |
| 2001 | 5 | 16 | 3 | 24 |
| 2002 | 9 | 24 | 2 | 35 |
| 2003 | 7 | 28 | 5 | 40 |
| Total | 355(30) | 468(88) | 356(171) | 1179(289) |

The evidence-based approach in this paper relies on presenting the substance of the debate in the words used at the time. To achieve this, the press has been cited and quotes selected to explain the issues and report the conflict. Extensive quotes are presented to help overcome any bias of reporting and to provide readers with the material for their own interpretations and analyses. While there may be little doubt that some readers will place a different interpretation on the articles presented, the primary aim is to report the conflict in the language in which it was expressed.

To help minimise the confusion about names and events, the material is presented chronologically. Sequential quotations from newspaper articles are presented as the data set, while the author’s summation and evaluation of the material are to be found in the introductory and concluding remarks about each year. The headings of press articles have been identified by the use of bold. All authors are acknowledged whenever their names appeared (most articles in the local press were anonymous, but names appeared in letters to the editor and in most of the pieces in the SMH). Quotations were selected if they summarised the main points clearly, were representative of the flow of the debate at the time and succinctly encapsulated the views of one side or the other, or the dilemmas faced by government. The paragraph spacing used in the newspapers was deleted in the

interests of the flow of the material, and any deletions of text, for example to jump repetitive detail, are shown by the insertion of three dots.... The use of square brackets [] in the quoted material was to insert a point of clarification, or to let the reader know that a particular spelling was published in the newspaper, given as *[sic]*.

3 1987

The main headlines and the key sentences in the accompanying articles summarise the shifts in the political agenda, the views of both the pro- and anti-woodchippers, and the various elements of the conflict. The issues of the debate, which would persist for many years, were being set at a local, state and national level in 1987, when the increasing complexity of the political decision-making process also became evident. The newspaper articles for the year provided much material on which to form a rich portrait of the conflict, so the following material has been presented in some detail because it provides the basis of understanding the conflict in subsequent years.

The partisan debate, which had been raging for many years, continued undiminished through 1987, with headlines such as in the BDN of 30 January 1987 reflecting the divisions and the issues:

“In depth study gives logging the ‘go-ahead’. A final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on woodchipping operations at Eden has stated that forestry operations are compatible with National Estate values. Prepared by independent consultants, Margules and Partners Pty Limited, the EIS is the final stage of review prior to the Federal Government making a decision on a continuation of the export licence for the woodchip mill at Eden, operated by Harris Daishowa (Aust) Ltd. ... ‘The Forestry Commission of New South Wales has the capacity to protect and conserve the unique National Estate values of the Coolangubra and Tantawangalo places,’ says the EIS.”

On the same day in the same paper (BDN 30 January 1987), the opposite point of view appeared under the headline:

“Anti-loggers slam EIS. The Conservation Council of the South-East Region has accused supporters of continued woodchipping on the south coast of either trying to mislead people or fundamentally misunderstanding the EIS process. The Convenor of the council’s Forestry Working Group, Mr Patrick Tobin, said that the final impact statement for the continuation of the Harris-Daishowa woodchip operations could in no way be described as an independent or balanced report, as has been claimed by the company.”

The politically volatile environment was unequivocally displayed in the SMH 9 February 1987:

“Carr prepares for battle of the woodchips” by Joseph Glascott: “As the woodchip battle moves from Tasmania to NSW, the Minister for Planning and Environment, Mr Carr, is preparing for a tough fight in Cabinet to extend the national parks in the south coast logging region. The timber industry, the Forestry Commission and the trade union movement are ready to resist any reductions in the woodchip area.”

The headlines also reflected federal opposition views on the matter (in the BDN of 13 February 1987):

“Howard says ‘yes’ to chips. On a tight-scheduled visit to Bega this week, [Federal] Opposition Leader Mr John Howard said he was unconvinced by the anti-woodchip argument...he backed the woodchip industry including the use of Tantawangalo and Coolangubra State Forests.”

The issue of Tantawangalo and Coolangubra State Forests provoked the following headline in the IM of 17 February 1987:

“Forest lock-up alternative. ...Forests Products Association spokesman, Dr Bill Hurditch, said in Sydney today that the Heritage Commission had lost touch with its original [sic] objective, and was quickly becoming a puppet of the environment movement. Dr Hurditch said the current proposal to list Tantawangalo Creek Catchment and Coolangubra Forest Area on the National Estate Register was a back-door attempt to stop timber harvesting in the Eden area. ‘If the listing goes ahead the NSW South Coast will become embroiled in a Tasmanian-like logging dispute, with little likelihood of a balanced outcome...’”

A state pro-woodchip matter was reported by the IM on 19 February 1987, with a political sting in the tail:

“Woodchip Company supports need for wildlife reserves. The Eden-based woodchip company, Harris-Daishowa (Australia) Pty Ltd., has called for the creation of wildlife reserves to protect any endangered species found in the forests it is permitted to log. The company was responding to claims that a rare Australian potoroo lives in the forests surrounding Eden. ...Mr Whitelaw [representing the company] said that Harris-Daishowa was concerned that the visit to the area by Minister for Planning and Environment, Mr Carr, appeared to be a publicity exercise. ‘We find it hard to understand why he would visit the area without inviting us to participate, and announce a discovery several months old which is still the subject of a Forestry Commission investigation.’ Mr Whitelaw said if the presence of the rare long footed potoroo was confirmed, the company would support the formation of a reserve to cover its habitat.”

By contrast, the BDN of 20 February 1987 reported on a federal politician:

“Howard’s comments condemned. It is very unlikely that the leader of the Federal Opposition, Mr John Howard, knew very much about the complexities of the Eden Woodchip Industry when he openly supported the renewal of the Export Woodchip License [sic] during his recent visit to the region, a spokesperson for the Far South Environment Group has said.”

On the pro-woodchip side of the debate, the issue was clear to the BDN of 1 March 1987:

“Work and employment. Work and jobs has become a key issue in the current debate over woodchip and sawmill licences...The strongest reason to support the continuation of the timber industry in its present form has been to maintain employment in this industry.”

The IM of 5 March 1987 was more strident:

“Forest lock-up threatens sawmill jobs. Sawmillers and their employees are facing almost certain disaster this winter solely because the industry is being denied logs from the Coolangubra and Tantawangalo State Forests.”

The article concluded with the subheading:

“Koalas: He [Mr Len Ferguson, principal of Tableland sawmills] said what some people failed to appreciate is that the timber industry is not out to eliminate any wildlife anywhere. On the call for Yurammie State Forest near Wyndham to be closed following the sighting of a number of Koala bears, Mr Ferguson said Koala [sic] was particularly susceptible to fire and this threat would increase if the area was turned into a National Park.”

The BDN of 13 March 1987 noted conflict with the local federal member:

“Woodchip missile – Environmentalists attack Jim Snow. Conservationists have attacked Jim Snow, Labor MP for Eden-Monaro who gained his seat through environmental preferences. Mr Snow has been described as “the woodchip missile likely to damage the NSW Government’s environmental reputation.” A spokesperson for the South Coast Forest Alliance, Mr Tony Fleming, said that during the Federal Election Campaign conservationists had turned out in large numbers to ensure that the preferences of the independent [sic] environmental candidate went to Mr Snow. “We want to make it very clear that environmentalists did this to help the return of the Hawke Labor Government, as its policies were far superior to those of the Liberal-National Parties. We did not support Jim Snow’s woodchip sympathies...” Mr Fleming said. ...“The conservation movement has proposed responsible alternatives to woodchipping by ending clear-felling and pointing to alternative sources of timber to protect employment. Our major national park proposals such as Coolangubra and Tantawangalo are vital and leave plenty of native forest for sawmillers,” he [Mr Fleming] said.”

The issue involved both the state and federal governments (both Labor in 1987), and lobbying was intense, such as was reported in the IM of 26 March 1987:

“Chip support group meets Kerin. Members of the Woodchip Support Group travelled to Canberra...to meet with the Federal Minister for Primary Industry, Mr John Kerin. Coming on top of the recent visit by the Federal [Environment] Minister, Mr Barry Cohen, the meeting enabled the group to be further advised on the status of the Export Woodchip Licence renewal and other related matters.”

The strength of the argument was reflected by IM 2 April 1987 with the heading:

“Greenies dictating to government. Environmental groups have been accused of ‘dictating’ their terms to State Government for winding down the forest industries in NSW.”

Positive language was evident at this stage of the debate, with the IM of 9 April 1987 reporting:

“Ministerial confidence in chip future. John Akister, the [State] Member for Monaro, said today that he was very pleased that the four Ministers who are responsible for consideration of the future of the timber industry in the south-east region had all given unequivocal assurances of support for the continuation of the industries and the continuation of jobs. ...‘As each of the Ministers has said, it will be possible to carry out these reassurances and at the same time provide all reasonable protection for important and endangered species of flora and fauna. There appears to be no good reason why the Federal and State Governments cannot speedily resolve any outstanding matters and give the reassurance that the people in the south-eastern region require, concerning the assured future of timber industries in the region.’”

On 2 May 1987 the SMH reported another dimension to the conflict under the heading:

“Woodchip research interference claim. By Bob Beale, Science Reporter. A forestry researcher has called for an enquiry into what he describes as ‘inexcusable interference’ by the NSW Forestry Commission in legitimate inquiry by a scientist in his department. Associate Professor Eric Woolmington, who retired last year as head of the Geography Department at the University of NSW, in Canberra, says the Commission should explain why it complained officially to the university, through one of its most senior administrators, about a research paper by Dr James Burgess. Details of the incident are to be aired today on ABC radio’s *Science Show*, in a program dealing with the environmental effects of woodchipping operations at Eden. The program – the result of an ABC Science Unit investigation spanning six months – reveals admissions by a forest worker that high quality logs were wrecked to render them useless for saw-milling, because of financial incentives to produce woodchip timber. An Australian

Museum ecologist, Dr Harry Recher, says the whole woodchip operation should never have been allowed to go ahead in the late 1960s because the scientific research base was so poor. ...The Commissioner for Forests, Dr Wal Gentle, defended yesterday the decision to write to the university, describing it as a normal administrative procedure.”

The IM of 14 May 1987 presented industry details in the following manner:

“**What the chip industry is worth to us.** Included in the press kit given to visiting media who came to Eden last week to look at forest-based industries was a sheet of facts relating to the Harris-Daishowa operation. The sheet included the following information: **Employment.** The chipmill employs directly 134 people with a further 455 in the bush...**Value of industry.** The annual value of the woodchip industry is: current export income - \$55 million; value added to the State - \$145 million; payments to the public sector in royalties, taxes, fuel taxes - \$25 million; NSW State royalties - \$7.2 million. **If new National Parks.** If the NSW Government takes the areas of the Tantawangalo and Coolangubra State Forest for new national parks, the job loss (with flow-on effect) will be 528. The loss in export income per year will be \$11 million and the total loss in regional economic output will be \$27 million a year.”

That article was followed by another in IM of 19 May 1987 tackling other major strands of the pro-woodchip argument:

“**Chip Facts.** Much of the controversy surrounding the woodchip industry seems to have been sparked off by the appearance of forest areas immediately after harvesting, and the fear that forests were being destroyed by harvesting. To a large extent the visual impact has been lessened by small coupe harvesting. Doubts about the forests surviving can readily be dispelled by a visit to the areas first harvesting [sic]. ...**No extinction threat.** The effects of harvesting on wildlife is another area of concern to some people. Findings by the Australian Museum indicate that no species of animal is likely to become extinct locally as a result of harvesting, though animal and bird species that depend on resting hollows could be disadvantaged by removal of large over-mature trees. However, numbers of these trees are earmarked by logging to remain precisely for this reason. Eighty per cent of the wildlife inhabits the corridors which are retained along the streams, and the Museum concluded that the animals are less affected by clear-felling (a method which is, incidentally, no longer in practice in the Eden area) than by bushfires which have ravished the area in the past.”

The anti-woodchip position showed a different basis for action, as was evident in a letter to the BDN of 29 May 1987 by Michael Hissink under the headline:

“**Woodchipping – an environmentalist’s viewpoint.** Editor: - The woodchip conflict is a conflict of values and [sic] stands alongside similar environmental issues as the Franklin Dam, rainforests...The real conflict between environmentalists and exploiters revolves around those jobs in our society which contribute to the ongoing destruction of the environment. ...A recent article in New Internationalist May 1987 said, ‘...How can we talk of “progress” when the main use of technology is to enable a few to hoard vast wealth and allow others to produce ever more efficient means for humanity’s self destruction.’ This is why the Eden woodchip issue will not go away as long as the industry continues to overexploit our native eucalypt forests in such a destructive fashion as it does at present. Yes, timber jobs are at risk but that is only because the timber industry allowed itself to get too big, and the fact that the Forestry Commission has admitted that we have been overcutting our forests all this time is proof of that.”

A pro-industry result appeared in the IM on 11 June 1987:

“Chip export licence will be renewed – Kerin. The federal Minister for Primary Industry, Mr John Kerin, has written to [the local federal member] Mr Jim Snow following the Canberra rally in support of the timber industry last Wednesday reiterating that the Commonwealth will renew the woodchip export licence.”

The blunt headline in the IM of 16 June 1987 showed the strong party political support for wood-chipping:

“Nationals support for chips unequivocal. Deputy leader of the National Party in NSW, Ian Armstrong last Thursday voiced his support for the timber industry in the State’s south-east and gave an unequivocal commitment on behalf of the Nationals to the continuity of this support for the woodchip industry not only in Eden but wherever they are established in Australia.”

The scale and complexity of the debate emerged from the Herald’s environment writer (SMH 24 June 1987) under the playfully ambiguous headline:

“Chipping away at the forests. Joseph Glascott looks at the case for extended national parks in the south-east forests of NSW...The future of the woodchip operations has created the biggest conservation controversy in NSW since the rainforest debate of the 1970s and early 1980s. The Japanese woodchip company Harris-Diashowa [*sic*] (Australia) has been logging in the Eden forests for 17 years. The company is now seeking renewal of its export licence for 20 years from 1989. Canberra will decide on the export licence, but the NSW government must decide first the timber resources it will make available from the State Forests. A decision by the State Cabinet is expected in the next three weeks. About once every two weeks, a ship loads 50,000 tonnes from the mountain of woodchips beside the mill on the southern shores of Twofold Bay across the water from the old, former whaling town, and sails to Japan. Each shipload represents hundreds of trees logged from the south-east forests and reduced to chips within seconds by the massive drum saws at the mill. The logs have been hauled in from State Forests in the woodchip concession area which covers a vast area from the Victorian border north to Bermagui and from the coast to the tablelands near Bombala. The battle for the south-east forests has developed into a bitter struggle. The town of Eden and its 3,500 people believe they are fighting for their survival...The conservation movement of NSW, which has combined in the South-East Forest Alliance, argue that the jobs of timber workers can best be preserved in the long-term by restricting over-cutting of the forests for woodchips...Wildlife authorities say studies have shown that parts of Coolangubra forest are important habitats of colonies of yellow-bellied gliders...Ms Heather Meek, who has studied the wildlife population says the gliders cannot survive clearfelling of forests for woodchipping. Koalas and many species of birds inhabit the south-east forests. One of the most important recent discoveries by naturalists of the National Parks and Wildlife Service was evidence of the long-footed potoroo which was thought to have become extinct in NSW...The reservation of Coolangubra and Tantawangalo [state forests] as parks would provide a corridor of south-east protected forests to protect tree species, plants and wildlife for posterity. Woodchip company executives, while claiming publicly that loss of the forests would endanger the woodchip mill, concede privately that the woodchipping would not be greatly affected.”

The main political themes became rapidly explicit, *e.g.* in the headlines found in the BDN of 17 July 1987:

“Woodchipping to be issue in Howard’s electorate. The conservation movement’s first response to John Howard’s ‘total support’ for woodchipping”.

Also on 17 July 1987, the BDN reported this matter, again as a federal issue:

“**‘Woodchip missile’ – Environmentalists attack Jim Snow.** Conservationists have attacked Jim Snow, Labor MP for Eden-Monaro who gained his seat through environmental preferences. Mr Snow has been described as ‘the woodchip missile likely to damage the NSW Government’s environmental reputation’. A spokesperson for the South Coast Forest Alliance, Mr Tony Fleming, said that during the Federal election campaign conservationists had turned out in large numbers to ensure that the preferences of the independent [sic] environmental candidate went to Mr Snow...’. We did not support Mr Snow’s woodchip sympathies which are out of step with the more enlightened attitudes of the Federal government,” Mr Fleming said.”

A new dimension – legal proceedings - appeared in the IM of 27 August 1987:

“**Injunction may cause contractor close-down.** Logging contractors working in the Nungatta State Forest, east of Eden may be forced to shut down operations, due to an injunction lodged in the Land and Environment Court in Sydney on Friday...The forests in question being brought before the Land and Environment Court on Friday, are outside the forest areas currently before the Heritage Commission for inclusion in the National Parks system.”

The pace of the political process was quickening as shown by the BDN of 28 August 1987:

“**Premier meets protesters.** The NSW Premier, Mr Barrie Unsworth, visited the Far South Coast this week to gain first hand information on the controversy surrounding the woodchip issue.”

There was also a recurring personal element to the public debate, such as in the letter by Vince Phillips, Secretary of the Woodchip Support Group, to the editor of the IM on 27 October 1987 under the heading:

“**Dunphy claims like laxative:** Sir, Milo Dunphy...accuses the Woodchip Support Group of wasting its resources on abuse, trivialization of the conservation cause and of frightening politicians. As secretary of the group I refute all three...Milo’s namesake carries the instruction – add two spoons to a mug of hot water. We don’t need to do anything to obtain a mild laxative on our region. The mug in question is already full.”

Criticism of politicians was becoming more public, e.g. BDN 17 November 1987:

“**‘Snow is wrong on woodchips’.** ‘Jim Snow...is wrong on the woodchip timber industry issue,’ a spokesperson for the South East Forest Alliance, Bega Local Committee, Mr Michael Hissink said.”

The looming NSW State election of early 1988 produced more concentrated political comments, e.g. IM 19 November 1987:

“**Eden woodchipping – election focus.** Premier Unsworth said today that the issue of National parks in NSW’s South East would be resolved before the State Election, according to the [statements by the] Total Environment Centre.”

In direct contrast was the position of the state opposition in the BDN 11 December 1987:

“**Griener [sic, correct spelling is Greiner] promises woodchip solution.** The leader of the NSW opposition, Mr Nick Griener [sic], promised a ‘Sensible compromise solution’ on the woodchipping issue if a Liberal-National Party coalition was voted to power in the State election.”

The year 1987 was marked by conflict between the pro-woodchippers who were concerned about jobs and economic prosperity and anti-woodchip conservationists who wanted two state forests (Tantawangalo and Coolangubra) to be reserved from logging and dedicated as national parks. The press articles gave considerable detail about the complexity of the matter and thereby allowed a diligent reader to arrive at a map- and numbers-based understanding of the main issues, which were to persist throughout the debate. A subsidiary theme considered by both sides was wildlife conservation, although with starkly different positions adopted. The political debate involved both state and federal politicians, mostly at a senior level, and the different parties held quite different attitudes to any additional restrictions on logging. Players in the debate made personal attacks on those with opposing views, and both sides used tough tactics in dealing with science and scientists, with an attack on the EIS writers and a scientist during the year. The substance of the science and the EIS was not reported, but the credibility of the scientists involved was severely challenged. Minor themes included aesthetic considerations, the sustainability of the industry, the role of the legal system and government departments, particularly the Forestry Commission of NSW and the Commonwealth's Heritage Commission. The range of fauna mentioned was narrow, with mainly the large and attractive animals such as koalas and yellow-bellied gliders gaining attention, while the concept of extinction, particularly in relation to long-footed potoroos, appeared as a dominant concern. This reflected both the limited public knowledge of fauna and the symbolic role that fauna played in the public debate. With hindsight, the least prophetic view was put by the local state member, John Akister, who said "There appears to be no good reason why the Federal and State Governments cannot speedily resolve any outstanding matters", while the insight from Harry Recher, who said that "the whole woodchip operation should never have been allowed to go ahead in the late 1960s because the scientific research base was so poor", provided a much better guide to grasping the deep-seated issues that have stoked this enduring debate.

4 1988

A record number of articles on the woodchip debate was collected in 1988, with almost all of them concentrated in the first six months of the year. The rate during this period was greater than one article per day. What follows is a selection of articles that reflect the main elements of the debate as it intensified in early 1988.

The IM of 21 January 1988 was blunt in its headline:

"Local recession forecast. 'In what could be the most disastrous decision this State Government could make, jobs, people, and towns will go if the decision to remove 60-120,000 ha of forest resource from the timber industry is made,' Russell Smith, Liberal Candidate for the State seat of Bega said..."

The IM of 29 January 1988 carried a tough political message:

"Jim Snow right behind timber industry. ...On January 4, Mr Snow [local federal member] sent to all NSW State Minister [sic] the following telegram: 'Please do not accept any proposals for Eden-Monaro timber industries which will remove more than 10,000 hectares from Tantawangalo and Coolangubra and other forest areas unless recommended by NSW Forestry as unsuitable or undesirable for logging'."

The debate sounded like a battle in the SMH of 29 January 1988:

"Greenies triumph over loggers." By Joseph Glascott and Mark Coultan. "The conservation lobby was victorious in State Cabinet yesterday when it was decided to protect up to 80,000 ha in national parks in the south-east woodchip logging region west of Eden."

The local reaction was hostile, as was apparent in the IM 2 February 1988:

“Black Friday for forest industries. 1988 is more likely to be remembered by many people in the south-east of N.S.W., not for the bi-centenary [sic], but for the “votes v. jobs” decision by Labour [sic] Premier Barrie Unsworth and his cabinet in which the forest industries of the region were dealt a crucial blow. Last Friday’s announcement by Mr. Unsworth took away more State Forest than anyone had dreamed of, even more than the greenies had asked for.”

The BDN of 9 February 1988 carried a set of figures:

“662 jobs will go. Figures released recently showed that 662 jobs would go, not the 55 claimed by Premier Unsworth, as a result of the recent national parks decision, the NSW Forest Products Association has claimed.”

A counterclaim was published in the IM of 18 February 1988:

“Towamba association rebuffs timber claims. ...A spokesperson for the [Towamba Valley Protection] Association said the campaign of cynical misinformation by forest industry interests has forced the TVCPA to enter the public debate in an attempt to put the record straight. ‘The claim by Dr Hurditch of Forest Products Association that the creation of new National Parks will cost \$55 million is absurd. The Harris Daishowa Australia EIS says the woodchip industry generates \$40 million per year,’ the spokesperson said.”

The political tension was rising as was evident in the same edition of the IM of 18 February 1988:

“Fighting for their livelihoods. The Eden-Monaro Survival committee, formed from representatives of the business community, bush and timber mill employees, logging contractors and trucking operators, from the towns of Eden, Bombala and Nimmitabel, met in Eden on Monday 15th February, to plan a strategy to defeat the Unsworth Labor Government at the coming NSW State elections.”

Internal political tensions emerged in the piece by Dennis Shanahan, SMH of 20 February 1988:

“Forest decision splits cabinet. The State Government’s decision to establish 80,000 hectares of national park on the NSW South Coast was carried by only one vote in Cabinet because of disillusionment with the environmental lobby.”

The pro-conservation position was clear in the BDN of 26 February 1988:

“Conservationists praise Unsworth decision. The South East Forest Alliance, Bega Local Committee, has congratulated Mr Unsworth...**Employment** Mr Hissink said figures provided by the industry exaggerating the loss of timber jobs belied the fact that the timber industry had been declining...”

A letter to the SMH of 2 March 1988, by “Steve Mackay and eight others, Copeland, Beecroft” employed the authority of science in the debate:

“Scientific studies challenged. Sir: Statements attributed to Mr Milo Dunphy of the Total Environment Centre (Herald, February 18) should not pass unchallenged. Mr Dunphy claims the existence of ‘scientific studies’ which show that forests in the woodchip zone of south-eastern NSW were mismanaged and in danger of destruction.” In the same article he is quoted as saying that the woodchip company “is destroying the south-east forests”. “We are scientists specializing in hydrology and erosion research, plant ecology and animal ecology. We have

worked in Eden's forests for a number of years and have published our studies in scientific journals...we are dismayed by the disparity between the picture conveyed by his statements and the situation as we know it...Our results and observations do not support Mr Dunphy's dire predictions...There is nothing in our experience to indicate that the forests, their soils, their streams or their fauna are being destroyed or are in imminent danger of destruction."

Also on 2 March 1988, the SMH carried the following story by Pilita Clark:

"Howl of protest from South Coast timber industry. ...Mrs Loydell, or raving Robyn as she is known to the people of the South Coast, is about to star in an election advertisement for the recently-formed Eden-Monaro Survival Group – a body dedicated to the reversal of the Unsworth Government's controversial decision to turn 80,200 hectares of South Coast forest into national parks."

The SMH of 5 March 1988 set the tone of the dispute:

"Echoes of the Franklin in forest showdown. Michael Cordell finds both sides in the timber debate sharpening their axes for a war in the woods. Some greenies have spoken of blockades to stop logging...The fate of the south-east forests will be the major green issue of the State election campaign...The crucial difference between the two political sides is their policy on the south-east forests. Labor will gazette the 80,200 hectares, while the coalition will allow logging and woodchipping to continue."

The debate took another turn when a legal matter, mentioned the previous year, was concluded (BDN 8 March 1988):

"Court rules suspension of logging. Significant effect on environment – Judge. The NSW Land and Environment Court has [ordered] a suspension of logging in the area near Eden on the far South Coast pending consideration of an environmental impact statement. Justice Hemmings said in his judgement that harvesting activities and associated roading and pre-logging burning were likely to 'significantly affect the environment'. He ordered such activities to cease until an environmental impact statement could be considered and activities affecting the environment taken into account...Environmentalists have applauded the decision... [which] affects 50,000 hectares inland from Eden...The Minister for Planning and Environment, Mr Carr, said: 'This decision leaves the Opposition in the ludicrous position of advocating open slather in our forests when the Land and Environment Court says that there are enormous environmental issues at stake'. The Opposition spokesman on Environment, Mr Tim Moore, said the Opposition's policy to avoid this type of litigation, was to improve the standard of environmental reporting in forest management plans by the Forestry Commission."

Many details of this court judgment were presented in the IM of 22 March 1988:

"The Towamba Valley Catchment Protection Association has won it's [*sic*] case in the Land and Environment Court...Judge Hemmings stated in his judgement released on March 4 that 'The hearing has taken 25 days' and included 'a three day view [*sic*] of all relevant areas and activities. An enormous amount of detailed written and oral, and technical and scientific evidence as to impact and adequacy of data and available research has been tendered and explained by a large member [*sic*] of highly trained and experienced experts' and 'I have carefully considered all the evidence...'. He continued 'In my opinion, by its very nature the integrated logging activity, whether on a local or regional viewpoint, has inevitably a significant effect of converting the environment from that of an old forest to that of a different and regenerated forest. The forest must be fragmented and flora is likely to be reduced in species and diversity...I am satisfied that as a consequence of the nature of the activity it is likely that

many species of fauna will be adversely affected by the current logging operations and this effect is likely to be compounded by fire...I am also satisfied that if the current logging operations continue for a long term it is likely that arboreal populations could significantly change, particularly if regrowth forests fail to provide adequate habitats for birds and mammals...Whilst it is apparent that tree dwelling birds and mammals are not evenly distributed in the region, I am satisfied that existing management prescriptions do not guarantee the maintenance of composition and description [*sic*]...I am also satisfied that regular burning as distinct from wildfire is likely to affect the diversity of plant and animal communities and their habitat to a significant extent, particularly in the long term.”

On 31 March 1988, a SMH article by Bernard Lagan considered the aftermath of the NSW State election on 19 March:

“**Loggers had a hand in Unsworth’s downfall.** A timber industry analysis of country electorate results shows that forestry issues were decisive in the Unsworth Government’s defeat.”

The IM of 5 April also reflects this view:

“**Greiner thanks timber communities.** NSW’s new premier, Mr Nick Greiner, has personally thanked the State’s timber communities for their vital support during the election campaign...Mr Greiner contacted the Eden-Monaro survival group in South-East NSW to congratulate them on their efforts.”

The debate was not abandoned after the election, as was evident in a letter to the editor of SMH on 28 April 1988 by Sue Salmon, Australian Conservation Foundation:

“**Timber quota versus responsibility.** ‘Sir: The Minister for Natural Resources, Mr Causley, is in direct conflict with the commitment given to the electorate and the environment movement... “that all developments likely to significantly affect the environment will be subject to environmental impact statements and the consequent public participation and review process”. Mr Causley wants to exempt the Forestry Commission from its obligations in this regard. He is reported as saying: “I think there are ways to get around this act” (Herald, April 22).’”

Despite the change of government, the matter continued to be raised locally, as was apparent in the BDN of 3 May 1988:

“**Smith says the forest industries are still threatened.** The forest industries again find themselves under threat despite the defeat of the Labor Party in NSW election of March 19, the [State] member for Bega, Mr Russell Smith, said last week. This follows a ruling by the Land and Environment Court last month in which the Forestry Commission was ordered to stop logging in certain areas until an Environmental Impact Statement was prepared.”

In the aftermath of the NSW State election federal-state issues were canvassed in the press, such as in the IM 19 May 1988:

Science and scientists were also under the spotlight in the election aftermath, as noted by Bernard Lagan in the SMH of 25 May 1988:

“**Scientist gagged on woodchip threat to Eden wildlife.** A senior government scientist who believes the controversial woodchipping debate in southern NSW threatens the survival of some animal species was prevented by superiors from speaking at last week’s ANZAAS scientific conference and talking to the media. The scientist, Mr Dan Lunney, the head of the National Parks and Wildlife Service’s environmental survey and research branch, was told by the department’s director, Mr John Whitehouse, that he was not to deliver a speech on Friday

detailing the findings of a survey. The Liberal Party pledged during the election campaign to continue woodchipping on the South Coast. The former Labor Government's promise to end the operations and to create extended national parks has been blamed for playing a large part in its election defeat...The ANZAAS registration documents distributed weeks before the conference said Mr Lunney was scheduled to contribute a paper entitled 'Management of wildlife in the Eden woodchip forests'. As well, delegates were provided last week with a brief summary of Mr Lunney's speech. The summary said: 'The studies showed that many species are adversely affected by the current logging operations, an effect which was compounded by fire and drought. The decline in their populations will continue, possibly to extinction, unless there are major changes to current logging operations...Mr Whitehouse said...he strongly encouraged the department's scientists to publish their material.'

In case there was any lingering doubt on the resolution of the election, the article in the IM of 7 June 1988 laid that to rest:

"NSW timber industry policy quite clear. The New South Wales government has made a clear decision on the future of the timber industry in the south east region. Logging will continue in the area following the reversal of the former government's decision to extend National Parks. Mr Russell Smith, member for Bega, made this statement, this week, when commenting on press reports attributed to Mr Tony Fleming of the Australian Conservation Foundation. Mr Fleming had apparently expressed concern about logging in Egan's Peak area."

The issues evident in 1987 became much sharper in 1988, particularly with clearer divisions emerging in the debate on the environment versus local jobs and wealth. These issues – woodchipping, national parks, state forests and forest management – had moved into the state political fray as was evident from the reports in the SMH. Both sides of the debate used strong language and the gap between them widened, as became apparent from the succession of articles stating the position of the two sides. Such words as "debate", "woodchip", "national park" and "state forest" were common. The primary issue was the clear-cut division on whether the 80,200 ha of State Forest, identified by the Unsworth Government to be dedicated as national parks, should remain open to woodchipping, which was the position adopted by the Liberal and National Parties while in opposition prior to the state election. In some, but not all, newspaper reports, the election win by the coalition of the Liberal and National Parties appeared to decide that matter.

The sleeper from 1987 that emerged as an issue just before the election was the judgment in the Land and Environment Court. The consequence of that decision itself become a matter of political contest after the election. A primary observation that can be drawn from the newspaper reports is that they are an important source of the ideas raised during the conflict, and of how the conflict shaped the outcomes.

A minor theme that emerged was on scientific matters, when science and scientists appeared in the letter to the SMH by Steve Mackay, in the findings of Justice Hemmings, and in newspaper reports of a scientist being gagged. The common thread in these three scientific cases is that each involved conflict: the letter was presented as a rebuttal to Milo Dunphy; the matter in the Land and Environment Court was a formal legal resolution of a conflict; and the issue of an officer of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service being prevented from speaking at a public scientific conference remained unexplained in the press. The science in question by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service has been published (e.g. Lunney 1987; Lunney and Ashby 1987; Lunney and O'Connell 1988; Lunney and Leary 1988, 1989; Lunney *et al.* 1987; 1988; 1989a,b; 1991), along with research with a regional perspective (e.g. Lunney 1989; Lunney and Matthews 2002; Lunney *et al.* 1997, 1998, 2001). Further, both Lunney and Whitehouse reflected on the public and legal presentation of zoology in a 1990 forum *Zoology in Court*, which was published and also included another major participant (Harry Recher) in the public debate over woodchips and science (Lunney 1992). Such episodes of intense conflict carry a caution for science managers, who are likely to face fierce political debate when scientific questions on the conservation of forest fauna are asked,

investigated and reported, or when answers to questions of impact are sought. The author has presented a variety of views on how to set and answer scientific questions on the conservation of forest fauna (Lunney 1991, 2004b).

There was more scientific information presented in 1988 than in 1987, and these two years themselves bore witness to more science reporting than arose in Part I of the debate, or in the remainder of the period of Part II. However, the press was not reporting science, it was reporting conflict about science, and the emergence of any science was a by-product of the conflict. Nevertheless, the presentation of details of the findings of Justice Hemmings in a local newspaper in relation to the impact of logging and fire was striking and it could be read as the most impartial statement that ever appeared in the newspapers in 35 years. Needless to say, the findings by the judge did not resolve the political issue at the heart of the public woodchip debate in the lead up to the election, and that conflict remained polarized and intense at the outset of the term of the next State government.

The question of woodchipping was concentrated on State Forests. The wood resource was therefore a state matter and since the land was Crown land, it was within the authority of the state to transfer such land to a different tenure, such as to a national park. The area and location of all Crown land transfers from 1968, at the inception of the Eden woodchip industry, to 2002, after the conclusion of the Eden Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) Process, has been given in detail by Lunney and Matthews (2002). There is little doubt that the focus of the debate in the lead up to the state election on 19 March 1988 was on whether various forests should be deemed to be state forests or national parks. This represents a black and white difference in the way the forests are managed, with no intermediate positions. This was the sharpest division in the woodchip conflict, with the disputed forests representing quite different things – renewable wood resource or environments conserved in perpetuity – to the two sides. It should be noted that there was also a difference of opinion within the NSW State Labor government prior to the election, as evident from the report in the SMH on the close vote on the matter. There were no reported divisions on the pro-woodchipping side. The public debate faded in the latter half of 1988, but the state election did not put the matter to rest. The events of the next few years bear witness to a continuing debate, with some unexpected turns.

5 1989

A major turn of events in 1989 was the involvement of the federal government in the escalating issue of woodchipping in the National Estate forests of south-east NSW. Since much of the substance of the debate has been covered in earlier sections of this paper, the selection of newspaper items for 1989 aimed to examine the scale of the debate and its complex policy and political dimensions. The national scope of the debate made it newsworthy for the SMH, which carried the major elements of the conflict. The year had barely started before the contest began with a piece by Paul Bailey, environment writer for the SMH, on 2 January 1989:

“Logging plan may face long delay. Plans by Harris-Daishowa to log the Coolangubra Forest in the State’s south-east could be delayed for another year while a report on the wilderness value of the area is completed... Meanwhile, the NSW Labor Party is distancing itself from the Federal Government’s decision to renew Harris-Daishowa’s woodchip export licence for the Coolangubra and Tantawangalo forests...”

A shift in mood became perceptible by 3 January 1989 in an SMH piece by Malcolm Brown:

“Jobs at risk over delay, says logging company. ...Mr Frank Whitelaw, forestry manager for Harris-Daishowa, said any delay in logging operations would cause ‘a pretty fierce reaction’ in the Eden district, where about 2,000 people would have their employment in jeopardy.”

Confusion arose over the decision to renew the woodchip export licence, as reflected in the SMH piece by Paul Bailey on 4 January 1989:

“Forests decision: survey ignored. A key survey by the National Parks and Wildlife Service calling for the NSW south-east forests to be protected was not taken into account by the Federal Government when it agreed to renew the woodchip licence of the Japanese company Harris-Daishowa. The confidential report, dated June, 1987, said the areas now threatened – Coolangubra, Tantawangalo and Egan Peaks – had plants and animals not adequately protected in existing national parks or reserves. The area had at least 10 endangered species of mammals.”

The issue had intensified by 6 January 1989, as evident from a piece in the SMH by Mike Secombe:

“Govt to revise woodchip licence. Canberra: The Federal Government is likely to press for major changes to an export woodchip licence for the NSW south-east forests in the face of mounting criticism that it ignored a key report on the issue...The Federal Government claims the report was not provided by the NSW Government, despite two requests from the Department of Environment.”

In the postscript section of the SMH of 9 January 1989, letters’ editor Jennie Curtin provided insights into both the volume and the tone:

“The decision by the Federal Government to grant a 15-year woodchip licence to Harris-Daishowa provoked a very quick response last week – more than 50 letters in just four days, and all but two against the move...If environment rates number one among readers, cricket runs a close second.”

Differences of opinion within the federal Labor government surfaced in SMH on 18 January 1989 in a piece by Paul Bailey and Mike Secombe:

“Logging goes ahead as Federal advice ignored. The Federal Minister for Resources, Senator Cook, has ignored environmental advice that there be a moratorium on logging in two key areas of NSW south-east forests. Advice given to Senator Cook on Monday by the Minister for the Environment, Senator Richardson, argued that logging operations should not proceed in the Coolangubra, the Tantawangalo Water Supply, Egan Peaks and Yowaka Reserve.”

The matter was also alive as a state government issue in the SMH 18 January 1989 in a piece by Paul Bailey and Luis M. Garcia:

“Greiner: no more land for greenies. No new wilderness areas or national parks will be created in the forests of south-east NSW, the Premier, Mr Greiner, declared yesterday. Mr Greiner’s statement has pre-empted a National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) report on the contentious Coolangubra Forest and outraged conservationists.”

An extended piece by Milton Cockburn in the SMH of 20 January 1989 pinpointed the dilemma faced by the federal government:

“Greens failing to see the woods for the trees. How many of those in favour of protection would be prepared to switch their votes to Labor if it took the courageous decision to stop woodchipping in NSW is unknown, but few believe the percentage is high...Cabinet is now very receptive to what is Peter Cook’s most powerful argument: economics.”

The issue had reached the point where the lead editorial in the SMH of 23 January 1989 commented:

“The longer view on forests. Impatient at the prospect of yet another round with the conservationists, Mr Greiner firmly assures us NSW will have no new wilderness areas and no new national parks. If he hoped that would be the last word on the subject, he will be disappointed. The conservation debate is far from over. The present confused skirmish between the Federal and NSW Governments over the precise effect of the new Harris-Daishowa concession is mere sideplay, a taste of things to come...Some questions – such as the true economic benefit of logging, as against conservation – are only beginning to be properly debated. Their answers are not clear. Certainly Mr Greiner’s firm assurances against new national parks and wilderness are premature.”

The response was immediate, as was evident in a letter to the SMH by Nick Greiner on 26 January 1989:

“Greening and the Greiner Government. Sir: In your editorial (Herald, January 23), you assert that I have stated that NSW will have no new wilderness areas and no new national parks. This is untrue and far from the case...With respect to the south-east forests of NSW, my ministers and I have made it clear for four years that we would not take or accept any decision which threatened the social cohesion and economic livelihood of the timber communities in south-eastern NSW. We indicated prior to the March 1988 election that we would not proceed with the national park proposals in that area proposed by the then Unsworth Government.”

The next steps in this matter appeared in the piece by Luis M. Garcia SMH on 23 February 1989:

“Battle looms over forest decision. The NSW conservation movement has been put on a ‘war footing’ following a decision by the State Government not to declare the controversial Coolangubra Forest a wilderness area.”

The BDN of 24 February 1989 carried the debate in clear language with two headings side by side:

“Coolangubra to be logged” and **“Environmentalists will set up resistance camp”**.

The piece by Peter Fray and Bernard Lagan of SMH 28 February 1989 showed that the issue was volatile:

“20 held on rainforest protest. It was a day of confrontation both in and outside the hardwood rainforests of the State’s far south-west [*sic*] today. At 9.45 am, 20 conservationists, including the prominent anti-nuclear activist Dr Helen Caldicott, were arrested by a team of 50 police officers in the NSW Forestry Commission-controlled Nullica State Forest, north of Eden.”

The tactical shifts take on an overtly political dimension, as was apparent in the headline in an SMH piece by Paul Bailey on 3 March 1989:

“Greenies say it’s time Causley went”.

The conflict took another turn, as described by Paul Bailey in the SMH of 10 March 1989:

“Brawl over NPWS. Two State ministers are involved in a brawl over the role of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The Minister for Natural Resources, Mr Causley, has written to the Minister for the Environment, Mr Moore, complaining that the NPWS is ignoring the Government’s policies on national parks and forestry...Mr Causley’s letter reveals he was

particularly upset by the NPWS submission on the Forestry Commission's Environmental Impact Statement on the south-east forests. However, Mr Moore defended the role of the NPWS in his reply to Mr Causley."

The conflict in the forest continued, as reported by Peter Holmes in the SMH on 28 March 1989:

"Logging opponents use cars to hamper arrests. ...About 250 conservationists began the protest early yesterday morning in the National Estate Forest, which is about 60 kilometres south-west of Bega. Police made 87 arrests for disobeying instructions not to enter restricted areas."

The drama was also being played out at the chipmill, as recorded by Paul Bailey in the SMH on 29 March 1989:

"Govt urged to halt taking of timber. Harris-Daishowa is clearly in breach of its woodchip export licence and the Federal Government should move immediately to suspend its operations, according to Senator Irina Dunn. The NSW Nuclear Disarmament senator and 60 other people were arrested yesterday in an anti-woodchip demonstration involving 450 people outside the Japanese company's woodchip mill at Eden."

The language of the headlines reflected the growing tensions, as seen in the SMH piece of 4 April 1989 by Paul Bailey:

"Policy to destroy wilderness alleged. The NSW Forestry Commission has set out deliberately to destroy the wilderness values of the Coolangubra and Genoa areas of the south-east forests, according to conservationists. The claim is based on a leaked letter from the commission's secretary, Mr John Yarwood, to the director of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Mr John Whitehouse, which said that in the commission's view the area did not deserve wilderness designation...'Although the Forestry Commission contends that wilderness identification is not justified in their present state, the roading and harvesting intended will put this issue beyond doubt,' he said. Mr Yarwood argued in his letter that the areas had been modified significantly by roads, logging and human activity. Flora and fauna had been 'profoundly affected' by wildfires and populations of feral animals...The Australian Conservation Foundation's Sue Salmon said the leaked letter proved that the commission was 'hell-bent on the destruction of the high conservation values of these forests.'"

The conflict continued to involve the federal government, as was evident in the piece by Paul Cleary and Paul Bailey in the SMH of 11 April 1989:

"Govt retaliates over logging. The Minister for Resources, Senator Cook, has put a temporary ban on Harris-Daishowa exporting woodchips from timber cut at National Estate areas of the south-east forests."

Again, the Commonwealth was involved, as noted by Margo Kingston in the SMH on 17 April 1989:

"Disputed forests for heritage list. Canberra: The Australian Heritage Commission has thrown its weight behind the fight to save forests in south-eastern NSW by deciding to list the Coolangubra and Tantawangalo Creek catchment area as part of the National Estate...Mr Causley yesterday ruled out any agreement with the Federal Government, and condemned the commission's decision."

Wildlife gained a rare mention with an exceptionally rare animal, as reported by Paul Bailey in the SMH on 20 April 1989:

“Extinction fears for tiny roo. Conservationists have called on the Premier to intervene in logging operations in the south-east forests to save Australia’s mammal, the long-footed potoroo, from extinction in NSW...Dr Harry Recher, a former principal scientist at the Australian Museum who worked closely with the Forestry Commission developing wildlife conservation management plans for the south-east, said this type of potoroo was extremely rare in numbers and distribution. He argues the only way to properly protect wildlife is by declaring the areas national parks.”

The local press portrayed the conflict with dramatic headlines in the BDN of 21 April 1989 reading:

“Richardson blames Causley”, “Logging of the National Estate forests ‘not on’”, and “Jobs claims ‘nonsense [sic]’”.

The conflict continued within the region as reported by Paul Bailey in the SMH on 25 April 1989:

“Another 133 arrests in the south-east forests.”

The issue remained alive locally as noted in two items in the IM of 25 May 1989:

“More arrests. A further 25 forestry protestors were arrested in Nullica Forest on Tuesday. Former rock star, Sting, was present in the area at the time but was not arrested.”

The next piece on the same page was:

“South East forests proposal. Mr Causley, the NSW Minister for Natural Resources, had rejected a Commonwealth proposal that, on the best and widest advice possible, provides a fair and technically feasible compromise solution to the conflict over the South-eastern forests of NSW.”

A new dimension entered the debate on 27 May 1989 in the SMH in a piece by Paul Bailey:

“Timber firm attacked over dispute. The Australian Timber Workers’ union has strongly attacked the Eden woodchip company Harris-Daishowa, accusing it of causing the dispute over the south-east forests and using its workers as a pawns in its own political manoeuvrings.”

The political stage was being reset by 31 May 1989 according to Philip Clark in the SMH:

“Greiner to request more logging talks. Mr Greiner has agreed to direct the Minister for Natural Resources, Mr Causley, to reopen negotiations with his Federal counterpart, Senator Cook, on the future logging in the State’s south-east forests.”

The conflict expanded, as may be seen by Anne Howell’s piece in the SMH of 15 June 1989, to encompass artists:

“Wild Art upholds forests. Exhibitions. John Coburn, Mike Parr and Janet Laurance are among the Sydney artists contributing to *Wild Art*, an exhibition of works that oppose wood-chipping in South Coast forests.”

The editorial in the BDN 16 June 1989 offered a number of observations on recent aspects of the conflict as it was played out locally:

“The politics of forest products. The withdrawal of Operation Redgum police from Eden combined with the onset of below-freezing point weather in the South East may work to change the direction of the current dispute between conservationists and the timber industry over logging of National Estate forests. It seems to have finally dawned on State Government that conservationists entered restricted areas of the forests are doing so with the express purpose of getting arrested. In doing so they are drawing the attention of the entire country, and indeed the world, to their protest...The cost of Operation Redgum so far is nearing \$1 million and the time and cost involved in prosecuting nearly 700 protestors has also been enormous... There can be no doubt that the entire issue is political – it is not just a ‘loggers versus greensies’ dispute.”

The language of the dispute became firmer on the state-federal front judging by the headline to the piece by Luis M. Garcia and Paul Bailey in the SMH of 7 July 1989:

“NSW Govt warned on south-east logging. The NSW Minister for Natural Resources, Mr Causley, has been warned that if no agreement is reached on the logging of south-east forests by the end of the week, the Federal Government will have to look at ‘some other way’ of solving the dispute.”

A week later the story had shifted, as reported by Mike Seccombe in the SMH of 14 July 1989:

“Most logging in south-east deferred. Canberra: After six months of wrangling, the Federal and NSW Governments finally reached agreement last night to suspend logging in most of the south-east National Estate Forests...During the six-month period, a joint Commonwealth-NSW scientific committee of three nominees from each side will undertake biological studies in the Eden area.”

The lead editorial in the SMH of 15 July 1989 commented:

“The logging compromise. The agreement between the Commonwealth and the NSW Governments allows the logging of 9 per cent of the National Estate areas of the Eden forests for six months while biological studies of the area are undertaken by a joint Commonwealth-NSW scientific committee. This represents a compromise built on compromise.”

The public debate continued at the national level as noted by Mike Seccombe in the SMH of 26 July 1989:

“Forest powers threat to NSW. Canberra: The Federal Government is prepared to use its corporations power under the Constitution to override NSW on logging the south-east forests, the Minister for the Environment, Senator Richardson, warned yesterday.”

The dispute continued in the SMH of 27 July 1989 in a piece by Paul Bailey:

“We’ll log forests, insists Causley. The NSW Minister for Natural Resources, Mr Causley, has committed the State Government to logging the protected National Estate areas of the south-east whatever the outcome of the current studies. Conservationists are outraged at the declaration...”

The dispute in the forest threw up new developments as was apparent from the article by Malcolm Brown in the SMH of 14 November 1989:

“New bid to check logging violence. Police held an emergency meeting with members of the South-East Forest Alliance at Bega last night to head off an escalation of the violence which has in the past two days seen mass protests, arrests, banner burning and shooting.”

The BDN of 28 November 1989 carried an article to address the matter:

“Forest peace plan. Business people and conservationists have released a peace plan which they claim will save the South East forests without job losses. The article on the peace plan is contributed by the Australian Business for the Environment and the South East Forest Alliance.”

Another species of fauna appears in the debate in a piece by Mike Seccombe in the SMH of 11 December 1989:

“Koala area ‘illegally’ logged. The Forestry Commission logged one of the few remaining areas of koala habitat in the southern forests of NSW, in breach of its own Environmental Impact Statement and the Forestry Act, according to documents given to the *Herald*. The commission then denied to the Federal and State Ministers responsible that the logging had taken place... NSW Independent Senator Irina Dunn yesterday used the report as ammunition in calling for a full commission of enquiry into the Forestry Commission of NSW (FCNSW).”

By the end of the year, the Commonwealth government was centre stage and the negotiating position had shifted, as evident in Mike Seccombe’s piece in SMH on 16 December 1989:

“Greens pressure Govt on forests. Canberra: Australia’s environment groups increased pressure on the Federal Government yesterday to protect south-east Australia’s forests in a move which would pre-empt a Government-sponsored inquiry. Their call for the Government to immediately use its constitutional power over corporations co-incided with the first public hearing by the Government’s Resource Assessment Commission (RAC) into the future of Australia’s forests and forest industries.”

Two days before Christmas the issue had not abated as was evident in the piece by Mike Seccombe in the SMH on 23 December 1989:

“Federal push to stop forest road. Canberra: The Federal Government is expected to push hard for an end to construction of the controversial Wog Way road in the south-east forests of NSW, following the release of a scientific report on the area yesterday. The interim report of the joint scientific committee set up by the NSW and Federal Governments said logging activities would not necessarily threaten rare or endangered species, but nor did it endorse the resumption of logging in any of the 91 per cent of the National Estate area which it investigated. And after talks this week between conservation leaders, the Prime Minister, Mr Hawke, the Minister for the Environment, Senator Richardson, and the Minister for Resources, Senator Cook, it appears the Federal government’s position against logging is firming...The report adds that reserving selected areas within the production forest, using buffer zones and implementing management practices that enhance regeneration or reproduction of species, ‘may be effective conservation measures’. But existing management practices by the NSW Forestry Commission did not allow enough time between logging cycles for regeneration, or make enough provision for animal habitat needs. There was a need for a more co-ordinated management approach to the whole region, including not only National Estate areas but all lands.”

The year 1989 marked an escalation of the debate which had been mounting for two years. Between 1987-1989, the matter become much more than a local battle, and local members of parliament were at the sharp end of the criticism. By the end of 1989, the Prime Minister had become

involved, along with the Premier of NSW and various ministers in both the NSW and Federal Governments. They had become the main players, but not the only players. The protestors, the luminaries who were arrested, the Independent senator, Irina Dunn, the alliance of the conservation bodies, the forest workers, the timber union, the forest industry members, the police, and a number of government departments and scientific committees, all played a part. The newspaper journalists were busy, and editorials were forthcoming. At one point the issue had eclipsed the cricket in the ratings battle for letters to the editor. In short, 1989 was an arresting year in the Eden woodchip debate.

Details of the conservation issues were thinly reported. Two animals - the long-footed potoroo and the koala - gained specific mention, but then only in the context of conflict over logging plans and operations. The values of National Estate areas became a pivotal point in the dispute, and the importance of the Commonwealth in this matter was pronounced. The declaration of national parks is a state function, but the identification of values is not limited to any particular level of government. The focal issue in 1987 and early 1988 was whether particular forests should be national parks or not. It appeared that this was lost on the popular vote when the Unsworth government lost office, but by 1989 there was no sense that this view was accepted by the conservation side of the debate. The question of which areas should be national parks and reserves remained the hot topic for 1989.

The tensions in the debate were evident between the ministers for natural resources and the ministers for the environment at both the state and federal level. This clash of values was also apparent in the bureaucracies, with the following examples: the emergence of a confidential report by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service that caused problems for both the state and federal governments; criticisms of the way the NSW Forestry Commission was managing the forests, especially the Wog Way road into Coolangubra; and criticism of the fact that the National Parks and Wildlife Service commented on the Environmental Impact Statement by the Forestry Commission. The creation of a joint Commonwealth-NSW scientific committee was a new development. Its interim report carried new ideas on management, and most importantly it put management options before the public and thereby gave a new option to the logging-national park stand-off. It also put forward the idea that such an approach should be regional, and not confined to one land tenure. The difficulty with this report was common to the difficulty found with the other reports, especially the confidential report of June 1987, and that is the way that science is managed. There appears to be some confusion as to the purpose of reports and the use of science within them. If a report looks as though it has been prepared for political purposes, such as a confidential report, it undermines the science. A central tenet of good science is the process of independent review. This is either peer review via an independent editor, or a book review after the book has been published. Without fearless, independent comment, any reports are weakened. One could conclude that science played an increasingly important role in 1989 as evidenced by the preparation of the reports, but that 1989 was not a good year for sound science management in that reports were chosen, rather than standard scientific review procedures, to direct the science.

6 1990

Much of the woodchip debate in 1990 revolved around the same issues as in previous years, but although the volume had abated somewhat, its intensity remained and it expanded nationally. The selection of newspaper articles for 1990 concentrated on examining new issues and reporting changes in the political sphere, as well as keeping a sharp eye on the place of science.

The strong language continued in the press, as was apparent from the piece by Milton Cockburn on 20 January 1990 in the SMH:

“Govt puts brake on woodchip company. Canberra: The Federal Government has refused to grant an export licence to the Harris-Daishowa woodchip company for 1990 and instead has renewed its licence for six weeks only...In another development yesterday, conservation

groups accused the NSW Minister for Natural Resources, Mr Causley, of stacking the committee examining the biological resources of the national estate forests...’ Mr Causley well knows that five of the six members of the committee are foresters and three of these are employed by the NSW Forestry Commission over which he has direct control,’ the convenor of SEFA, Mr Jeff Angel, said.”

With the caption to a dramatic photo reading: **“Eugene Collins and Roland Breckwoldt take to horseback to protest logging of the Tantawangalo State Forest”**, the extended piece by Malcolm Brown in the SMH of 20 January 1990 read as follows:

“Horsemen of the Logging Apocalypse. With an election close, the last thing the Hawke Government wants is an environmental row over the South-East forests, but it will be difficult to avoid - especially if any more protestors volunteer to go on hunger strike. Malcolm Brown visited both camps and, in the final of his two-part series, reports that the loggers are finding themselves increasingly besieged. Tony Howe’s view is that ‘the regenerated areas have lost nothing, but they are different from the original’. Mr Howe, as south-east regional forester with the NSW Forestry Commission, is in the hot seat of the State’s bitterest environmental controversy. ‘Our object is to spread the impact of logging over as wide an area as possible, to ensure we are only logging what forests can maintain.’ His basic argument is that trees can be felled on a long-term rotation basis – that is, doing over each area once every 40 years – and that if enough trees were left standing, including ‘nature strips’, everyone would be ultimately just as well off as before. As the debate heats up, with major changes in Government policy in Victoria, and in prospect in New South Wales, such talk, however sincere and well-based, is sounding thinner...Others do not think the conservation push is moving fast enough. Senator Irena [sic] Dunn (Ind, NSW) has introduced a private member’s bill to Federal Parliament seeking to strengthen the Australian Heritage Commission Act, 1975, to boost its protection of National Estate forests... ‘At the beginning, large areas were being clear-felled,’ Mr Howe said. ‘That is certainly never going to happen again.’ ...Research had a big priority...Much work has been done on the sensitivities of bandicoots, long-footed potoroos and other fauna. Strips of bush were kept for ‘wildlife corridor’, along which animals could migrate to other mature bush areas...Mr Breckwoldt and Mr Collins took to horseback to mount protests against logging of the Tantawangalo State Forest. Mr Breckwoldt repeated that a regrown forest could not offer the range of growth that original forests offered and was so valuable to wildlife. ‘The wildlife corridors are a joke,’ he said. ‘...The Forestry Commission goes in anyway and decides that if there is no wildlife in an area, it can be logged. There is no security for these wildlife corridors at all.’ Mr Breckwoldt complained: ‘The studies the Forestry Commission refers to are all done by tame researchers who report in in-house documents that the public does not have access to. Whenever we press their senior officers to provide the documents so that the public can scrutinise them, their answer is that it is a confidential report and we cannot release it to the public.’”

More players and more changes were evident in the SMH article by Paul Bailey on 31 January 1990:

“Greiner starts talks on logging. The Premier has refused a request from the country’s leading conservationists to end logging the National Estate areas of the NSW south-east forests, but has agreed to talk further on the issue. Yesterday, for the first time in the 13-month logging dispute, Mr Greiner met conservationists including the president of the Australian Conservation Foundation, Mr Peter Garrett, the Tasmanian Green Independent, Dr Bob Brown, and local leaders. Mr Garrett said that the meeting signalled that the dispute over the south-east had now become a major national political issue.”

The Prime Minister weighed into the debate on the question of definitions, as reported in the IM of 1 February 1990:

“National Estate areas are not National Parks. The Prime Minister, Mr. Hawke, says there is a clear difference between National Parks and National Estate areas. In a letter to Dr. Robert Bain, the Executive Director of the National Association of Forest Industries, the Prime Minister said he is aware of the confusion in the community about the difference.”

A relevant piece by Leonard Radic in the SMH of 15 February 1990 read:

“Spare the trees, you say. Most Australians attach strong importance to the preservation of Australia’s forests, a Saulwick-Herald Poll has found. Almost four in every five people sampled agreed that forests were a valuable part of our environment and should be preserved wherever possible. By contrast, only 18 per cent thought that, because trees will grow again, we should cut down and use whatever timber we need. Perhaps more significantly, given the debate on logging in Victoria and NSW, 70 per cent said in answer to a second question that the preservation of forests was more important than the jobs of timber workers.”

The political scene begins to change, as reported by Paul Bailey in the SMH, also on the 15 February 1990:

“Deal cuts NSW logging area to 7%. The NSW and Federal governments have agreed to cut the area of National Estate forests being logged from 9 to 7 per cent. In return for the reduction, the Federal Government will give \$800,000 to the State, the NSW Minister for Natural Resources, said yesterday. Most of the money will be used to improve the wet weather access to the logging areas, and about \$300,000 will be spent on a computer model of the forests.”

The editorial in the SMH of the same day, 15 February 1990, was under the amusing headline:

“A splintered logging debate.”

Science played a continuing role in the debate, as seen in the piece by Paul Bailey in the SMH of 16 May 1990:

“New report wants end to logging in SE forest. A new scientific report on the State’s south-east forests has called for an immediate halt to the logging of all old-growth forests and for the Coolangubra area to be declared a wilderness. Prepared by scientists at the Australian Museum [the names of the authors of the report were not given in the article], the report is highly critical of the NSW Forestry Commission and claims that if changes are not made to current logging practices, the long-term survival of animal species may be threatened...It says that the south-east has been inadequately surveyed for animals but those which are rare and endangered include 15 mammal, two bird and one fish species. Also of concern were the region’s 17 bat species, which will be adversely affected by any logging...’ Really, this whole report uses very dubious methodology and reaches conclusions that are not supported by any data,’ the [NSW Forestry Commission] spokesman said. ‘There is no new scientific work in this. They have just reviewed the existing literature on the subject.’”

A new twist to the debate came in the piece by Mike Seccombe in the SMH of 25 July 1990:

“ACTU steps into debate on logging. Canberra: The ACTU entered the debate over the future of the National Estate forests of NSW yesterday, effectively demanding that considerably more than half of them be left open to public logging...Mr Hawke moved to put a lid on the increasingly public dispute among ministers on the issue. The debate is now more wide open than ever...”

The issue took another turn as recorded by Mike Seccombe in the SMH of 26 July 1990:

“Greiner favours protecting half of SE forests. Canberra: The Premier, Mr Greiner, put himself at odds with loggers and sections of his own party yesterday by endorsing the protection of about half of the National Estate forests of south-east NSW. In doing so, he aligned himself with what he said he believed was the preferred position of the Federal Government.”

The mounting pile of scientific reports was described by Paul Bailey in the SMH on 30 July 1990:

“New report disputes forest findings. In a new report to be released today on the NSW south-east forests, a former scientific adviser to the Forestry Commission insists that unless larger areas are reserved from logging rare and endangered plant and animal species will become extinct. The report challenges the findings, released last week, of the joint scientific committee appointed by the Federal and NSW Governments to examine the future of the timber industry in the forests. That committee said...that there was no scientific evidence to indicate that current management practices would result in the extinction of plants or animals. The committee suggested an extra 30,000 hectares be reserved but the latest report, co-authored by Associate Professor Harry Recher and Mr Bert Jenkins of the University of New England (UNE) at Armidale, says an additional 80,000 hectares should be set aside. This would double the area currently in reserves leaving about 56 per cent of the south-east available for commercial logging... While he acknowledged that National Estate forests did not have the status of national parks, Professor Recher said they had similar qualities. ‘A National Estate forest is a national park waiting to happen,’ he said yesterday...However, while critical of many of the joint committee’s findings he commended the committee on its report and the great deal of work which had gone into the collection of extra data on the forests.”

Science reaches the headlines in Paul Bailey’s piece in the SMH of 1 August 1990:

“Scientists call for review of south-east NSW forests report. Four prominent scientists have publicly criticised the findings of the joint scientific committee on the south-east forests and have called for a formal peer review of its report. They join the growing disquiet in some sections of the Australian scientific community over the report, which was intended to provide a solution to the long-running dispute over the forests. The report has already come under criticism from Associate Professor Harry Recher, of the University of New England, and Dr Hugh Possingham, of the Australian National University, particularly for its claim that there was no scientific evidence to suggest current practices in the south-east would lead to animal or plant extinction. Now, the assistant director of scientific research at the Australian Museum, Dr Hal Cogger, a museum research scientist, Dr Alan Jones, and the National Parks and Wildlife Service ecologists Mr Dan Lunney and Ms Liz Dovey have joined the debate by speaking on ABC radio’s *Earthworm*. ‘When we undertake the kinds of operations that are proposed for the south-east forests, there is a very real risk, in fact quite a high risk, of some organisms becoming extinct,’ Dr Cogger said.”

A light moment appeared in the SMH of 4 August 1990 in the Sayings of the Week section: Harry Recher’s words (‘A National Estate forest is a national park waiting to happen,’) had gained an entry. It presents a distinct contrast to the point made by the Prime Minister as reported on 1 February 1990 in the IM.

The editorial of the SMH again contributed to the debate on 17 September 1990:

“The wood and the trees. Federal Cabinet’s interim decision on logging in National Estate areas of the NSW south-east forests was easy. It will allow loggers something to go on with – access to 15 limited areas – while the real and much harder decision is made, it is to be hoped, by September 28...the lack of co-operation between the State and Federal Governments in exchanging information that would help reach the correct decision is a cause for concern. The NSW Forestry Commission, for example, appears unwilling to provide Mrs Kelly [the Federal

Minister for the Environment] with information on resources available to the logging industry in the south-east until she dropped her opposition to logging in at least six of the 15 areas now opened to loggers by the interim decision.”

Most of the battle was fought at the national level, where the SMH carried the debate, but the local newspapers still carried personal points of view from both sides, such as the letter to the editor by Chris Allen, Tantawangalo Catchment Protection Association, on the BDN of 28 September 1990:

“Koala habitat survey. Editor: - The Forestry Commission has failed to honour a promise to carry out further koala habitat survey work in the Devil’s Creek catchment area in conjunction with the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Instead it has begun roading activities which pose a major threat to this most significant koala habitat. The koala faces regional extinction in the very near future.”

Returning to the national scene, the SMH article on 5 October 1990 by Karen McGuinness and Luis M. Garcia report:

“Forest plan angers loggers, greens. Conservation groups and timber workers said yesterday they would protest against the agreement between the NSW and Federal governments which withdraws another 12 per cent of the timber resource of the NSW south-east forests. The conservationists say it is not nearly enough...The timber industry says many jobs will be lost.”

The language of the debate grew stronger, as was apparent in the SMH of 8 October 1990:

“Greens angry on eve of forests decision. Federal Cabinet is set to endorse a decision on the south-east forests which has attracted the ire of conservationists, who yesterday threatened to establish their own political party...Yesterday, the historian Professor Manning Clark told a Canberra news conference that Australians should break away from the vulgar view that material well-being equaled happiness. ‘There must be a revolution in Australia to preserve the forests of Australia and to preserve the great beauty of Australia,’ he said.”

The editorial on the same day 8 October 1990 in the SMH was even stronger:

“The politics of logging deals. The State Minister for Forests, Mr West, claimed that this week’s decision on the NSW south-east forests will bring peace to the area. Almost certainly he is wrong. The agreement is likely to lead to violent clashes between conservationists and timber workers.”

The only new dimension to the debate came at the end of the year in a number of related articles, such as the piece by Bernard Lagan in the SMH on 18 December 1990:

“Forestry policy savaged by MPs. The management of the NSW Forestry Commission should be completely revamped because it was bloated and inward-looking, managed native forests poorly and needlessly provoked confrontations with environmentalists, a parliamentary committee has found. The savage criticism came in a report released yesterday by the influential Public Accounts Committee, following a nine-month investigation into the commission...The committee’s chairman, Mr Phillip Smiles (Lib, Mosman), said the commission lacked any depth of professional management...The Minister for Forests, Mr West, said the report would lay the groundwork for the commission’s restructuring.”

By the end of 1990 the intensity of the debate had strengthened, the number of players had increased, and the SMH had followed the plot sufficiently closely to comment in its editorials on likely outcomes. By 8 October 1990 it was able to state that any claim that a decision had brought

peace in the south-east forests was almost certainly wrong. The debate was now national and very bitter, and a resolution was not on the horizon. The role of the NSW Forestry Commission had come under strong criticism and a major change in its structure was foreshadowed. The focus of the debate was on the NSW and Federal government interactions and the splintered attempts at compromise solutions. Even if the debate had ended by the end of 1990, it would have by then earned the dubious honour of being one of the most intense and insoluble debates in Australia's environmental history.

Science and scientists were also criticised in the press. Hidden and confidential reports attracted stringent criticism, and some reports were criticised, none more so than the report by the joint scientific committee. It was supposed to be the influential report, if not the definitive report, but strong criticism threw a deep shadow over its conclusions, but not necessarily the work that lay behind it. It is not surprising that reports such as this that bypass the mechanism of peer review become the subject of stringent public criticism.

7 1993-1995

The debate continued undiminished through 1991 and 1992, with changes emerging at both the state and federal level (e.g. Lunney 2004a). A major change was the NSW *Endangered Fauna (Interim Protection) Act 1991*, which came into force in early 1992 after the schedules of endangered species were promulgated [the equivalent generic term to endangered species under the current NSW *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995* is threatened species]. The schedules under the Act included many forest-dwelling species (see Lunney *et al.* 2000; Lunney and Matthews 2004), and were based on available knowledge at the beginning of 1992 (Lunney *et al.* 2004). At the federal level, the final report on forest use by the ecologically sustainable development (ESD) working group (Commonwealth of Australia 1991) was published. The Commonwealth's Resources Assessment Commission (RAC) had devoted much attention to forests, with the final report being published in March 1992 (Resource Assessment Commission 1992). This was followed by Australia's signing of the *United Nations Convention on Biodiversity* and the *Non-legally binding authoritative statement of principles for a global consensus on the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests* in mid 1992 (The full text of both documents was published in *Australian Zoologist*, Volume 28, 1-4, December 1992). Also in 1992, the influential *National Forest Policy Statement* (Commonwealth of Australia 1992) was formulated, which led to the Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) and the Comprehensive Regional Assessments (CRAs). The terms "Regional Forest Agreements" and "threatened species" thus carried the weight conferred on them by a formal agreement and legislation respectively, and these terms appeared in the press.

The debate in 1993-95 covered major shifts in the politics and more details about forest management emerged in this period. An interesting exercise is to compare the careful and diplomatic language of the formal documents and the strident language of conflict as it appeared in the press. It could appear that a civilised process was underway to deal with forest policy if the formal documents were the only ones consulted. The real world of conflict was the key testing ground. In this author's opinion, the extent of the failures of the various policies become more apparent in the face of the forest confrontations and the battle of words in the daily press. This paper presents a series of quotes to give a balance to the formal policy debate and provides an additional measure against which to assess policy successes.

7.1 1993

Sian Powell's piece in the SMH of 9 January 1993 opened the year with:

"Habitat threat for a rare mammal. One of Australia's endangered mammals, the long-footed potoroo, has been found in part of a State forest between Eden and Bombala on the far South Coast. The potoroos were discovered in an area marked for logging, conservationists

say. ...The survey also found evidence of two other endangered species in the area, the tiger quoll and the southern brown bandicoot. The acting general manager of the NSW Forestry Commission's southern region, Mr Ken Traise, said he could not confirm whether the area was destined for logging nor explain why the Commission's fauna impact survey had not found evidence of the endangered animals. Mr Traise said that the area would not be logged for the time being and the potoroos' habitat would be protected..."

The BDN of 12 January 1993 carried the following view:

"Time to stop the woodchip lies". "It is time to put a stop to the woodchip lies being spread by misguided environmentalists, the Liberal candidate for Eden-Monaro, Mr Rob de Fegely, says. "Claims that woodchipping destroys the forests and leaves ecological deserts are just plain wrong. The Resource Assessment Commission conducted a long and exhaustive inquiry into woodchipping. It found no evidence to support claims that current policies regarding the use of native forests for wood production should be changed."

The media itself featured in the BDN of 26 February 1993:

"Chipmill blockade story takes colour award. Maurie Ferry wins his 4th Tim Murgidge journalism gong. Bega ABC journalist Maurie Ferry's report on a blockade of the Harris Daishowa chipmill at Eden last year has won him his fourth Tim Murgidge journalism award. ...Maurie said he faced a number of difficulties getting the story. "Log truck drivers were openly antagonistic because of alleged anti-industry bias in the media and I was pushed and abused as I tried to get interviews at the scene," he said."

The politics of woodchipping were again featured in the headlines, as reported by Mark Coultan in the SMH of 20 March 1993:

"Labor denies deal on park. A secret deal struck during the election campaign between the ALP member for Eden-Monaro, Mr Jim Snow, and his Green opponent has opened the way for a huge expansion of national parkland planned for the State's South-East Forests. ...Mr Snow denied yesterday that he had done a deal with the Greens: "It was not so much a deal. I went to the Greens, to the industry, the timber workers, and to Harris Daishowa and told them my position. Only the Greens wanted it in writing."

Danielle Cook, in the SMH of 22 April 1993, provided readers with another inside story:

"Report attacks logging methods. The NSW Forestry Commission's logging of sections of the south-east forests undermines the intent of a forest agreement between the State and Federal Governments, a NSW internal report says. ...The internal report, written for the parks service...The leaked report, a copy of which has been obtained by the Herald...was praised by the then Minister for the Environment, Mr Tim Moore...but the Bombala district forester, Mr Phil Clements, said the report's recommendations were not feasible: "They would have meant we got nothing out of the area at all."

The IM reported another fauna item on 6 May 1993:

"Native animal welfare discussed by foresters. Ways of maintaining numbers of native animals in State Forests despite the pressures of logging were examined by about 30 foresters from around the region who visited Merimbula on the weekend. ...Of central concern was methods of ensuring animal populations remained viable in conjunction with the needs of logging, according to the [Institute of Professional Foresters southern branch] group's secretary

Keith Lamb. A discussion led by wildlife ecologist Dr Jim Shields from the Forestry Commission Research Division, and an exercise tracking a koala by radio, both revolved around this important theme.”

Minor protests did not register in the SMH, but locally they were recorded, such as in the BDN of 2 November 1993:

“Tanja logging protest. Logging in Tanja State Forest about 8km east of Bega was the subject of a hastily called meeting on Sunday...The major issues discussed were: The steepness of the logging coupe...The wide range of rare and endangered native fauna and habitat for powerful owls in the coup [sic]. ...‘the way the current logging is planned will destroy most of the scenic values of the area’.”

The editorial in the SMH of 2 November 1993 made the following observations and threw out challenges to both the State and Federal governments:

“Round and round in the forest. According to the loggers, the defeat of the South-East Forest Protection Bill in the NSW Legislative Council last week clears the way for a revitalisation of the forest industries in the State’s south-east. According to the conservationists, it means another campaign of protests and other disruptions to prevent logging in the area. It is hard to imagine a more unsatisfactory outcome. Between 1989 and 1991, 1,000 people were arrested trying to stop the chainsaws in the south-east forests. During that period, the dispute between conservationists and loggers came dangerously close to getting out of control. Lives and livelihoods were placed at risk. ...The South-East Forest Protection Bill, for instance, would have prevented logging in 90,000 hectares of old-growth forest until a proper environmental assessment study of the area was undertaken. That appears to be perfectly consistent with the undertakings the NSW Government took up last December. So why vote the bill down? ...And lastly, as Independent MP for North Sydney, Mr Ted Mack, put to the Federal Environment Minister, Mrs Ros Kelly, recently: “Are the National Forest Policy and the National Estate Register meaningless documents?”

While the national picture was filled with national level debate, the local area was also a scene of debate, or negotiations, as recorded in the BDN of 16 November 1993:

“Negotiations over logging in Tanja State Forest continue. Local residents have successfully negotiated with officers of state forests over the nature of logging operations in Compartment 2102 in Tanja State Forest. They are now continuing negotiations with the State Forest Department about logging operations in Compartment 2115 which are due to start this week. Members of the residents committee elected at a public meeting on November 7, 1993, have conducted surveys with State Forestry Officers and held discussions with recognised native fauna experts. They have independently surveyed the logging area in compartment 2115, and on the basis of available knowledge and advice by experts, residents have identified and marked by numbers approximately 100 trees within the coupe. The trees have all been selected as having high habitat value for native fauna. They include representatives of all species found within the coupe, which is essential to ensure that both summer and winter flowering trees are retained as food sources for endangered fauna known to occur in the area.”

The issue of fauna then featured in a piece by Kate Southam in the SMH of 16 November 1993:

“Memo queries logging licences. State Forests – the former Forestry Commission – was given the go-ahead to log areas of the south-east forests despite advice that endangered animals would not be adequately conserved.”

As a zoologist reading the local press, one seeks the reports of any wildlife, and notes that the greatest emphasis is on those large species that are threatened with extinction, although the primary feature of any article remains on the conflict, e.g. IM 9 December 1993:

“Court rules against State Forests. The South East Forest Conservation Council has called for the sacking of the Managing Director of State Forests Hans Drielsma and the former Minister for Conservation and Land Management Garry West for attempting to subvert the Endangered Fauna Act. The call follows a judgment handed down last week by Justice Stein in the NSW Land and Environment Court over the issue of licence for logging in four compartments in the Eden area...The General Manager for State Forests of NSW Southern Region, Mr Nicholson responded to the South East Conservation Council claims. ‘We had confirmed that Tablelands Sawmill had run out of log stocks and would have had to close without access to four compartments in Cathcart State Forest...’ Mr Nicholson explained that the ‘log supply crisis’ was not due ‘to unsustainably high log quota’ or ‘inept management decisions’ in Cathcart State Forest. ‘On the contrary, this was brought about by State Forests’ responsible decision to impose moratoriums on logging in previously licenced [*sic*] compartments in order to protect special wildlife values including those associated with Koalas, potoroos and owls,’ Mr Nicholson said.”

This issue became broader in a piece in the SMH of 11 December 1993:

“Who’s minding the trees? State Forests is both guardian of NSW trees and the timber industry’s wood supplier. Catherine Armitage examines the bureaucracy’s uneven record of managing these disparate claims.”

The BDN of 21 December 1993 again reported on fauna management:

“Back to school for group of foresters. At a timber camp at Bondi State Forest Bombala, school’s in for a group of foresters and field staff, majoring in one subject: wildlife. Identification and management of native animals is a major factor in timber harvesting prescriptions, according to State Forests of NSW Ecologist, Dr Jim Shields, and he sees State Forests’ wildlife management team as second to none.”

Within the context of woodchipping, the issue of logs for the local sawmills hovered near the surface, occasionally reaching the news, mostly in terms of conflict, as noted by the following strongly worded letter to the editor of the BDN of 24 December 1993:

“Sawlogs shortfall. Editor:- The timber industry has finally hit the wall...With an anticipated 40 per cent shortfall in sawlogs for the next six months they are casting around for a scapegoat. Quite naturally the finger points at the State Forests of NSW who, in turn, have tried to blame everything from bad luck to the smokey mouse [a threatened native rodent], but as the managers (or should that be mismanagers) of the forest resource they themselves are entirely and culpably responsible for this situation. Mark Blecher SE Forests Conservation Council.

The editorial in the SMH of 28 December 1993 finished the year with a strong viewpoint:

“Forests green and profitable. Is it too much to hope for a new era of co-operation between governments, industry and conservationists in the forest debate? Probably. ...The debate is inching, ever slowly, closer to the facts. There is an emerging middle view which accepts that the twin goals of a profitable native timber industry which is environmentally friendly are not mutually exclusive. ...State Forests of NSW exhibits all the problems characteristic of entrenched bureaucracies. But that is changing. ...The serious players who are truly interested in

a long-term, value-added industry will stay, thrive and add jobs; the exploiters who are not prepared to meet their environmental responsibilities will drop out, and not be missed.”

The 15 items selected for the 1993 show that the year was characterised by a Federal election, in which the Labor government retained power, and the defeat of the South-East Forest Protection Bill in State Parliament. Fauna reports again threw the spotlight on threatened species. There were perceptible shifts on the local front, particularly in the coastal forests near Bega, Tanja State Forest, where the focus was conflict then on negotiations about trees, habitat and management, and foresters were reported as also being focused on fauna. The editorials in the SMH were critical of all players, but mostly of those in authority who did not act to the level conferred on them by the opportunities available, such as passing the South-East Forest Protection Bill at a State level, and the Federal government by being questioned as to whether the National Forest Policy and the National Estate Register were meaningless documents. Secret deals or decisions, whether at the federal level of agreements between political parties, or over the issuing of logging licences, caught the attention of the press. The award to Maurie Ferry for his report on a blockade of the Harris Daishowa chip-mill at Eden showed the depth of the subject from the media’s viewpoint. The most disturbing conclusion emerged from the editorial in the SMH of 2 November 1993 that, “the dispute between conservationists and loggers came dangerously close to getting out of control. Lives and livelihoods were placed at risk...” It is not surprising then that the SMH finished the year with an editorial on 28 December stating: “The serious players who are truly interested in a long-term, value-added industry will stay, thrive and add jobs; the exploiters who are not prepared to meet their environmental responsibilities will drop out, and not be missed.” One can conclude that the Eden woodchip debate had become a profoundly serious matter from the management of trees in a compartment within a forest, to the national level of government, and that the dispute had not been well managed with the consequence that both lives and livelihoods were at stake. This had indeed become a serious and far-reaching debate.

7.2 1994.

Woodchipping included other issues included water shortages, e.g. BDN 14 January 1994:

“Chipping blamed for water shortage. Woodchipping is to blame for water shortage in the Bega Valley, according to the Tantawangalo Catchment Protection Association, Mr Eugene Collins.”

The counter claim appeared in the BDN of 21 January 1994:

“State Forests disputes water claims. The southern region general manager for State Forests of NSW, Mr Col Nicholson, has disputed claims by the Tantawangalo Catchment Protection Association that forest management in the Cochrane Dam catchment is responsible for the present lack of water in Bemboka River.”

Some wildlife matters made the news in the contested forests, e.g. BDN 25 March 1994:

“Radio-tagged koala dies in Tantawangalo. The first koala to be radio-tagged by State Forests’ researchers in the south east has died. Wayne, a four year old male, was found dead by researchers on March 2 in Tantawangalo State Forest north west of Eden. ‘The most likely cause of death appears to be that he was speared through the abdomen by a dry branch while he was on the ground,’ Mr Jurskis said.”

Fauna, however, is rarely mentioned unless it is a source of conflict, e.g. SMH 5 May 1994:

“Report urges logging ban” by Kate Southam. “A CSIRO report has recommended that responsibility for koala research in south-east NSW be taken out of the hands of two State agencies and that a logging moratorium be imposed to protect important habitats.”

This was followed by a letter to the editor by (Dr) Neil Shepherd Director General, National Parks and Wildlife Service, and (Dr) Hans Drielsma, Managing Director, State Forests of NSW in SMH 18 May 1994:

“Koala research. We wish to correct two major errors in Kate Southam’s recent article (Herald, May 5) about research in the South-East Forests ... Contrary to Ms Southam’s claims, the report by CSIRO’s Dr Steven Cork did not at any point recommend that responsibility for koala research be taken out of the hands of the above State agencies...Both agencies are fully committed to ensuring the conservation of the koala in the South-East Forests.”

Under a dramatic headline, Andrew Darby, Maria Ceresa and Daniel Lewis report in the SMH of 30 June 1994 that:

“Woodchippers chainsaw Faulkner plan. An ambitious plan by Federal Minister for the Environment, Senator Faulkner, to have woodchipping phased out by 2000 came under strong attack yesterday from industry representatives around Australia.”

The battle lines became sharper in the BDN of 26 July 1994:

“Greens call for an end to woodchipping. Conservationists from the south-east have called for an immediate end to woodchipping in native forests. The call came after a meeting in Bega on Sunday of representatives of conservation organizations in south eastern NSW and East Gippsland.”

The portrait of the forests expanded as additional State Forests were included in the list of contentious areas and as caution entered the debate, as seen in the IM of 4 August 1994:

“Halt to logging operations. The Managing Director of State Forests, Dr Hans Drielsma, has ordered a stop to [the] work in four new logging compartments in the South East... Logging has now stopped in controversial compartment 1451 in Coolangubra Wilderness, and will be discontinued in the remaining areas within the next two weeks. These compartments are located in the Nalbaugh, Mumbulla and Glenbog State Forests.”

The IM 11 August 1994 recorded the potential impact of federal government policy:

“Policy threatens woodchip future. The Bega Valley could lose hundreds of jobs under Federal Government plans to phase out woodchip exports by the year 2000. The Federal Minister for the Environment John Faulkner has confirmed that the Government wants to scale down the export of woodchips, jeopardizing the future of the Harris Daishowa chipmill.”

The IM of 11 August 1994 carried a variety of views about the future of woodchip exports. The lead piece was:

“Pulp mill necessary: Bain. The construction of a pulp mill in the local area will be necessary if the Federal Government plans to phase out export woodchipping by the year 2000, according to the executive director of the National Association of Forest Industries, Mr Robert Bain.” An accompanying piece on the same page was headed: **“No need for exports: SEFA.** Raw materials should not be exported overseas for value adding in other countries according to Noel Plumb from the South East Forest Alliance.” A new piece of information was made public

under the heading: **“Decision made in 1988.** According to the [federal] member for Monaro, Mr Jim Snow, the decision to phase out woodchip exports by the year 2000 was made at a Premier’s conference in 1988.”

Local interest was high, and fauna was involved, in the following matter reported in the BDN of 12 August 1994:

“Visitors to moratorium compartment. Tanja and Wapengo residents visited logging operations in the Timber Industry Protection Act (TIP Act) moratorium area in compartment 2129 Mumbulla State Forest near Wapengo on Monday. The group was met by and had cordial discussions with a contractor representative and a State Forests marking foreman. After an inspection of the logging compartment the residents discussed their concerns and passed several resolutions...a spokesperson, Mr Richard Blackers, said...The high conservation value of the forests was confirmed by the residents who were able to locate about 12 trees containing active fauna hollows within the area...Endangered fauna such as the powerful owl are known to occur in Mumbulla State Forest, and State Forests must obtain Endangered Fauna licences to conduct logging operations in these areas. However, it is very clear from discussions with the marking foreman that State Forests had not allocated enough time to properly implement the conditions of the Endangered Fauna licence in this compartment. None of the previously mentioned habitat trees the residents located were marked as habitat trees for retention, and the marking foreman was still trying to mark out boundaries while tree felling was in progress...Residents called for an independent body to be given control over forestry operations within State Forests. Residents have decided to initiate a public group within the State Forest.”

Mumbulla State Forest was of particular interest to this author because it continues to be the site of our research in the coastal forests near Bega, initially in the early 1980s (listed previously), and more recently as the sites are being revisited (e.g. Lunney and Matthews 2001; Lunney *et al.* 2001; 2002; Penn *et al.* 2003).

In the BDN on 16 and 20 September 1994, two fauna research items were reported:

“Fresh evidence found of long-footed potoroos” and **“Research finds first NSW smokey mouse”**.

The issue of extinctions drew a letter to editor of the BDN on 11 November 1994:

“Fauna Extinctions. Editor:- Recently a Blue Mountains man, Mr Brooke Watson of Hazelbrook, was fasting for forests in front of State Parliament House...I was present at this protest...when a member of one of the forest industries groups crossed the road to inform us, among other things, that ‘no extinctions (of species) have been caused by logging’. Now this sort of misinformation propagated by the pro-woodchipping groups in this country con the Australian public...In a publication, *Forest Fauna* (ed. D. Lunney, 1991) a senior member of NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service states the following in its introductory chapter; ‘research has shown that there has been a decline in many species as a result of logging and that extinctions are likely if current logging regimes persist’.” (Lunney 1991, p.4). Another chapter in the same compilation of research states: “It is therefore a scientific fact that increasing the area that is logged in any region will increase the probability that forest-dependent fauna and flora will become extinct”. (Possingham 1991, p.37). The pronouncements of spokespersons for the timber industry in this country should be treated with skepticism. Catherine McNamara, Bega.”

Towards the end of the year, fauna remained a point of interest and contention, e.g. BDN 15 November 1994:

“Logging continues. The South East Forest Alliance has called for an investigation of State Forests which is still woodchipping in Yurammie State Forest, a legislated logging moratorium area and known koala habitat. ‘There is no reasonable excuse for State Forests to be still clear-felling Compartment 987 for woodchips,’ said Noel Plumb, spokesperson for the alliance.”

The SMH editorial of 17 November 1994 summed up how it saw the situation:

“Lost in the woods. The division within the Federal Government over woodchip licences is a reminder that the Opposition is not alone in its inability to pull together all the time on all issues.”

On 30 November 1994 in the SMH, James Woodford examined the issue of old-growth forest:

“Old-growth forests ravaged, report shows. The devastation of old-growth forests by woodchipping has been revealed in a document proposing further logging of National Estate areas. ...The latest environmental impact statement (EIS) prepared by NSW State Forests has, for the first time, assessed the amount of old-growth left in the south-east region. ...The reason that there is so little old-growth in the south-east, said Mr Bob Bridges, planning manager of the State Forests southern region, was because of logging and fire. ...Mr Jeff Angel, the co-director of the Total Environment Centre, said that woodchipping in Eden was the ‘most destructive old-growth project forest in the history of the State’s Forestry Administration.’”

The IM of 29 December reported:

“Woodchipping future is up to the states – Snow. Federal Member for Eden-Monaro Jim Snow claims that the future of woodchipping will depend on the way in which the states manage their forests.

The looming NSW state election drew the following editorial view in the SMH of 29 December 1994, and the headline summarises the difference between the Labor opposition and the Government:

“Battle lines over forests.”

The year finished with a group of eight letters to the editor of the SMH on 30 December 1994 under the major headline:

“Woodchipping: extreme and irreversible.” The first and longest letter, by Dr David R. Murray, also addressed the issue of science: “I am sick to death of hearing that Mr David Beddall took the decision he did in relation to woodchipping licences on the basis of the best available scientific evidence...Scientific information can be wide-ranging or narrow, accurate or inaccurate, relevant or irrelevant. In this instance it is apparent to me, as a scientist, that the decision was taken with no discernible reference to science whatsoever.”

By the end of 1994 one of the noticeable features of the articles was the greater concentration on details of logging, the location of fauna, and the expansion of the interest beyond Coolangubra and Tantawangalo. Whereas forests, or National Estate areas, had been the standard unit reported in the press, much smaller units, namely compartments, were now the subject of articles. The spread of interest to other forests, such as Mumbulla and Tanja on the coast, represented an expansion beyond iconic old-growth areas to forests with a long history of use (e.g. Lunney and Moon 1988) and the compartment-level focus showed more concentration on their management than on their tenure.

The rise in the appeal of fauna was noticeable, although the concentration was on species listed under the state's *Endangered Fauna (Interim Protection) Act 1991*. Criticism by the anti-woodchip groups of NSW State Forests was reported to sustain the conflict. One also notes that the Forestry Commission became State Forests. Fauna that was not on the endangered schedules was not mentioned, probably because the endangered fauna management procedures under the new Act presented a new lever for the pro-conservation lobby to push its concerns. A more general explanation is that the Act provoked all to think about conservation matters beyond forests to the fauna within them. It enabled a new view to be taken of how the forests were being managed. Catherine McNamara, for example, was able to contrast the well-worn statement of the claim of "no extinctions" in forests with statements by researchers.

The focus also remained on old-growth forests and their management, the reference to science in making decisions, but that science itself can be limited, and on the largely unsuccessful attempts by governments to resolve the matter, such as "Woodchippers chainsaw Faulkner plan". With headlines, such as: "Old-growth forests ravaged", "Battle lines over forests" and "Woodchipping: extreme and irreversible", there is a growing sense that the debate is both tough and enduring.

7.3 1995

The year 1995 was busy with political contests over woodchipping, frustration at the lack of resolution of the matter, and the entry of new players and ideas. It presents a fascinating case study of how such principles as ESD, fauna conservation, public protests, large conservation and industry groups relate to a difficult resource matter, namely forestry, with the sharp edge being the export woodchip industry. The year opened with doubts on the political solution proposed, as appeared in a piece by Paola Totaro in the SMH of 3 January 1995:

"New doubts on PM's woodchip package. The Prime Minister's peace package on woodchips has been thrown into further doubt, with timber companies refusing to hand in their licences and environmental groups confirming plans to mount at least three further court challenges."

A letter to the editor in the SMH of 5 January 1995 was a blunt, but personal, explanation of one of the continuing difficulties:

"Cynical politics. One could say much about the woodchip kerfuffle, but one point seems to have escaped attention and deserves to be aired. As your editorial (Herald, December 22) points out, the Federal Government's only real power to control woodchipping is to regulate export. The State Government controls the industry itself. Lest people in NSW State Labor should appear too lilywhite in the current scene, caring people should not forget that cynical politics lost the Unsworth Government (Environment Minister, Bob Carr) its chance to reserve relatively significant areas of the south-east old growth forests just before it lost government last decade. It could have gazetted, rather than merely promised, those areas before the election, and thus secured them forever. However, determined to reap extra kudos by doing this after the election, it surrendered the forests to the tender mercies of the Coalition, which had been honest enough to state its intention to go on plundering the resource and which has only recently announced a much-reduced package of national parks in this area...Alan Catford, Turramurra."

A related point was made in another letter to the editor of the SMH on 6 January 1995 and such explanations help us understand why the woodchip matter is so vexatious:

"Environment underscores power struggle. The imbroglia over the woodchip licences is but the most recent example of the conflict of Federal and State powers in the control of the

environment...Peter McEwen, President, Environment and Planning law association (NSW) Inc, Sydney.”

The shifting political scene was recorded in the editorial of the SMH on 6 January 1995:

“Greening the Coalition. ...The controversy over the woodchip exports from native forests has, however, tarnished whatever reputation the Federal [Labor] Government has of being a champion of the environment. It is not only green ideologues who oppose woodchipping of native forests. The politics of the environment, therefore, has been changed.”

Iconic fauna continued to make headlines in the context of the woodchip conflict, as noted by James Woodford in the SMH on 12 January 1995:

“Koala collars may be kiss of death. Five wild and extremely rare koalas fitted with radio tracking collars face the prospect of strangulation after a monitoring program co-ordinated by NSW Forests appears to have gone terribly wrong. Three of the koalas in the program have already died. For three years, State Forests has co-ordinated a radio tracking program that studied the movements of the eight koalas fitted with non-detachable collars in the forests near Eden.”

Also on 12 January 1995, the issues from 1994 had split over, as reported by James Woodford in the SMH:

“Forest fight smoulders. Outrage over the granting of woodchip licences threatens to deprive Canberra of control of the issue.”

With a switch back to the national scene, James Woodford reported in the SMH of 16 January 1995:

PM ready to reprieve 500 forests. The Prime Minister is set to make a dramatic intervention in the woodchip row this week by announcing that up to 500 forests earmarked for logging will now be protected...This would affect the extension to Harris-Daishowa’s operations in south-east NSW and the new woodchipping licences for logging in north-east NSW and south-east Queensland.”

However, the political scene darkened, as recorded by Craig Skehan for the SMH on 31 January 1995, under the headline:

“Woodchip row grows blacker for PM. The Federal Government failed to appease environmentalists and the timber industry yesterday, despite an acrimonious Labor Caucus meeting on the woodchipping controversy.”

The editorial in the SMH on 1 February 1995 tried to get to the heart of the matter and provide a way forward. It presented a good summary of the state of play at the beginning of 1995:

“A forests accord. If ever there was a case where concentration of government effort was required to resolve a policy mess once and for all, it is the annual woodchip licence circus. To begin with, there is confusion about what the problem is. It is certainly not the existence of a woodchip export industry. Conservationists have learnt to target the woodchip industry as a tactical device to press the Federal Government on an area of Federal authority – the power to issue export licences. But that is not the heart of the problem. But it certainly helps confuse the issue, since at the heart of the problem, it is State and not Federal power which generally operates. At the heart of this policy mess, surely, is the question of what happens to old-growth native forests. Conservationists want old-growth forests preserved for aesthetic, scientific,

cultural and broad economic reasons. The timber industry wants continuing access to ever-diminishing stands of old-growth forests for their dwindling supply of sawlogs. The industry argues that it can, to the benefit of the economy, log in ways which do not destroy the forests' essential characteristics...surely the weight of the argument here is on the conservationists' side...in this highly emotional argument over trees, the conservationists are not the only dewy-eyed sentimentalists. There are those in the timber industry who refuse to see what has been clear for decades – that there will soon be no place for the old-style sawmills equipped for labour-intensive processing of logs from native forests...That is why the licensing decision by the [federal] Minister for Resources, Mr Beddall – favouring employment considerations over conservation values – was short-sighted...What is really needed is a change in attitude by both sides in a highly emotional conflict of ideas. To realise this, the Federal Government should call a forests summit at which all interests are represented. This, with good leadership, should produce a forests accord to end this messy business.”

The debate continued with commentary by James Woodford in the SMH of 6 February 1995:

“Truth gets the chop. Both sides are guilty of bending the facts in the woodchip debate. Meanwhile, the industry is in chaos and trees are at risk. It is one of the worst farces of the woodchip debate that the timber industry has claimed 1,300 areas not worth protecting were recommended for conservation.”

James Woodford, environment writer, in the SMH of 11 February again reported on the hardening political divide:

“NSW defies PM over woodchipping. The Prime Minister’s woodchips compromise, promising to protect 509 forest areas until they may be assessed, was in tatters yesterday after NSW State Forests confirmed that Mr Keating’s list would be ignored...Also, the Herald was told yesterday that the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service was investigating NSW State Forests for an alleged breach of an endangered fauna licence in Nullica State Forest in the south-east forests of NSW.”

Journalist Alan Ramsay weighed into the debate with his views in the SMH of 11 February 1995:

“Farce wins in war of the woodchips. First, with John Faulkner, it was 1,300. Then, after David Beddall got to work with his chainsaw, it shrank to 85. Later, after environmentalists shrieked, Paul Keating jumped it back to 509. Two days later, after the loggers got heavy, it came down again to 452...This is what the sorry war of woodchips has been all about – an exercise in numbers. How many so-called timber coupes to ‘harvest’, how many to preserve? A week ago, with almost nobody listening, the Democrats’ John Coulter finally asked the obvious question. What...is the total area of forest in dispute...The answer: 60,000 hectares, or just one 15th of 1 per cent of Australia’s entire native forest estate. Silly, isn’t it? In fact, an absurdly small area for all the shot and shell that has rained down on the Government, for all the poisonous and politically inept behaviour that has gone on since hostilities broke out between loggers and Greens, between minister and minister, between Paul Keating and seemingly everyone else, a week short of two months ago.”

A new dimension entered the picture, as reported by Craig Skehan and Sanya Sandham in the SMH of 15 February 1995:

“Govt condemns logger over call to violence. The Prime Minister and two of his ministers yesterday condemned comments by the executive director of the NSW Forest Products Association, Mr Col Dorber, condoning the use of violence by loggers against demonstrators in the south-east of the State. Mr Dorber sparked a furore with comments he made in an ABC

television interview on Monday night on the alleged punching of conservationists in Mumbulla State Forest near Bega. ... 'I just say to those people in the industry, if you're going to do that, use your common sense and make sure that it's not being filmed when you do it'. He was referring to conservationists' video-taping of violence and supply of the footage to television stations. 'Mr Dorber's remarks are as brutal as the industry he represents and he should be prosecuted', a spokesperson for the South East Forests Conservation Council, Mr Simon Clark said."

The SMH editorial again entered the debate on 16 February 1995 and provided a comment on the state of play:

"The wood and the trees. There is no issue more complicated than forest management. It is so tangled by prejudice and emotion that there are no simple answers. Despite this, the broad picture is increasingly clear. As the latest Herald McNair poll shows, there is an unmistakable public sentiment now in favour of giving priority to protection of the natural environment, even over jobs. ... The poll confirms the extreme polarisation of community attitudes. That underlines the importance of getting people on all sides – the forestry industry, the conservation movement, and both State and Federal Governments – talking and reaching consensus. Just as the Hawke Government confronted and dealt with the problem of strikes, wage demands and productivity in the 1980s, here is a challenge of similar importance for the Keating Government."

The local scene was also included in the public debate, as noted by the BDN of 17 February 1995:

"Merimbula chosen for a forest rally. A rally for the forests will be held in Spencer Park, Merimbula, at noon on Sunday. The rally will co-incide [sic] with a major rally in the Sydney domain to say "No to Woodchipping" and continued destruction of old growth and wilderness forests. ... The Sydney rally will feature prominent conservationist Mr Peter Garrett and resource economist Dr Clive Hamilton who will expose the false economics of the woodchip industry."

Editorials in the SMH on successive days (8 then 9 March 1995) contrasted the debate the Federal and State levels:

"Silly game on forests. Federal Cabinet has been extraordinarily selective in the release of forest areas where, after logging, woodchipping will now be permitted." This was followed by the next editorial: **"New approach to forests.** The NSW Opposition policy on forests might not be the last word on the subject. Indeed, it cannot be, since no single State policy can satisfy what, by its nature, must be subject to a national scheme if it is to be completely effective. But the new approach the policy takes – in particular its claim to reflect a consensus between the two great opposing forces in the forests debate – is a good start."

The debate took a new turn at the state level as reported by James Woodford in the SMH of 18 March 1995:

"Carr vow to axe woodchipping. The State Opposition Leader, Mr Carr, has promised the Greens a Labor Government would end export woodchipping as soon as possible and by not later than 2000. The promise, which the timber industry regards as a major change of Opposition policy, would effectively lead to the closure of the two biggest timber companies – Harris Daishowa and Export Sawmillers."

The political importance of the matter federally emerged from the piece by Margo Kingston in the SMH of 27 March 1995:

“Members blame interest rates and woodchip issue. Labor members in marginal seats yesterday cited the Government’s mishandling of woodchip exports, fear of interest rate blow-outs, and alienation in mainstream Australia towards Labor as the major factors causing them electoral pain. The woodchip issue has members in timber and non-timber seats alike feeling the pressure, but their solutions are diametrically opposed.”

The local residents formally acknowledged the significance of the State policies, as recorded in the BDN of 13 April 1995:

“Council congratulates Carr. The Bega Valley Shire Council is to congratulate the new Labor Premier in NSW on his decision to protect the old growth forests of Tantawangalo catchment and Coolangubra. It will also congratulate him on his decision to protect the livelihoods of the timber workers and express interest in being involved in the forest industry restructuring process. Cr Roland Breckwolft suggested the congratulatory letter in a motion to Tuesday’s council meeting.”

By 17 April 1995, Paola Totaro had reported in the SMH:

“Reserves, logging cuts for NSW. A Chain of reserves containing 15 per cent of every forest type that existed before European settlement in NSW should be protected and conserved within three years, according to the Minister for Land and Water Conservation, Mr Yeadon. ...In a wide-ranging interview with the Herald, Mr Yeadon said Labor’s pre-election promise to conserve old-growth forests in the south-east was on track...”

The debate remained alive, as reported by James Woodford in the SMH on 5 May 1995 under the witty headline:

“Opponents at loggerheads as new boy wades into SE forests debate. With cracks appearing in the alliance between greens, unions and the ALP, the State’s new forests minister made his first foray into the south-east forests battlefield yesterday. The Minister for Land and Water Conservation, Mr Kim Yeadon, is responsible for implementing one of Labor’s most controversial policies – an overhaul of the timber industry centred on phasing out export woodchipping.”

A new national move was reported by Craig Skehan in the SMH of 6 June 1995:

“Cautious welcome for national forest plan. The Federal Government yesterday fleshed out proposed criteria for a national forest reserve system without enraging the timber industry or environmental organizations.”

At the state level, reporter Bob Beale reported in the SMH of 14 June 1995:

Fauna remained newsworthy, as reported by James Woodford in the SMH 4 September 1995:

“The hunt is on for NSW’s elusive long-footed potoroo. Dr Linda Broome’s team says it needs a sign from God. After four years of scouring the South-east forests of NSW looking for long-footed potoroos – a tiny marsupial unknown to science until the 1980s – the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and State Forests have nothing but a few hairs and some bones found in fox faeces to prove that the animal even exists in this State.”

Some central issues appeared in a piece by Craig Skehan and Michael Sharpe in the SMH of 30 September 1995:

“Promise over jobs in move to save forests. More than 1 million hectares of NSW forests will be set aside from logging and woodchipping, under a Federal plan for national forest reserves. Protection is being considered by 900,000 hectares of forest in northern NSW and 150,000 in the Eden area...Under the State plans, the area of forest available for logging in the Eden area of southern NSW will be reduced by 40 per cent...There will be three weeks of consultations before these areas are given interim protection. Determining all the reserves could take three years.”

At the federal level, the negotiations drew a pointed comment in the editorial in the SMH of 7 October 1995:

“The gods first make mad. Representatives of green groups at the meeting with Commonwealth Government bureaucrats in Canberra this week seemed determine to demonstrate the truth of Euripides’s observation: ‘Whom the gods destroy, they first make mad’. The meeting had been called to discuss progress on the formulation of regional forest agreements, which could establish forest reserves that would be free from logging and woodchipping...If the strategy of the green groups which participated in Tuesday’s meeting was to be deliberately uncooperative in the belief that this was the best way to close down the woodchip industry, they are mistaken...the green representative threatened to bring down the Labor Government. ‘Whom the gods destroy...’”.

The difficulty of finding a resolution to the matter is reflected in a piece by Nathan Vass in the SMH of 28 October 1995:

“Between the wood and the trees, a path to hell. The past six months have been hell for Mr Col Dorber, a leading representative of timber industry employees and member of the National Party. A key supporter of the Carr Government’s \$60 million plan to save NSW forests and restructure the timber industry, Mr Dorber said he and his family had received death threats and had been given police protection because of his support for the plan.”

Under a dramatic photograph, with the caption: “Activist Andrew Wong is dwarfed by an ancient eucalypt in an area of North Glenbog State Forest not set in the planned national forest system”, was an article in the SMH by Craig Skehan:

“A towering confrontation. In the next few weeks, Federal Cabinet will decide which forests should form the core of a national reserve system. As well as protecting native forests, Cabinet wants to lay the framework for industry restructuring. But it won’t be possible to satisfy everyone.”

By 2 December 1995, Craig Skehan pointed in the SMH to the emerging decisions:

“Keating plan to protect forests. The Federal Government has announced protection of 5.8 million hectares of forest pending agreement on national reserves, a cut in woodchip exports and spending \$145 million to help forest workers and companies.”

The local Eden newspapers reflected strong positions along a range of values which emerged in the political debate, e.g. IM 5 December 1995, under the main headline:

“Fight for our Forests” with the following three subheads: **“Pain inflicted without gain.** The National Association of Forest Industries says the Federal Government’s decision to reduce woodchip exports will cause substantial and unnecessary economic and social suffering”; **“Greens slam govt decision.** The South East Forests Conservation Council has described the deferred forest assessment process for the Eden management area as a recipe for ‘complete

ecological disaster””; **“Keating pushes for added value.** The Federal Government wants to reduce the volume of woodchip exports from Australia and encourage value adding. Speaking in Parliament on Thursday, Prime Minister Paul Keating said priority when issuing woodchip export licences would be given to applicants who invested in domestic processing.”

The title of this paper contains the word “debate”, but if 1995 had been the year from which to make the selection, then there were many other words on offer. The choices were: kerfuffle; challenge; conflict; fight; war; imbroglio; mess; issue; argument; hostilities; confrontation and dispute. They would have enlarged the list, which already contained brawl; skirmish; resistance; protest; row; and controversy. The most extended description was that by Alan Ramsay: “poisonous and politically inept behaviour that has gone on since hostilities broke out between loggers and Greens, between minister and minister, between Paul Keating and seemingly everyone else...”. The word “debate” continued to be used during 1995, as in “Little sign of logging debate losing its heat”. It remains a sound word to use to cover the entire period, but many other words employed by those journalists with a flair for language captured the mood of the conflict in 1995.

From the forests of the south-east to the Federal Cabinet, the debate remained alive, unresolved and filled with firm statements from the various players. The newly-elected Carr-led Labor State Government moved quickly to introduce major changes. The Federal Government also moved the Regional Forest Agreement process forward. Both governments introduced the concept of restructuring the timber industry. The scale of the changes was larger than had been mooted in previous years, but the Federal Government continued to be trapped by the conflict. Alan Ramsay doubtless caught the mood of many in his mockery of the conflict, with his reference to a 15th of 1 per cent of the total area of native forest, *i.e.* the 60,000 hectares that were in dispute. It would seem that there was enough resource to accommodate both sides of the debate in the way he presented those figures, but in doing so he missed what it was about woodchipping in Eden that generated such a bitter dispute. The real target of his journalism was, most likely, the politicians who read his piece. He was suggesting that it is essential to grasp the figures and to understand their meaning. In his opinion, this battle of words, of points of view, was only leading to inept politics. This author can add that a grasp of the figures is not such an easy task (Lunney 2004a; Lunney and Matthews 2002).

The editorial writer in the SMH of 1 February 1995 suggested two proposals to end the conflict over woodchipping, firstly that the Federal Government should call a forests summit at which all interests were represented and this should result in a forests accord to “end this messy business”. The year 1995 finished without either a summit or an accord, although the existing *National Forest Policy Statement* (Commonwealth of Australia 1992) was being pressed into action via the Regional Forest Agreement process. The SMH editorial writer again entered the debate on 16 February 1995 with the view that “there is no issue more complicated than forest management. It is so tangled by prejudice and emotion that there are no simple answers.” From all the quotes for 1995 and the preceding years, that is a reasonable summary of the conflict, but what is illuminating is the opinion that the issue is complicated. From the material presented in this review of the debate, there is ample evidence of the complexity of the issues, with new dimensions appearing regularly. For example, the report of 17 February that the resource economist Dr Clive Hamilton “will expose the false economics of the woodchip industry” challenges the apparently solid contest of income and jobs versus keeping the forests undisturbed. The emotion and prejudice reached an awful pitch with the altercation in Mumbulla State Forest, then the death threats to Mr Col Dorber and his family because he supported the Carr plan to save the forests. The emotion and prejudice has also arguably clouded the complexity, with difficult issues such as fauna conservation being captured in 1995 only by the endangered long-footed potoroos and iconic koalas. “Despite this,” said the SMH editorial, “the broad picture is increasingly clear. As the latest Herald McNair poll shows, there is an unmistakable public sentiment now in favour of giving priority to protection of the natural environment, even over jobs.” Given that the editorial had also noted that the “poll confirms the extreme polarisation of community attitudes”, it is easy to conclude that the way forward will be difficult, and it also explains the SMH editorial view of 7 October 1995 that, “Whom the gods destroy, they first make mad”. Seeking a solution to the woodchipping debate was manifestly

driving some people mad, and many others to strong action without clear resolution as is evident in the succession of newspaper reports for the last quarter of a century.

This paper now leaps the next four years, not because they were bereft of conflict, far from it, but to avoid repetition of the main themes and to examine what was still driving the debate in the new century after the conclusion of the Eden RFA, which included a major transfer of state forests to national parks, as summarised in Lunney and Matthews (2002). The RFA process in 1996 (with the Interim Forestry Assessment) and 1999 (with the Eden RFA) resulted in the transfer of 126,870 ha of State Forests to National Parks, with the resulting area of State Forests in the Eden region being 204,977 ha in 2002, and the area of National Parks and Nature Reserves being 247,627 ha (Lunney and Matthews 2002).

8 2000-2004

This section focuses on how the debate was being run, which points were in contention, whether any matters were resolved, and whether there were any new developments. As may be noted from Table 1, the balance of published items in this period was predominantly anti-woodchipping, about four times as many as pro-woodchipping. The number of neutral articles was small. The year 2000 opened with fauna which appeared not so much as a point of conservation concern, but more as a point of conflict, with one side asserting neglect and the other side claiming that appropriate conservation measures had been put in place. It began with an announcement in *Town and Country magazine*, an insert in the papers of the Eden region, on 17 January 2000:

“State Forests sponsors owl conference. State Forests ecologists from Batemans Bay and Eden will present a paper on the presence, ecology and management of large forest owls in south-east NSW at the upcoming International Owl Conference.”

There was a rejoinder in BDN 25 January 2000:

“Threat to owls. Editor: - So State Forests of NSW was a sponsor of the International Owls 2000 conference...Perhaps this is its way of making amends for the large forest owls it has destroyed over the years by woodchipping their habitat. The Regional Forest Agreement for the Eden region virtually guarantees the regional extinction of the sooty own [sic] and tough times for the barking owl. Harriett Swift Chipstop Bega.”

Submitted as a: “Question about forest operations”, the following letter to the editor of the IM on 20 January 2000 read:

“Editor, An open letter to the Regional Forester Eden Region – South East NSW. A particularly shocking example of your logging operations has occurred along Goshawk Road, off the Greig’s Flat Road, in Pambula Goldfields. Contractors have bulldozed over some huge old grey box trees and left them to rot. They have cut down a large number of grey box and ironbark trees, and preferentially retained silvertop ash trees as so-called “habitat” trees. As a forester you should know that both grey box and ironbark are slow-growing and long-living trees that form good hollows. Ironbark is also a winter flowering species, rare in the eucalypt family, and so therefore important to many forms of native wildlife. Silvertop ash is comparatively unimportant to wildlife...Silvertop regeneration after woodchipping is so extensive that many believe that this is your deliberate strategy of your agency...Is the main aim of your management to provide a permanent source of pulpwood for woodchip exports and not, as is claimed, ecologically sustainable forest management. Chris Allen, South East Forests.”

The Regional Forest Agreement provoked comment in the BDN of 25 January 2000:

“Logging claims ridiculous. Claims by the logging industry that we now have sustainable forest management were dismissed this week as ‘ridiculous’ by a spokesperson for the CHIP-STOP group, Ms Harriett Swift. Ms Swift was commenting on a statement by Mr Col Dorber of the Forests Products Association which claimed (BDN, January 14) that the signing of the Integrated Forestry Operations Approvals for the Eden Region has guaranteed sustainable forest management enshrined in State law. ‘In fact the only thing they guarantee us is 20 more years woodchipping’ Ms Swift said... ‘The mix of species and ages of trees and their value as habitat for wildlife may take many centuries and may never be regained.’ Ms Swift said that to clearfell a forest for woodchips made no sense in economic, ethical and ecological terms. She said a recent photo of the Gnupa State Forest [the photo was part of the article] showed exactly what logging under the Regional Forest Agreement was really like.”

An infrequent, but nonetheless persistent, theme emerged in the IM of 10 February 2000:

“Artists express their concern about logging. Summer visitors have been shocked and outraged by recent logging in the Nullica State Forest, according to a spokesperson for a group called ‘Wild Art’ – Artists for South East Forests. Helen Neeson described the logging as ‘seemingly senseless destruction’... This has been done under the current Regional Forest Agreement (RFA).”

From a close reading of the local papers there was a marked difference in the photos accompanying the articles, depending upon whether it was pro- or anti-woodchipping. Those opposed to woodchipping frequently employed a just-logged woodchip coupe in the foreground as in BDN 18 February 2000, which carried an article accompanied by a photo of logged coupe captioned, “Nullica State Forest near Pambula”.

“Challenge to State Forests. Despite recent media coverage [of] logging operations in Nullica State Forests [*sic*], the State Forests Department has not made any statement explaining their activities there. Local group, Wild Art, is disappointed by their silence. Wayne Allen, Wild Art spokesperson, said that after visiting this and other logging sites over the last 12 years, Wild Art is very concerned for the forest’s future. ‘As artists they realise that forests hold much more than timber-harvesting values. The beauty of the forest shows the delicate balance of life that underlies our very existence... There is no multiple use of forests; all other values have been ignored in the production of pulpwood for the chip industry.’”

The continuing debate and the values that surface were consistently found in the local newspapers, e.g. BDN 12 May 2000, which included an aerial photo of the chipmill with the caption “Large logs lined up to be woodchipped”:

“Bird’s eye view of woodchipping. Ms Swift said there were some people who still believed that woodchipping used ‘waste’ timber. ‘These pictures of large trees piled up waiting to be turned into woodchips should finally put that old myth to rest,’ she said.”

The editorial in the BDN of 6 June 2000 commented on the status of woodchipping, showing that there had been a local shift in environmental perception:

“Environmental action overdue. The theme for yesterday’s World Environment Day was, somewhat ironically, ‘Time to Act’. It is more than time that we, as a nation, did something about the problems which we have caused; problems like woodchipping, greenhouse emissions, uranium mining, land clearing, soil erosion, salination... the list goes on.”

The newspapers of the Eden region continued to report the saga of bitter conflict over the use of Eden's forest resources, e.g. letter to the editor in the BDN 8 June 2000 by Col Dorber, Executive Director, NSW Forests Products Association:

“Greens continue to run forest debate. Editor, Despite millions of dollars, State and Federal Government agreement, legislation and a myriad of other positive outcomes, the greens continue to run the debate to lock up our forests.”

The RFA process was a disappointment to some, e.g. BDN of 16 June 2000:

“Forest protester is found guilty, fined. The successful prosecution by NSW State Forests forest campaigner, Mr Gerhard Wiedmann, in Bega Local Court last week, is a ‘hollow victory’, according to the vice president of the South East Forests Conservation Council, Mr Tim O'Rourke... ‘The prosecution... clearly demonstrates that Regional Forests Agreement have failed to resolve the forest debate,’ he said.”

The anti-woodchip campaign continued, as reported in the BDN of 17 November 2000:

“Walk against woodchips. The Walk Against Woodchips will make the journey along the south coast again this year. The Walk Against Woodchips 2000 will leave Canberra on Monday, November 27, and arrive at the Harris Daishowa woodchip mill at Eden on 8 December. ‘The walk is our way of giving voice to the more than 80 per cent of Australians who oppose native forest woodchipping,’ the walk co-ordinator, Mr Paul Dickson, said... ‘Many people think that woodchipping is no longer a problem since we have had Regional Forest Agreements for all the regions supplying the chipmill. In fact, the RFAs have simply entrenched woodchipping for a further 20 years, and this walk is our way [of] highlighting the threat of woodchipping to Australia's forests,’ he said.”

The direct confrontation was evident at the end of the year as was reported in the IM of 14 December 2000:

“Arrests at Harris Daishowa chipmill. Four people were arrested and one summonsed to appear in court as a result of protests at the Harris-Daishowa woodchip mill last week... The protests came as a culmination to the ‘Walk Against Woodchips’ 2000.”

The 12 newspaper items presented here for 2000 reveal a sustained campaign against woodchipping, with the details of the local objection to logging appearing early in the year. Both wildlife habitat and particular trees species were mentioned, as well as objections by artists. The role of the RFA was mentioned, as well as a rejection of the notion that it had resolved the thorny issue of woodchipping. The editorial in the BDN can be read as a reflection of a major shift in local opinion since the beginning of Part II of this history of the woodchip debate. That it listed woodchipping as first among the environmental problems was a new outlook. The local conservation groups pressed their point, with public demonstrations, such as walking against woodchips while the arrests and court action drew attention to a strand of the debate that has a long history.

The walks and the protests continued in 2001, as shown in the BDN of 30 March:

“Woodchip walkers arrive in town. Long-distance anti-woodchip walkers, Lea Parker and Rob Tombs from Bemboka, were in Bega on Tuesday and are now headed for Eden. They began their walk at the Japanese Embassy in Canberra last week...”

The IM of 5 April 2001 reported a demonstration outside the chipmill:

“Protest at chipmill. Conservationists blockaded the Harris Daishowa Chipmill at Eden earlier this week. [Harris Daishowa corporate affairs manager] Vince Phillips labelled the exercise as ‘futile’ while spokesperson for the blockaders, Harriett Swift, described it as ‘symbolic’.”

The arrests continued, as reported in the IM of 17 May 2001:

“Two arrested at chipmill protest. Eden police were called to the chipmill early yesterday morning where they arrested two people from a group of 30 protestors. Police said the protestors erected a tripod at the front gate at about 5 am to prevent logging traffic moving in and out ...The action [was carried out] by the Wilderness Society’s Chipstop group...”

The issue of Australian woodchipping being owned by a Japanese company has been a continuing theme in the debate. Under the heading “Chipmill ownership”, the following letter to the editor of the IM of 24 May 2001 by Harriett Swift of Bega states:

“Mr Vince Phillips (Magnet 17/5) has again stated that the Eden chipmill does not have a new owner. Let me explain: The majority shareholder of the Eden mill has not changed. However, the owner of the owner has changed. On April 1, 2001, the Daishowa Paper manufacturing company of Japan ceased to exist when it merged with the much larger Nippon Paper Industries. The resulting company is Nippon Unipac Holdings Pty Ltd, which is indeed the largest paper manufacturer in Japan.”

The issue of land clearing was headlines in the BDN of 29 May 2001:

“Bega Valley has highest land clearing in State. The Wilderness Society claims that a recent report released by the State Government on satellite monitoring shows that the Bega Valley scored the highest rate of land clearing in NSW. ‘The data shows that in the years 1997 to 2000, 5807 hectares of woody native vegetation was cleared in the shire,’ the Wilderness Society’s NSW forest campaigner, Mr Glen Klatovsky, said...It found that the ‘greatest concentration of patches of clearing’ in NSW was associated with forestry operations around Eden – clear evidence that woodchipping and clearfelling of forests goes hand in hand.”

A different point of view appeared in the IM of 7 June 2001:

“Government officials tour forests. Commonwealth Government Department officials working on forest policy are touring through forests and communities in South Eastern NSW and Central and East Gippsland this week to gain first-hand knowledge of various aspects of forest industries. The aim of the Timber Communities Australia (TCA) tour is to provide staff working on forest policy matters with an overview of various elements of the forest industry, including forest harvesting and thinning operations (hardwood and softwood); forest regeneration...and the impact that the Regional Forest Agreements have had on communities...The tour covers areas involved in the Commonwealth/State Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) process that delivered a world-class system of forest reserves and forest resources to support Australia’s sustainable forest industry.”

The BDN of the 27 July 2001 ran the following wildlife story:

“Koalas likely to become extinct in the south-east. Koalas in the coastal forests of south-east NSW have been nominated for listing as an endangered population, likely to become extinct. ‘The loss of a readily identified species such as the koala is a signal that many other species have also been lost,’ he [Mr Robert Bertram, co-ordinator of the Murrumbidgee Koala Recovery Project] said.”

The role of the koala re-appeared in the following letter to the editor in the IM of 27 September 2001, which also showed the extent of the woodchip protest:

“Alternative viewpoint. Editor. I would like to provide you with an alternative viewpoint regarding the recent trip undertaken by Harriett Swift and myself to Japan...While the Japanese paper companies refused to meet with us...one of the largest printing companies (Shueisha) was very keen to meet with us to explain that it will be switching from using native forest woodchips to plantation chips for its magazines ...All the attendees [at public meetings] were deeply shocked when they found out that Australian industry is logging Koala habitat for woodchips for export to Japan. ...Tim Cadman MA Native Forest Network.”

The year finished in much the same way as it started, as shown by the IM of 20 December 2001:

“Protestors block road to chipmill. A group of 30 protestors blocked the Edrom Road on Monday and stopped vehicles from entering or leaving the Harris Daishowa chipmill...HDA corporate affairs manager Vince Phillips said the bush crews and trucks would have lost about \$100,000 in productivity on the day. Mr Phillips said it been a futile exercise...Spokesperson for Chipstop, Ms Harriett Swift said conservationists has described the blockade as ‘the most successful’ in recent times. She said the aim of the protest was to focus public attention on the woodchipping of Tiger Quoll habitats in the Badja State Forest near Cooma.”

A number of points can be made from the nine newspaper items presented for 2001. The public contest between HDA’s Vince Phillips and Chipstop’s Harriett Swift was prominent and both these spokespersons were the ones most regularly reported. The reach of the protest to Japan was newsworthy, as was the regional tour by Commonwealth Government officials responsible for forest policy. Among the most important points to be gleaned from comments on that tour was the satisfaction by the timber communities with the RFA outcomes. This is in sharp contrast to the response of the anti-woodchip groups. There was no comment by any Commonwealth official. It is this author’s suggestion, as a fellow public servant, that such officials include reading newspaper articles to gain a sense of the diversity of views and the strength of the opinions in the woodchip debate. Koalas were again mentioned. They are iconic and represent the native forests and their fauna, and in the Eden region, the loss of fauna. The Tiger Quoll also gained a mention. Fauna remains a minor but persistent strand, with the koala being the most mentioned species.

Animals remained a part of the debate in 2002, as recorded in a letter to the editor of the BDN 19 April 2002:

“Animals and woodchips. Editor: Your correspondents Vince Phillips and G Collet and their criticisms of Cr Keith Hughes (BDN, April 5) encouraged me to search out old memories and records concerning fire, forests and woodchips since the industry was introduced to the region in 1968. I found, contrary to Mr Collet’s negative reference to ‘the truth’, evidence that Cr Hughes is perfectly correct in his claims that ‘millions of animals and birds have been slaughtered’ since the introduction of woodchipping to this region...The term ‘animal’ includes all animate creatures, so it is appropriate to include insects and reptiles, all creatures that move, in the count. Betty Thatcher Tathra.”

In another letter to the editor of the BDN of 3 May 2002, koalas again feature:

“Koalas might become extinct. Editor: I had a feeling of déjà vu when reading your article (BDN 19-4-02) titled ‘project to restore koala habitat on private lands’...Koalas are likely to become extinct in the short term because of decisions made by the triumvirate claiming to manage koala habitat on the south coast. The triumvirate is made up of NPWS, State Forests, with critical input from a Daishowa representative (the Woodchip Company) and a ‘community member’, operating as the NSW Government’s putative South Coast Koala Recovery

Team. Unfortunately, no amount of planting will counter the current processes threatening koalas. It does however divert attention from current forest management practices and proposals which are not addressed by the South Coast Recovery Team. Planning for the 'long-term' isn't much use if they become extinct in the short-term. Robert Bertram, Bermagui."

A different view of the future appeared in the BDN of 24 May 2002:

"Encouraging forestry. The Federal Member for Eden-Monaro, Mr Gary Nairn. ...[said that] 'March was a great month for the forestry industry – we managed to pass the RFA Bill, and managed to also legislate the '12 month rule' [for investment in plantations]. I doubt any government could demonstrate much more commitment to just one industry,' Mr Nairn said."

Another element in this debate is the perception of the land by Aboriginal people and others who became involved in the debate, a point explained in detail for Mumbulla Mountain by English (2004). The following obituary put a different perspective on seeing the forests it expressed values other than those that have characterised the mainstream of the conflict. BDN 26 June 2002:

"Gubbo Ted Thomas 1909-2002. The last initiated tribal elder of the South Coast, Gubbo Ted Thomas, returned to the Dreaming on May 18, aged 93...His work with the Institute of Aboriginal Studies was groundbreaking and became the basis of all future land claims along the south coast. Outside his friends and acquaintances almost nothing was heard publicly of Gubbo until 1979 when finally, largely through his efforts, the then Premier Neville Wran ordered logging to cease on Mumbulla Mountain...His life was not without controversy. During the fight to save sites from woodchipping he took a group of supporters, conservationists and politicians up Gulaga...It was the first time that an Aboriginal elder had proclaimed he would consider anyone who pledged him or herself to work towards the preservation of forests, and the rewal [sic] and protection of the sacred sites, to be part of his own tribe...He returned to Mother Earth in the presence of a huge gathering at Wallaga Lake under the shadow of Gulaga, the sacred mountain which he had won from the woodchippers and safeguarded on behalf of his own people and all humanity."

The local press continued to report the conflict, e.g. BDN 9 July 2002:

"Councillor guilty of forest charges. Cr Hughes was convicted after pleading not guilty to charges which resulted from his attempts to stop logging in Badja State Forest in December last year."

A new public demonstration against woodchipping was reported in the BDN 15 October 2002:

"Minister given a woodchip 'welcome'. The State Minister for Tourism, Ms Sandra Nori, was greeted by a shower of woodchips when she opened a new tourism centre in Eden yesterday. In what is becoming a traditional 'welcome' for politicians visiting the Bega Valley, the woodchips were thrown by members of Chipstop. A Chipstop spokesperson, Ms Harriett Swift, said their aim was to highlight the threat to the tourism industry posed by native forest woodchipping."

Threatened species in the context of woodchipping remained newsworthy, e.g. Letter to editor BDN 6 December 2002:

"Threatened species. Editor: Vince Phillips (BDN, November 22) asks what species of Australian fauna have been rendered extinct because of woodchip operations. Woodchip operations, being a process of land clearing, have been responsible for the death and extinction of native birds, wildlife and biodiversity...the southern brown bandicoot (*Isodon obesulus*) is

one species listed as an endangered species on the Schedule 1 of the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act...MPosa [sic] Bega.”

Although 2002 was not a busy year locally in the woodchip debate, a new balance had emerged. The most telling point was the satisfaction recorded by the local federal member that it had been a great year for forestry. That read as a partisan statement. It did not encompass any of the concerns of Chipstop, nor those interested in wildlife conservation in forests. Concerns about the koala, the throwing of woodchips at the State member, and the arrests, were all symbolic acts of protest about the woodchip industry. The obituary of Gubbo Ted Thomas identified another anti-woodchip theme that was rarely reported in the papers, but it was nevertheless an important strand as reviewed by English (2004). There was no sense that the debate had been resolved. There was, rather, a sense that one side was prevailing in the politics and the outcomes, and that possibly provides an explanation of the relative silence of the pro-woodchip lobby.

The lack of acceptance of this position by the anti-woodchip groups in 2002 foreshadowed a continuing year of debate in 2003. It soon appeared and it was political in its target, as evident in a letter to editor of the BDN of 10 January 2003:

“Woodchipping. Editor: In 1995, Premier Bob Carr promised to end export woodchipping by the year 2000. Seven years and over 7 million tones of woodchips later, he not only continues to permit this violent and destructive industry, he subsidises it. Taxpayers in NSW and Victoria all pay higher taxes and charges to subsidise the woodchips that are exported from Eden. Harriett Swift Convenor Chipstop Bega.”

The protests outside the chipmill resumed, e.g., the IM of 18 February 2003:

“Chipstop vigil checks logging truck loads. A vigil organised by Chipstop, the campaign against wood chipping in the south east and east Gippsland forests, took place at the entrance to Edrom Road this week...Ms Swift explained that the number of each truck, the time it entered the road, and the nature of its load, whether mature logs or thinnings, was recorded in a notebook. ‘The Timber Industry and the State Government keep saying that waste wood is used, timber such as heads, crowns, butts and branches. We’ve stood here for a day, counted 140 fully laden logging trucks in that day, and we’ve seen none of those going in. In any event if someone did turn up with a load of branches the chipmill can’t process them. The chipper can only use whole logs. The overwhelming majority of logs going in are mature trees.’” There was a subheading in the article: **“Timber Communities stand.** A stand from which information from Timber Communities Australia was given out was set up on the other side of the entrance by the Eden branch of the Association.”

The arrests continued, BDN 4 March 2003:

“Councillor arrested on woodchip carrier. Bega Valley Shire Councillor Keith Hughes was one of the seven people arrested for boarding the woodchip carrier Keisho Maru in the Port of Eden last Wednesday.”

The concerns of the forestry groups again began to make the news, e.g. IM 19 June 2003:

“Timber representatives discussing the future. State Manager of Timber Communities Australia (TCA), Peter Cochran, is concerned that there will be a reduction in the future wood supply available for the timber industry in the south east. He said the Resource and Conservation Assessment Council (RACAC) was starting a review this week and he was almost certain there would be a reduction in supply. ‘If they close the icon areas they propose, the loss of timber will have a significant impact on the industry – both loss of jobs and production,’ he said.”

The position of the federal member was headlines on this matter, BDN 20 June 2003:

“Nairn angry on RFAs deal. The Federal Member for Eden-Monaro, Gary Nairn, said he was extremely angry at confirmation that the NSW Government was planning to walk away from the Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) for the South East and Eden... The State Labor Member for Monaro is even using the Greens mantra’s [*sic*] like ‘Icon Areas’ for places earmarked for new national parks in the south east... ‘Too much time and taxpayers [*sic*] money has been invested in the extensive RFA process to just have it thrown away by the Green loving Carr Government,’ said Mr Nairn.”

The protests did not let up, as reported by the IM on 27 July 2003:

“Protest at chipmill. Representatives of environmentalist groups Chipstop and Southern Area Earth Rescue set up camp at the turnoff to Edrom Road on Monday, starting a planned week long demonstration. They were joined at an adjacent camp by representatives of Timber Communities Australia (TCA)... Spokesperson for Chipstop, Harriett Swift, said the main purpose of the demonstration was to record and prove that claims by the timber industry and the government that only waste wood was being used for chipping was false... According to Mr Cochran [State Manager TCA], his presence is designed to ensure that the environmental lobbyists do not receive a disproportionate amount of attention in their attempts to sway the State Government’s stance on the Regional Forest Agreement (RFA).”

The RFA was again mentioned in the press, in a letter to the editor by D K Smith, Burragate in the IM on 14 August 2003:

“Constance wrong about RFA. Editor. Mr Constance [State member for Bega] may wish to believe the Eden RFA is set in concrete [and] closed to the concept of amendment and environmental assessment of forestry activities... ‘The RFA will include provision for review every five years, it must accredit codes of practice, including the process for continual improvement of those codes for forests within the RFA boundaries. .’”

The matter of RFAs was one of rising local interest and a point in the new phase of the debate, as seen in the letter to the editor of the BDN on 19 August 2003:

“Forest Agreements. Editor: According to the NSW State Opposition leader, John Brogden, Regional Forest Agreements were signed by environment groups, timber industry groups, local communities, the Government of NSW and the Federal Government. Mr Brogden expressed this opinion during a recent visit to the Bega and Monaro electorates. Surprisingly, the Leader of the NSW Liberal Party doesn’t know who signed the RFAs in his own State! John Brogden was in the area at the invitation of the State Member for Bega, Andrew Constance, who doesn’t seem to know any better. The Eden RFA was signed in March 1999 by four Ministers of the Government of NSW. The Federal Government signed at a later date. Stakeholders, like industry groups, environment groups, etc, were never meant to sign and never ever signed any Regional Forest Agreement. Woodchippers and State Forests of NSW don’t want to put the record straight, because it is in their interest that people believe that environmentalists have signed the RFAs. The recent anti-woodchip protest on Edrom Road leading to the Eden chipmill once again drew attention to the fact that RFAs have not resolved the dispute about the management of our forests... To date the Eden RFA has been amounting to nothing more than a cover-up of scandalous forest degradation with no accountability for the perpetrators... Gerhard Wiedman, Burragate.”

The word “beauty” did not occur often in the Eden woodchip debate, but it can be found, usually in conjunction with other themes, e.g. BDN 19 September 2003:

“Environmental campaigns. Editor: ...Perhaps the hardest fought campaign was launched by the Tantawangalo Catchment Protection Association – local people including farmers who stopped the continuation of woodchip (clear-fell) logging in the steep catchment of a most important water supply, the Tantawangalo Creek. It was a disgrace that State Forests even contemplated logging this catchment. It is now safe in the South East Forests National Park. I have not named the people who were involved in the battles for these beautiful and valuable places. Betty Thatcher, Tathra.”

The year finished as it began, as recorded in the BDN of 16 December 2003:

“Vigil against woodchips. Conservationists are conducting a vigil against woodchipping near the Eden chipmill this week...Ms Swift said the protestors know the ‘overwhelming majority of Australians’ already supported them but many thought the problem had been solved.”

This review of the Eden woodchip debate finished at the end of 2003, but an important point from 2004, relevant to the RFA process, is included here because it is categorical about some of the points of concern that were foreshadowed by the anti-woodchip lobby in 2003. The anti-RFA stand appeared in the following report in the BDN, 17 August 2004. It portends that there will be sufficient material for a part III of this debate:

“Environment Network boycotts RFA review. The Bega Environment Network will boycott the Regional Forest Agreement five yearly review. President of the Network, Ms Harriett Swift, said the RFA was a framework for woodchipping and conservationists had no role in helping to perpetuate it would not attend a workshop on the RFA Review to be held in Bega later this month...The Regional Forest Agreement has been a disaster for the forests of this region. It has been a catastrophe from a conservation and an ethical perspective and woodchip volumes are back up to where they were before the RFA, she said.”

The year 2003 produced new themes as well as revisiting old ones. The new theme was the firm rejection by the conservation groups of the RFA outcomes, with the most powerful comments by Swift and by Wiedman. The issue of forest degradation raised in Wiedman’s letter has a parallel in the concern expressed by Chipstop that mature trees, rather than waste, were going to the chipmill. (The name Harris-Daishowa changed to South East Fibre Exports Pty Ltd as reported in the IM of 2 October 2003.) The protest about the nature of the timber going to the mill had become a recurrent concern for the pro-conservation lobby in recent years. The word “old-growth” did not appear in the recent debate, but the phrase “mature trees” was used to convey the same message. Thus the condition of the forests of the region, but not of particular forests, had become the focus. The hostility was to the export woodchip industry as a whole, not just objections to particular locations. Conversely, the pro-logging lobby was concerned that the RFA be adhered to. It did, as the conservation groups pointed out, provide for 20 years’ supply of timber. The anger expressed by the Federal Liberal member against “the green loving Carr government” underlined the importance of the RFA outcomes for the timber industry. One conclusion that could be drawn is that any peace in the woodchip dispute gained through the RFA process was incomplete and sufficiently frail to be of concern for the timber industry. The aim of Chipstop and other conservation groups was to close down woodchipping of native forests. One also senses that there was a degree of misunderstanding about the significance and the detail of the RFA agreement. The point of the 2004 comment by Harriett Swift was that the conservation groups were walking away from the agreement because of the perceived continuing degradation of the native forests, their trees, their beauty and their wild-life. The old conflict, with its polarised participants, had not abated as a result of the RFA process.

9 DISCUSSION

The language of conflict has its own vocabulary and the best media players in the Eden woodchip debate have read the style well. The points raised in the newspapers are the voices of conflict, and strong, clear points carrying the arguments were those that were reported. Economic matters – jobs and industry – remained as a recurrent theme in the newspapers as primary justifications for maintaining the export woodchip industry in Eden. This has not changed since 1970. The counter to the economic argument was one of alternative values, especially those that placed greater importance on values other than wealth. When Lunney and Moon (1987) reported on the first phase of the Eden woodchip debate and identified the two leading issues - local wealth and jobs versus environmental concerns, particularly the call for more national parks - they had foreshadowed the two matters that captured the Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) process in the 1990s, namely resource security, *i.e.* continued access to the timber in State Forests, and the transfer of some state forests to national parks.

Icon forests held media sway for many years in Part II of the Eden forest debate, and the RFA process resulted in the transfer of 126,870 ha of State Forests to National Parks by 1999. However, this outcome did not deal with all the crucial aspects of the matter from a conservation viewpoint, and the public conflict continued. The BDN of 25 January 2000 reported that view succinctly: “Claims by the logging industry that we now have sustainable forest management were dismissed this week as ‘ridiculous’ by a spokesperson for the Chipstop group, Ms Harriett Swift... ‘In fact the only thing they guarantee us is 20 more years woodchipping’ Ms Swift said.” As reported in the BDN of 17 August 2004, the anti-RFA, position had hardened, again put by Ms Harriett Swift, as president of the Bega Environment Network: “The Regional Forest Agreement has been a disaster for the forests of this region. It has been a catastrophe from a conservation and an ethical perspective and woodchip volumes are back up to where they were before the RFA.” Such statements signify that the debate is far from over, particularly as the pro-logging lobby voiced its concern that the RFA be adhered to. The anger expressed by the Federal Member for Eden-Monaro, Mr Gary Nairn (BDN 20 June 2003), against “the green loving Carr government” on the basis that, “Too much time and taxpayers [sic] money has been invested in the extensive RFA process to just have it thrown away”, underlined the importance of the RFA outcomes for the timber industry. It is not only of historical interest to examine the conflict, but there also are practical lessons that can be derived for future policy, forest management and scientific decisions.

Newspapers reporting the Eden woodchip conflict have informed the debate on forest policy, determined which voices were given prominence in the public dispute, and presented those statements that were the most forceful. Newspapers, which provide one thread in the historical record, do not automatically fit the standard frame of enquiry by scientists. Few environmental scientists search local and national newspapers with the same diligence with which they search the scientific literature. The fact that newspapers are not regularly used in scientific debate points to a lack of familiarity with their value as a potent record of the history of public environmental conflicts. Further, a case could be made that the Eden woodchip debate dictated major directions of the science, and ecological research in particular, such as the concentration on the dedication of old-growth forests as national parks, and on threatened species, especially icon species, such as the koala. The public debate also emphasised reserve selection, *e.g.* 15 per cent of the pre-settlement forests, catchment retention, fauna surveys and habitat trees. Research into these topics, often at government direction in response to public demand, made science relevant to what the press had reported that public was calling for. The press did not report what research might have been undertaken to make it relevant to full range of issues of biodiversity conservation. A good clue had been provided in the judgment by Justice Hemmings in 1988, as well as reports in the press of the research from the Australian Museum, which had put its finger on a number of critical issues. The continued emphasis in Eden on protecting old-growth forests and threatened species was patently a much-truncated version of the *United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity*, signed by Australia in June 1992 in Rio de Janeiro and publicised widely across Australia.

While journalists highlighted the suppression of scientific findings and confidential reports, they but did not mention the failure of scientists to publish. Other important scientific matters that did not surface in the press included the lack of research on such issues as the efficacy of the Integrated Forestry Operations Agreement (IFOA) that was among the RFA outcomes in NSW, the recurrent question of whether the local national parks and nature reserves are adequate to conserve the local fauna, and the hidden topic of what is happening to the fauna in private native forests (PNP). Thus, a research agenda based on community concern, as reflected in the press, would be deficient from an ecological viewpoint. It would also fall short of the priorities identified in national and state biodiversity strategies (e.g. ANZECC 1996; ANZECC/BDAC 2001; NPWS 1999) and the *National Forest Inventory* (2003), which is structured to reflect the Montreal criteria for Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management (ESFM), even though the *National Forest Inventory* itself falls short of doing so because of its over-emphasis on threatened species (Lunney 2004a; Lunney and Matthews 2004; Lunney *et al.* 2004). Among the conclusions that can be drawn from reading the newspapers is that the conservation of forest fauna will not be reflected in, let alone driven by, the press. For example, there was no call for researchers to come to grips with, a) the underlying problems, such as long-term cumulative impact, including fire and drought; b) looming problems, such as managing the regrowth, climate change, and how to take a landscape approach to conservation; c) researching species that are unfamiliar to the public, such as bats or invertebrates, d) testing and applying new techniques, such as genetics and ecological history. Yet all these research fields are required under ESFM.

Land tenure as a reporting divide remains deeply rooted in the newspapers, even though stands of trees in a state forest, a national park and a piece of private land may be linked ecologically. One of the avenues out of the enduring conflict is to focus on forest fauna, not just on the forests themselves, and to take a landscape approach that is tenure blind (Lunney 2004a; Recher 2004). Another intelligent technique is not only to list those research topics that feature in the public domain, but also to discern that their intent is to seek a better outcome for the conservation of nature. Researchers, such as conservation biologists, need to work to a research agenda that goes to the heart of this matter, as covered in the various conventions, strategies and agreements. The real skill is to see national parks and endangered species as symbolic of a public need to conserve nature, but not as the only topics to set for a program to conserve the biodiversity of the Eden region, or any other region (Lunney 2004a; Penna 2004).

Fauna was used as a playing chip, rather than a yardstick for conservation. Individual faunal species were mentioned in the Eden woodchip debate, especially if they were endangered, but using fauna conservation as a gauge of ESFM did not emerge as an issue in the press. This points to the fact that ESFM is not generally understood, nor has it been promoted or evaluated, at least as a matter of public interest. Nevertheless, there was a widespread public perception in the press that wildlife conservation, to use a more popular term, had not been achieved. This stands in contrast to the statement, under the heading '2.4 Forestry', that the conservation of biological diversity through the adoption of ecologically sustainable forest management practices has been achieved (ANZECC 2001). Such formal statements have been challenged (e.g. Lunney 2004a) and they sit in obvious contradiction to many of the public views seen in the press in the Eden woodchip debate. This contrast warrants further inquiry. It raises a number of issues, one of them being the important matter of scale. If an argument can be made that ESFM has been achieved on a national, or even a NSW scale, as considered to be the case by the ANZECC (2001) review, it does not necessarily follow that ESFM has been achieved in the Eden region because the review did not focus so closely. One can then make the observation that there is an unfortunate mismatch between the scale at which planning and reporting on conservation is conducted and the scale on which conflicts occur.

Given that the Eden woodchip debate can be tracked back to 1970, and that the Senate conducted an enquiry into woodchips (Commonwealth of Australia 1977), it may be seen that the Commonwealth review of the conservation of biological diversity (ANZECC 2001) did not deal with the reality of conservation at which most people perceive it, at which politicians are obliged to form policies, and forest and wildlife managers have to deal with the issues. The review of the

Eden woodchip debate in the press has made the need for a second look at ESFM reporting a matter for policy revision. A more spatially-explicit approach to reporting ESFM is needed. Words such as “Eden” and “woodchips” need to appear in any formal statement that ESFM has been achieved. Another issue that the ANZECC (2001) review raised was the reliance on the RFA process.

The review states that RFAs are “the primary means by which the objectives of the Strategy [*The National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia’s Biological Diversity*, ANZECC 1966] will be accomplished in forest habitats.” From their detailed research, Flint *et al.* (2004) have argued that this approach was only partially successful in north-east NSW. A similar evaluation would be beneficial for the Eden region, particularly in light of the overwhelming conservation and newspaper emphasis on National Estate areas and national parks in Part II of this conflict. One conclusion that could be drawn is that policy implementation narrowed itself to following what was reported in the press to be the central issue, namely the call for the rededication of some state forests with old-growth forest as national parks. Policy implementation thereby missed dealing effectively with other key elements of ESFM, such as fauna conservation.

The press in the Eden woodchip debate also exposed some flaws in how some research was managed. The most noticeable was the production of unrefereed departmental reports, which were not accepted publicly by other scientists because they had not taken the critical step of independent peer review. Independent, peer-reviewed publications, principally in journals and books, are more time consuming but they do give fellow scientists, and the public, some quality assurance. Since the research is so important to the public, there is a powerful case for accepting the role of independent critical review, and for science managers to encourage researchers, and those funding research, to follow that procedure.

The constant search for policy solutions appears not to have included long-term research, such as on fauna, yet if the conclusion reached in the editorial of the SMH on 16 February 1995, namely that, “There is no issue more complicated than forest management”, then it is highly likely that long-term research, including long-term monitoring, is required. This points to a disparity between the time frame of research and the social and political imperatives for answers, which was not a problem identified in the press. The urgency of the press, and the social and political milieu in which it works, needs to be understood more clearly so that all parties gain from both the press and from research. An analysis of the Eden woodchip debate has provided an extended example that there is much value for a broader recognition of the complementary skills of the press and research.

By applying the logic of Brennan’s (2004) insight as a philosopher to the woodchip debate, one could conclude that it is a “wicked policy problem”, *i.e.* it involves competition among many different kinds of goods and a multitude of perfectly legitimate interests. Brennan argued that scientists can play an important role, not just in problem definition, but also in helping to set the agenda for action that will be effective for preserving natural diversity. One may agree in principle, but public exposure by a well-focused press in the Eden woodchip debate may be a disincentive for a scientist familiar only with the standard review process of science. The press can apply an intense selective pressure, and fitness for a researcher will then be measured by skills other than those needed in academic confines. To recast Brennan’s phrase, it is also a “wicked research problem”, *i.e.* it involves both knowing the strict rules of research (often cautious and couched in jargon) as well as the legitimate interests of the press and the public for unambiguous answers in plain language. How then does a scientist adapt to this particular environment? One of the answers is to read, review and analyse both the newspapers, and particularly look at how science and scientists have been reported in the press. Another approach is to see how the scientists elsewhere respond to public policy demands and the press.

In an analysis of the reporting of wildlife in the SMH and the *Daily Telegraph*, Lunney and Matthews (2003) noted that mammals received most attention, animal welfare and risks to humans were the dominant themes, and that although scientists were mentioned often, science as a subject had only a low profile. They also noted that there was a group of journalists who served zoologists and zoology well. This is largely consistent with the findings in the Eden woodchip debate, with the noticeable difference being that animal welfare and risks to humans did not feature, instead there was a strong emphasis on endangered species, extinction and wildlife conservation. It

needs to be recognised that many of the points of protest are symbolic, such as the koala as an icon for all forest-dependent fauna. Consequently, a wildlife management plan to conserve only koalas will not get near the heart of the matter, even though the koala was the most frequently mentioned animal in the Eden woodchip debate.

In an illuminating study that investigated the role of scientists in the environmental policy process in the USA, Steel *et al.* (2004) made the observation that there has been an increasing emphasis in recent years among decision-makers, interest groups and citizens alike on the importance of more science-based policy from the local to the international levels of governance. However, Steel *et al.* (2004) found that scientists were more doubtful of their ability to provide scientific answers and were also more reluctant to engage directly in policy processes than others would prefer them to be. Press (1991), as president of the US National Academy of Sciences, had noted that many scientists, engineers and other technical experts, make an inadequate effort to explain their work and concerns to their fellow citizens, even if their speciality bears directly on important issues of the day.

In Australia, there are a few scientists who are strong advocates of fellow scientists participating in public debates on environmental matters (*e.g.* Martin 2003, Recher and Ehrlich 1999). As Martin so plainly says: "As a biologist I have long been concerned that so few of us make public comment on important issues which fall within our fields of expertise – particularly on the many environmental issues that affect our future. All too many of us keep our heads below the parapet." Martin did add that, on his special subject of flying-foxes and diseases, he experienced unwanted publicity and some "hounding" by the press and can confirm how stressful that can be. Among his other observations were that, in the print media, the text usually gives an accurate and responsible treatment of what is provided by the scientists, but the accompanying headlines frequently do not. The value of communicating science beyond an in-house report, or a paper in scientific journal, can be judged by how keen the press was for specific information relevant to the Eden woodchip debate. However, the stress levels of the scientists no doubt varied, depending on the timing of the piece and its context. As for the headlines, that depends upon one's sense of humour. For example, not everyone would enjoy the headline in the SMH of 18 March 1995: "Carr vow to axe woodchipping". For the SMH, it is unlikely that the journalist wrote the headline. Compared with the SMH, the headlines in the local papers were usually less sensational, but often more blunt, *e.g.* IM on 11 June 1987: "Chip export licence will be renewed – Kerin".

The word "forest" was used regularly in the newspapers, but not until one begins to look at the history of the forest conflict does the term need a sharper definition. One of the clearest conclusions is that the term "forest" has mostly referred to State Forests of native eucalypts. Other relevant local issues in biodiversity conservation, such as the pine plantations near Bombala, and the management or clearing of forests on private lands, was not part of the public debate. The list of state forests affected by the conflict grew longer with each period in the debate, and was not confined to Coolangubra and Tantawangalo State Forests, which achieved such a high national profile between 1987 and 1995. The growing focus on such coastal State Forests as Tanja and Mumbulla may partly reflect a changing demographic structure for the region, as well as a growing recognition that all native forests, not just old-growth, National Estate quality forests, have many values for nature conservation. Old trees, and habitat/food trees, were mentioned a number of times in the press. The growing emphasis in the last phase of the debate on individual 'mature' trees was evident, and it was at the centre of much conservation action from 2000, irrespective of the forest of origin, as shown by the reports of the blockades at the chipmill. What emerges from reading the newspapers over the period 1987-2004 is that the conflict was directed at all the commercial native forests owned by the state, *i.e.* State Forests, in the Eden region, and not at commercial operations in private native forests. These have been identified as the forgotten forests by Prest (2004) and the forests of the Eden region provide another case to support Prest's interpretation. The fauna values of such forests have usually been found to be greater than the nearby Crown forests (Braithwaite 2004). Nevertheless, much of the conflict remains tenure bound. Vegetation management and restoration, such as in the Bega Valley, has become an increasingly important matter for various

bodies, such as the local shire council, but it has yet to be portrayed as part of the forest management debate.

By policy initiatives addressing only those issues that predominated in the press, it could be concluded that the woodchip debate was destined to continue. Although such subjects as beauty, and non-threatened fauna, rarely reached the news, they emerged as enduring concerns that helped drive the sustain the opposition to the export woodchip industry. As various commentators have noted, the RFA process endeavoured to focus on resolving what some players had identified as the conflict, but in doing so, it did not address all the key issues (e.g. Dargavel 1998; Davey *et al.* 2002; Kirkpatrick 1998; Lane 1999, 2003; Lunney 2004a; Mobbs 2003; Slee 2001). Some of these issues had been identified in major enquiries just prior to the *National Forest Policy Statement* (Commonwealth of Australia 1992), such as the RAC (Resource Assessment Commission 1992) and the final report on forest use by the ecologically sustainable development (ESD) working group (Commonwealth of Australia 1991), but their views did not often come into play in the public conflict during the RFA process, yet the continuing debate in the newspapers reflects the call for such values to be considered. For example, Hamilton (2003) concluded that the RAC experiment contributed to our understanding that resources include social, cultural and environmental values, as well as economic factors. All these strands were visible in the Eden woodchip conflict in the press, but they did not feature in the way the subject was being handled by those in authority. The editorial in the SMH on the 28 December 1993 framed the lack of leadership as a rhetorical question: "Is it too much to hope for a new era of co-operation between governments, industry and conservationists in the forest debate?"

In novel polemic, Ehrlich and Ehrlich (1996) tackled the subject of "brownlash", the backlash against "green policies". Brownlashers are those individuals and organisations who, with strong and appealing messages, have successfully sowed the seeds of doubt among journalists, policy makers and the public at large about the importance of such phenomena as global climate change and losses of biodiversity. One does not have to search far in the newspaper reports to detect what might be described as brownlashing. The opening piece of Part II in this history, on 30 January 1987 in the BDN ("A final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on woodchipping operations at Eden has stated that forestry operations are compatible with National Estate values"), seems to fit the Ehrlichs' definition of brownlash. A case could be made that the following piece in the BDN of 13 February 1987 also fits the Ehrlichs' definition: "On a tight-scheduled visit to Bega this week, [Federal] Opposition Leader Mr John Howard said he was unconvinced by the anti-woodchip argument...he backed the woodchip industry including the use of Tantawangalo and Coolangubra State Forests." Tantawangalo and Coolangubra became the sites of the most intense struggles over woodchipping, and these two 1987 statements look so weak in hindsight that one could form the opinion that they were examples of brownlash at the time. The letter to editor of the BDN 6 December 2002 reveals that brownlashing has remained alive and well in the local papers, but not unchallenged, as was evident in the following letter: "Vince Phillips (BDN, November 22) asks what species of Australian fauna have been rendered extinct because of woodchip operations. Woodchip operations, being a process of land clearing, have been responsible for the death and extinction of native birds, wildlife and biodiversity... MPosa [sic] Bega. One can also note that journalists were intuitively aware of this matter, as noted by James Woodford in the SMH of 6 February 1995 that, "Both sides are guilty of bending the facts in the woodchip debate."

Violence was a theme that emerged in the newspaper reports and it warrants more analysis. Homer-Dixon (1999), in his treatise on the subject, noted that violent conflict can be produced by environmental scarcity, including disputes arising from local environmental degradation; and civil strife caused by environmental scarcity that affects economic productivity. This applies to the conflict reported in the Eden woodchip conflict. The SMH of 14 November 1989 reported that, "Police held an emergency meeting with members of the South-East Forest Alliance at Bega last night to head off an escalation of the violence which has in the past two days seen mass protests, arrests, banner burning and shooting." Maurie Ferry's statement of 26 February 1993 that, "Log truck drivers were openly antagonistic because of alleged anti-industry bias in the media and I was pushed and abused as I tried to get interviews at the scene" bears witness to the threat of more severe

violence. An editorial in the SMH of 2 November 1993 said that the dispute between conservationists and loggers came dangerously close to getting out of control. Lives and livelihoods were, in the view of the editorial writer, placed at risk. In the SMH of 15 February 1995, under the heading, "Govt condemns logger over call to violence", the report stated that the Prime Minister condemned comments by the executive director of the NSW Forest Products Association, Mr Col Dorber, condoning the use of violence by loggers against demonstrators in the south-east of the State. In the SMH of 28 October 1995, the article reports that Mr Col Dorber, a leading representative of timber industry employees, a member of the National Party and a key supporter of the Carr Government's \$60 million plan to save NSW forests and restructure the timber industry, said he and his family had received death threats and had been given police protection because of his support for the plan. The point being raised here is to identify that violence was one of the outcomes of the Eden woodchip conflict. The violence exposes the deep-seated nature of the conflict and brings elements of the causes, such as environmental scarcity, to centre stage.

Consider Alan Ramsay's views in the SMH of 11 February 1995 when he pointed to what he saw as the obvious question. "What... is the total area of [Eden's] forest in dispute... The answer: 60,000 hectares, or just one 15th of 1 per cent of Australia's entire native forest estate. Silly, isn't it?" Ramsay had grasped the point of scarcity, but not in all its dimensions. The area of the Eden forests logged per year exceeded one 15th of 1 per cent. The rate of logging appeared in the SMH of 20 January 1990, in a piece by Malcolm Brown, where he quoted Mr Howe, as south-east regional forester with the NSW Forestry Commission, as saying that, "His basic argument is that trees can be felled on a long-term rotation basis – that is, doing over each area once every 40 years..." In other words, 2.5 per cent per of Eden's forests are scheduled for woodchip logging each year. Given that woodchipping started in 1970, and Ramsay wrote his piece in 1995, it means that over half of the region's State Forests had been woodchipped by then. It was not, as Ramsay contended, an "absurdly small area". Ramsay's point is clear; know your figures, but the corollary also applies, know them locally, as well as at a State and national basis, and know what each forest means environmentally, aesthetically, and culturally. The pro- and anti-woodchip groups have been at loggerheads over a rapidly diminishing resource in the Eden region, otherwise 35 years of fierce public debate would have been silly, as Ramsay contended.

In a well-titled book about the UK experience of the politics of farming, forestry and conservation, Lowe *et al.* (1986) noted in *Countryside Conflicts* that the most contentious aspect of conservation reform related to the regulation of farming and forestry developments, with the positions polarised between the advocates of *laissez-faire* and the advocates of control. Lowe *et al.* also noted that agriculture and forestry operate in an economic climate heavily determined by political considerations and decisions. In the period since the war, both sectors have been insensitive to the wider considerations of the countryside. This view has resonance in much of the material cited in the press in the Eden woodchip debate and puts this debate into an international context.

In a forum on *Australia's forests, their role in our future* (Day 1981a), the Commissioner, Forestry Commission of NSW, W. S. Gentle (1981) made the point that "Those who know why a particular change has been wrought are more likely to be closely associated with the forest than those who either do not know from local experience or who know only what they are told. A clustered urban population is thus vulnerable to both good and bad information." Day (1981b) presented the following summary of the discussion under the subheading *Forestry and the media*: "Gentle had commented that the mass media in Australia were generally ill-informed about forestry. He was asked what the New South Wales Forestry Commission was doing to educate the media personnel. He replied that the main avenue in the past had been by way of handouts, but these had generally been too technical and had apparently not been read." The Eden woodchip debate provides a substantial amount of material upon which to interpret this matter. If the bitterness at its outset was a construct of an ill-informed media and a vulnerable urban public, that view cannot be sustained for Part II of the Eden woodchip debate. The conclusion that emerges is that the conflict exhibited some profound differences of values. Day (1981b) had put his finger on one of these values: "Australia has a responsibility to posterity and to the rest of the world as a custodian of the profusion of life forms that are found only in our forests." The American ecologist Garrett Hardin (1985)

commented that, “It is unfortunately true that experts are generally better at seeing their particular kinds of trees than the forest of all life. Thoughtful laymen can become very good at seeing the forest...”. From an overview of all the newspaper articles, it can be concluded that an informed public, via a now-competent print media, has seen the forests of Eden in ways other than that seen by the experts. In fact, Day’s Academy of Science’s forum on *Australia’s forests* could be rerun with a transposition in the subtitle to: *Our role in their future*.

In 1830, at first settlement by Europeans, the entire Eden region was forested, but the richer lands, especially those with river frontages, were cleared, farmed and converted to today’s scene of bucolic peacefulness well before the end of the 19th century (Lunney and Leary 1988; Lunney and Matthews 2002). These lands are beyond the forest debate in the press, but ecologically they would need to come into view in any regional forest restoration program. New issues such as revegetation on private or council land, a regional approach to fauna conservation rather than just a focus on state forests, and a consideration of aesthetics, heritage, Aboriginal values, the long-term future and the place of science, particularly research, need more space in the public discourse. A wider public debate would enrich and expand arguments beyond those reported in the newspapers.

Woodchips themselves are symbolic. They are the visible export product. They are one step away from being converted to cash. They can be photographed in huge piles, they can be thrown at politicians, and the one word – woodchips - gives its name to the debate.

The history of the conflict over the export woodchip logging of the native forests of the Eden region, particularly those in state forests, continued in the 1987-2004 period to extend the time frame of the debate from 1970 to 2004. The policy outcomes, such as the RFA process, addressed some of the major concerns of the protagonists, but the fact that the public dispute continues after 35 years, as shown by the newspapers, is proof that not all the concerns of all the players have been addressed. The historian Manning Clark, as reported in the SMH of 8 October 1990, provides an example of this broader concern when he stated that Australians should break away from the vulgar view that material well-being equalled happiness. He said, “There must be a revolution in Australia to preserve the forests of Australia and to preserve the great beauty of Australia.” The editorial in the SMH on 28 December 1993 put the matter in a more practical way: “The serious players who are truly interested in a long-term, value-added industry will stay, thrive and add jobs; the exploiters who are not prepared to meet their environmental responsibilities will drop out, and not be missed.” The 35-year Eden woodchip debate is one of the most long-running and bitter environmental conflicts in Australia. It constitutes a significant part of the history of Australia’s forests and this author argues that the articles in the newspapers could fuel more research into this enduring debate than they have to date on the link between policy, management and the causes and resolution of the conflict.

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