

# ***The Fight for the Forests* revisited**

Val Plumwood

## **1: Background and motivation**

*The Fight for the Forests* (FFF) was written over a period of about 2 years between 1971 and 1973, by myself and my ex-partner Richard Routley, also later known as Richard Sylvan, as joint authors Richard and Val Routley. My co-author Richard Sylvan died in 1996—otherwise I'm sure he'd be keen to be here with me to reflect on the book and its impact 30 years on. FFF was one of a number of scholarly and life projects on which Richard Sylvan and I collaborated between 1965 and 1980, when this collaboration broke down and we went our separate ways, adopting different surnames, Plumwood and Sylvan.

Our personal commitment grew from personal experience of deforestation in Australia and NZ. I had grown up in forest country and as a child witnessed active deforestation and general cultural devaluation of native forest. Richard had seen the same sad thing in Taranaki province where he grew up. Richard and I were both passionate forest lovers, spent all our spare time walking in or scouting out SE forests, and ached to get back to living in tall forest (after years of residence in mountain ash forest near Melbourne). Before arriving in Canberra in 1970, we had been travelling in north Africa and the middle east -- a great way to get a sense of the final stages of the process of deforestation over millennia. The great extent of forest clearing and biodiversity loss on the global scale was being publicised by the rising environment movement. All these factors brought the importance of the cause of defending the forests home to us.

Our immediate initial motivation for writing on forest issues was our outrage at the huge pine plantation project which was already devastating higher altitude public forests in SE Australia. On the plan, almost everywhere in the SE public forest estate deemed suitable for exotic softwoods, the incumbent native forest would be flattened, windrowed, and burnt ; the ecological effects of this were never considered. Higher altitude native forests would be replaced by 'more productive' *pinus radiata* or douglas fir. This was land clearing on a massive scale--- not for agriculture on private property, but in the public forest estate, and carried out not by greedy farmers, but by the very people who claimed to have saved the forests from them – the foresters. Endorsed by the Institute of Foresters, and strongly promoted in the federal bureaucracy by the Forestry and Timber Bureau, the original planting program aiming at 3 million acres of pine (some spoke of 5 million acres) was implemented by state forestry departments and funded from 1967 at the federal level. Remember, this was in a situation where very little (only 2%) forested land was in national parks, and where a whole forest type – cooler mountain forests -- was being targeted for replacement. The project was already underway in some forests around Canberra, where we could see its devastating effects.

Delving into its justification, we found that the crudity of the original pine project's ecological understanding was matched by the crudity of its economic planning. Most of the key economic planning papers were the work of a botanist (Dr. M.R Jacobs) who had specialised in the seeding of eucalypts, and based the case on highly inflated forecasts of 'future needs' for self-sufficiency in wood. If botanists could write economic planning papers, we could see no reason why, as a couple of cheeky philosophers, we could not do the same. We knew there was disapproval of academics speaking publicly outside their

little enclaves of expertise, but felt people had to know about these dire threats to the native forests we loved. Since there were plenty of points where philosophy was just as relevant to the issue as the disciplines conventionally involved, we decided to write a paper on it.

So before we plunged in with the FFF we tested the water on the forestry issue with a paper published in 1971 which challenged the planning basis of this newly established and inadequately considered program. Our paper, published in the CAB in 1971, outlined some likely impacts of the program and criticised it on both economic and ecological grounds. (This paper was later expanded and incorporated into FFF as chapters 1-7 on pines). We were very impressed by the immediate political impact this paper had, an impact that gave us a very optimistic (and as it turned out, quite misleading) impression of how easy it was to get government to change something that had been shown to be misconceived. In the hands of Tom Uren, one of the more radical members of the newly-elected Whitlam Labor government, the paper was used to defeat the bill to renew federal funding for pines at its first reading in 1971, and although the bill later passed, a useful warning shot had been fired. FFF helped to create the atmosphere in which it was possible to set up the inquiry that eventually limited federal funding to supporting pine planting only on already-cleared land. Mainland states officially stopped felling native forests for pine after in 1976, and officially only Tasmania continues to clear native forest for pines, using its own state funds.

Helping to stop this extreme form of native forest devastation is something I am proud of. I want to make a clear distinction at this point between the original pine program, which aimed to supply exotic softwood from the existing public forest estate of native forest by felling and replacing native forests, and the later modified pine program which planted pines only on already cleared land, usually purchased expressly for the purpose. That is, it aimed to expand the public forest estate to produce softwoods, rather than producing them at the expense of native forest. It was not pines or exotic flora as such we opposed, but the massive destruction of native forests entailed by the original pine program. I would not deny exotoc, immigrant species a role in Australian life, but I believe we must ensure that the indigenous do not thereby become worse off. Ethical considerations like these must inform our plant introductions, and our agricultural, forestry and garden consumption, practices and projects.

The effectiveness of and interest in this first paper encouraged us to produce a larger work, with the assistance of the resources of the Research School of Social Sciences. This included 2 excellent Research Assistants, David Dumaresq and Jean Norman, who unearthed much of the mass of material we read and used for the book. This larger work reflected our reaction to the level of destruction of native forests already underway for pines, and our growing alarm at plans to develop all around Australia woodchip projects like one eating the SE forests near Eden. The potential appetite of this industry was enormous. Once such projects got started they could be very hard to stop. The native forests were under intense threat, and people had to know about it. These were early days in environmental critique, and while radicals like Milo Dunphy were becoming very critical of forestry,<sup>1</sup> some more cautious parts of it still accepted the claims of foresters to be the true conservationists who were protecting forests from the greedy menace of agriculture.

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<sup>1</sup> Milo had seen the opening phases of clearance of forests around Bathurst and Oberon for pines.

But it was increasingly clear that forestry itself was a threat to native forests. The role of forestry in world forest degradation was becoming better known. We had tapped into a major development and environment conflict created by intensification of wood production in Australian forests. Environmental critiques like ours (also in NZ and the USA) did not of course cause or create the conflict between forestry and the environment movement: both the critiques and the conflict were a response to technological and other developments making it 'economic' to exploit the last major semi-protected native vegetation communities, the forests, intensively for cellulose. The push for intensification itself can be analysed as originating in the vulnerability of forests as commodities to economic variables such as the cost-price squeeze (Clark 2003). Intensification meant that a much greater proportion of the forests would be used for wood production. The historic development of intensification changed the game entirely – no longer could non-wood values such as biodiversity get along on benign neglect – unless such values got real consideration and significantly constrained forestry planning and practice, they simply would not survive intensification. The time had come for forestry to come to terms with ecology and make the transition to a self-conscious consideration of ecological values and constraints. As it turned out, this it was ill-equipped to do because it was dominated by state forest services which had a culture of empire building, repressing critical debate and threatening and punishing non-conformists who dared to question the planners' grand projects.

At the professional forestry level, the push towards intensification was ardently embraced by professional foresters eager to display their agro-sylvicultural growth skills. On p. 18 of FFF we quote the president of the Australian Institute of Foresters, praising the woodchip industry, articulated as realising “the dream of all foresters -- complete utilisation”.<sup>2</sup> The moment of ecological truth had come for the profession. As we said on p. 18 “To the extent that forestry is committed to principles of total utilisation and production of maximum quantities of wood, it is on an inevitable collision course with conservation and with other forest values, and therefore also with multiple use properly conceived”.

## 2: The Wood Production Ideology

This brings me to the main message of FFF. The main concern of FFF was of course (it seems obvious now) the importance of non-wood values and the dominance of wood production over other forest ‘values’ in the education, ideology and practice of Australian forestry. In the earlier days of Australian forestry, this domination of wood production may not have made so much difference to forest outcomes, because the practice of ‘creaming’ native forests for good sawlogs and leaving the forest to regenerate naturally often meant that only a proportion of standing forest was suitable for and affected by forestry use. Now that much more intensive methods, practices and ideals were being promoted and adopted, resolving the conflict between forestry ideals of maximising wood production and the value of forests for biodiversity, watersheds and ecological was critical for the Australian environment. Multiple use conflicts, such as the destruction of animals like Greater Gliders through felling mountain forests for pines, had to be clearly admitted and addressed for ecological survival. The original pine program and its complete devastation of the original forest illustrated that at the extreme end, but so to an

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<sup>2</sup> (This is why saying “We’ve logged the forests for hundreds of years and they are still there” fails as an argument, in the same way that the claim “We’ve fished the Grand Banks for 400 years and the fish are still there” has failed in reality)

only slightly lesser degree did other intensive forestry projects such as woodchipping and so-called ‘integrated’ or ‘residue’ operations. Unthinking, crude wood-volume maximising intensive forestry would be every bit as much an ecological disaster for the forests as agriculture.

FFF was also concerned to further the appreciation of the non-wood values of forests and of the conflict with intensive forest use. So another major concern was to educate about these values and what was happening to them as intensification proceeded. We consulted with various experts working in these areas, such as Hugh Tyndale-Biscoe on wildlife and Alec Costin on soils and water quality, and were able to produce a well-referenced account which presented the latest research at the time. There is of course much more work available now, most of it showing that concern about the effect of woodchipping and intensified harvesting is well justified.

The original pine program also illustrated a crude volume orientation (documented FFF p.18 and elsewhere) that was often in conflict with economic as well as ecological good sense, as agricultural cropping approaches and maximising ideals were taken over uncritically for ‘the forest crop’. We argued that multiple use conflicts had to be addressed and good decisions made about priorities – and since these were public forests, made democratically. But foresters evaded admitting conflict and had already decided what the weighting would be: the professional objective was maximising wood production and promoting maximum wood use. Early planning papers for the pine program concentrated on projecting future needs and guarding against potential shortfalls – erring on the ‘safe side’ of producing too much wood was the methodology. The job of foresters was to produce maximum wood and promote wood use and growth, including development of forest industries.

Forestry tradition had given no value to the native community as such, royalties and stumpage rates being set to reflect only extraction, and not replacement costs. (Byron 1999) What was of value was not the forest community itself but its wood or cellulose-producing potential. An equally productive forest of exotics would be just as good, and an exotic forest with more capacity was even better. The pre-existing forest itself had no value. The concept of ‘multiple use’, although potentially helpful, was largely propaganda designed to contain the demand for more national parks, and did not correspond to real practice (FFF p 7, 8) : instead, forests were ‘managed with the dominant use as wood production with other values tolerated or promoted only insofar as they do not adversely affect wood production’. If multiple use was a real practice, we argued, research, funding, and attention ought to be evenly spread over the various uses or values of forests – but (p8) a search of forestry journals showed that their articles were overwhelmingly concerned with wood production efficiency (mostly as volume production). We found less than 2% of articles to be concerned with ecological matters at the time we wrote.

Because it was in conflict with alleged ideals of multiple use and the public nature of forests, the privileging of wood production (FFF pp. 7-8) – the Wood Production Ideology as we called it –was rarely stated explicitly but was implicit, operating as a set of unstated but powerful assumptions embedded in professional arguments, ideals and practices. The work of concepts like ‘overmature’ (to describe trees too old for logging but at their peak for wildlife and other non-wood values), is all the more powerful because their assumptions are unstated, and most people don’t have the critical skills to unpack them. The forestry conceptual framework could be described as ‘wood-centred’, and like other centric frameworks did much of its work without anyone being aware of it. Exposing these hidden assumptions showed the hollowness of the forest service claim to practice ‘multi-

ple use'. This was where our critical, philosophical and argumentative skills as philosophers were often particularly useful – in drawing out these assumptions. (This is something philosophy and reasoning skills actually can be useful for). We examined the way standard arguments forest services used to justify intensive forest-using projects and allay environmental concern covertly assumed that non-wood values were of no real importance or that there was no conflict. I think this was one of the most useful parts of the book since it gave environmental activists conceptual tools they could use in public argument over forestry.

For example, in the Renewable Resource argument, (p.13) , it is assumed that provided forest cover is maintained, the forest is renewed when trees are harvested, and nothing is essentially lost. Wood is a renewable resource, the argument runs, and therefore environmentally sound, no matter how obtained. But the fact that the wood-producing capacity is renewed does not mean that other values are renewed after harvesting. (p.13) “..the argument ... fails to consider the impact of use on important values other than wood production values, and attempts to persuade ua that as long as the wood-producing capacity of a forest is retained nothing is lost ... [It] is simply a subtle way of imposing the notion that the only real value of a forest is for wood production and the view of the forest as a cellulose factory”.

To take another example, in the productivity argument for pines, we have to ask : in what sense are exotic pine plantations ‘more productive’ than the native forests they replaced? Only in wood production, because if one looked at a wider range of forest products or values, including ecosystem services, they are usually much less productive, and there are grave problems in areas of wildlife and watershed protection, soils and sustainability. So the claim that they are ‘more productive’ assumes a model in which only wood counts in assessing productivity. Similarly for many other aspects and arguments. For example Jacobs’ forecasting methodology of erring on the side of producing too much wood privileges wood production over other values, because it assumes there is no conflict with and opportunity cost for non-wood values. If there is, it’s just bad methodology.

And of course privileging wood production is also an assumption of the currently popular Residue or Wastewood argument. In this ploy, trees that are not among the 10% deemed useful for sawlogging are described as ‘wastewood’ or ‘residue’, although they are being used by other species and supply other crucial ecosystem services. The misleading use by NSW State Forests of the ‘forest residue’ concept plays a major role in disguising and promoting unnecessary and socially unacceptable projects like the recent charcoal industry that depend upon cutting vast volumes of new trees. What misleads is the assimilation to mill or forest floor waste and the false impression that cutting of the further (90%) ‘residue’ trees would have happened anyway pursuant to cutting the other 10% of sawlogs). There is a fine line between persuasively manipulating conceptual frameworks in favour of wood production like this and outright dishonesty, and forest services cross it when they describe such operations as ‘recycling’, as has been happening recently on the NSW south coast. The presentation in the WPI of trees that other species are using and we are not as ‘waste’ or ‘residue’ is both unacceptably wood-centred and unacceptably human-centred. It violates all ideals of sharing the earth with other species.

As you can tell from these remarks, I think the critique of the WPI remains quite relevant to much contemporary forestry, and also to the NSW RFA. A slightly modified version of the WPI is in vogue today, which makes some minimal and quite inadequate provision for non-wood values, for wildlife and ecosystem services through leaving habitat trees, filter strips, buffer zones and the like, but then regarding what forest remains as available

for the foresters' dream of total use and yield maximisation. This sort of maximising-within-minor-constraints methodology has been behind the destruction and decline of scientifically managed fisheries in recent decades and it will do the same thing eventually to the forests, although maybe take longer. It does not learn the real lesson of what is wrong with WPI and wood-centred worldviews.

The use made of the residue concept points up a major area where I think FFF was mistaken. We argued in FFF that some careful low intensity logging could take place in native production forests without too much damage. I have always believed that on the whole developing careful and respectful forms of use is better than dividing the world into areas completely protected from use and other areas given over to completely productivist ideals where it is open slather and over-exploitation. (I argued for this in my last book, the Ecological Crisis of Reason 2002). But I now see that in the current political context the ideal of low volume respectful use cannot be realised, because the domination of the industry and the forest-service abuse of the residue concept and only slightly modified aims of maximisation refuse to let us uncouple acceptable and unacceptable forest uses. In these circumstances I see no option but to work to evict forestry entirely from the native forests. I am impressed by Judy Clark's work showing that we now do not need to log native forests at all to meet our needs or have forest-based industries (Clark 2003).

Another major theme of FFF was the scandal of forest economics. That the ideology of privileging and maximising wood production placed its schemes, at least in their cruder forms, in conflict with conventional economics proved eventually to be their Achilles heel.<sup>3</sup> Supplying cheap wood and supplying future needs were sacred tasks, but the low value accorded native forest wood did not support a budget that even covered public administrative and extraction costs. As Neil Byron put it, "there was no economic rationale to how forestry was actually being practised. It didn't have any sort of economic logic to it. . Forests [were] there ... just to produce as much wood as possible ' to help develop the nation" (Byron 1999, 52).

As we said on p.19 "The ideals of complete utilisation and maximum wood production – together with the empire-building aspirations of forestry organisations and the pressures.... from associated private industries explain the otherwise puzzling fact that forestry services are eager to persist with uneconomic projects which degrade the environment".

Now this scandal was really what was to prove the undoing of the grand projects. If you pointed out that these projects were ecologically destructive, many people would shrug and say that it was a pity but it had to be done, to supply needs or to make money, or whatever. They assumed the bureaucrats knew best. But if you could also show that the grand project lost money for the public and wasn't essential, they would have to think harder. So entrenched were the projects though that demonstrations of poor economics tended to be disregarded by those in power in forestry, and reports showing poor economic returns attacked or suppressed, as in the case of the 1976 Forestry and Timber Bureau Report on the economics of the pine program that was never released.

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<sup>3</sup> Of course forestry soon began to realise the promotional value of some economic analyses, such as multiplier effects, and these aspects were rapidly adopted. The conflict of the grand projects with an ecological economics that values ecosystem services is more obvious.

WPI was implicit in the whole economic relationship of the public and private structure, the bigger picture of socialising the loss-making production part, and the privileging of the highly profitable private part. It was no coincidence that the neglected non-wood values were mostly public and the privileged wood values mostly private. The privileging of private over public goods is a basic principle of neo-liberal organisation, applied in many fields.<sup>4</sup> This economic structure, along with the forest service secrecy and lack of accountability that goes along with it, really called into question the whole concept of these being ‘public’ forests, since they were really run as a resource for the benefit of a few big private forest industries at the expense of the public interest represented by the public agency budget and the non-wood values of the forests (p10).

WPI was also implicit in [some would say determined by] the social relationships of certain forest services – which members of the public they saw as friends or enemies, their function in determinedly promoting wood use projects even where they were opposed by the communities involved, would provide few or negative social benefits, and where non-wood values would greatly suffer -- as in the South Coast charcoal plant. Most especially it is implicit in the alliance of forest services with industry against environmentalists – by no means a foregone conclusion in a forest management system which is genuinely ‘public’ and democratic, and does not privilege industry welfare in determining values and projects for the forests.

### **3: Reception of FFF: Transgressive Cross-Disciplinarity**

FFF’s plethora of publication dates (1973, 1974, 1975) reflects its extraordinary reception, which was almost completely polarised. Publishing FFF was one of those experiences that are tactfully termed ‘educational’, educating by shattering illusions about academic freedom and public interest censorship. I was very lucky to have Richard Routley as an intrepid and imperturbable companion in this hazardous and intimidating exercise in ‘speaking truth to power’. The trouble began about 2 weeks before publication when the bold title FFF came to me, as so many good ideas do, overnight. Up to that point the book had survived what little academic oversight it had received under a stuffier provisional title that betrayed little of its radical content. In academia at that time environmentalism was considered radical, and rumours of the impending publication quickly spread to the ANU Forestry School (then led by Professor Derek Ovington). He asked the ANU Vice-Chancellor Professor R.M. Williams to stop publication of the book and make us revise the text in accord with Ovington’s comments.

What happened next is recorded in an article I published in Brian Martin’s 1986 book Intellectual Suppression entitled “The Fight for the Forests Affair”. Fortunately, the head of RSSS at the time was Professor Geoff Sawer, a noted civil libertarian and legal expert, who resisted this censorship proposal and kindly checked the book for vulnerability to legal action. The censorship attempt is commemorated in the note at the foot of p. 1 of the 1973 first edition (inserted very late in the printing process) which read: “The views expressed here have not been considered by the Forestry Department of the University and must not be taken as necessarily representing the views of members of that Department, or indeed of anyone but the authors.” The note flagged the book’s transgressive status in academic and forestry eyes.

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<sup>4</sup> With some exceptions for those public goods (such as highways) necessary for realising private goods.

The book was well-received by environmentalists who were eager to get copies, and the first edition of 1000 copies sold out within a few months. It was very unfavourably received on the whole by people aligned with forestry. The ANU student forestry journal the Forestry Log produced a whole issue vilifying us, complete with scathing reviews, satirical poetry and hysterical articles accusing us of responsibility for the deaths of saw-mill workers through hypothetical encouragement of tree-spiking – tellingly assimilating our criticism to murder. Two further editions sold out shortly after reprinting in 1974 and 1975, making it one of the best-selling books ever distributed by ANU Press. Nevertheless in 1974 under new forestry head Professor Carron's directions Richard Routley and his RA Jean Norman were banned from using the Forestry Library, which made preparations for any further editions difficult. Forestry Department objections to the book played a role in the withdrawal of support and funding for further editions post 1975. We did not contest this as vigorously as we might have because much of the book was already badly dated and it was almost a relief not to have to take on the daunting task of a further update and revision.

The sexism of the book's reception was one of the educational aspects of the experience for me (although it seemed lost on my co-author). I found many people automatically attributed the book and everything in it to Richard Routley. The experience of being accorded less than full credit for my collaborative work with a senior male academic, apparently because I was female, was quite galling. But my anguish was not wasted because the experience helped me later to theorise the parallels between androcentric culture's failure to recognise the creative and collaborative agency of women and its parallel blindness in human-centred contexts to the creative agency of non-human nature, traditionally feminised in the west (Plumwood 1993).

The situation in forestry showed a very high degree of suppression of criticism. What happened to us was fairly mild compared to the treatment of other critics over the years. I mention a few cases, which are of course just the tip of the iceberg of what was really a systematic process of intimidation and censorship by state forest services and senior academics. Many cases are documented in Brian Martin's 1997 book *Suppression Stories*. For example in 1977 the chairman of the Victorian Forests Commission, Dr. F. R. Moulds, wrote ten letters to La Trobe University urging dismissal or other disciplinary action against Peter Rawlinson, then a senior La Trobe University zoologist and spokesperson for the Conservation Council of Victoria, for speaking out on a forest issue. Similar letters were written about Philip Keane of the Botany Department. The university, to its credit, took no action.

Things were no better in NSW. Several people had research projects in state forests stopped because they had said something critical, and in one case a friend who had merely discussed ideas with us and given us offprints of published papers had a research project in Tallaganda State Forest suspended and his career suffered. Neil Byron, a member of the ANU forestry Fortech team that helped save the Washpool rainforests in 1982, records that "Wal Gentle, then the rather imposing chief of the NSW Forestry Commission, wrote to my boss at ANU, the Professor of Forestry David Griffin, demanding that I be sacked". (p 55 Byron 1999). In 1987 NSWFC made a similar suppression attempt against Jim Burgess of ADFA, then doing work on the effect of woodchipping on water quality. An entire Science Show was devoted to covering this case in 2/5/87.

In my article in Martin's volume I wrote "A combination of indoctrination and intimidation, plus well-developed professional loyalty, ensures that significant criticism does not



originate from inside the profession or discipline itself... at the same time the professionalism mystique and the discipline system was invoked, as it was in our case, to ensure that no one outside the profession can make such criticism in a way that needs to be treated seriously ... or silenced altogether. The fragmentation of knowledge, like the fragmentation of work, is thus used as a method of control. It's a neat system which nicely protects a particular set of doctrines and interests". (p. 73, Plumwood 1987).

To sum up, the historical convergence of events that created the space our book fell into was:

- the forestry profession was under pressure to undertake critical debate on the issues of intensification and to open to change
- strong disciplinary boundaries, a culture of suppressing debate and tight control of research and jobs protected established doctrines from internal challenge
- external challenge was discredited as transgressive, as in the note on FFF's first edition.

Obviously in these circumstances challenge can only come transgressively, from outside, from defiance of disciplinary barriers. In these circumstances transgressive cross-disciplinarity is the only route to creative change. I commend it to you for further study and practice.

#### **4: Limitations of FFF: Wider Social Analysis**

Of course the datedness of FFF strikes you right on the first page. We have much more forest in national parks than we had in 1973 and agricultural land clearing has turned out to be a much more persistent menace to Australian ecosystems than it then looked to be. This kind of dating is more or less inevitable, although embarrassing. What I find it a bit frustrating though now is how far the argument of FFF is deliberately limited in what it takes up – in that sense FFF is not a deeply radical book as I would now understand that. FFF did not explicitly question the wider background systems like capitalism, human-centredness, and Graeco-Christian forest phobia. For example the use of disparaging concepts like 'overmature' and 'wastewood' to describe trees not suited for logs but extremely valuable for wildlife is part of a framework for thinking about the forest that is not only extremely wood-centred but also extremely human-centred. But FFF did not directly challenge the human-centred aspects of the framework, which from my perspective now is a serious omission. I can say in extenuation that some of these aspects were taken up in later work, for example my own extensive work on human-centredness in Plumwood 1993 and 2002. Also that this limitation of vision was entailed by the book's advocacy role, involving not wanting to take on too much more than most people could manage or to seem too radical when speaking to power. But the price of this is a certain loss of intellectual penetration and connection. There is a tradeoff here realists and activists need to be cautioned about.

A more satisfying and rounded analysis than FFF would try to set the problems it discerns in the forestry profession and ideology into a larger social and ideological context. For there is much more to the problem than the state forest services and the forestry profession itself involved here. It is also a problem about the distortion and corruption of the public sphere and 'public forests' under neo-liberal capitalism. Recent evidence from Tasmania showing extensive corruption of forest service regulators (it's all in Hansard!), especially on environmental standards, by the forest industries, adds to the sad

evidence confirming the Fight for the Forests' analysis of forest services as captured bureaucracies. But in these days of neo-liberalism unfortunately they're all captured -- especially in comparison to the public service ideals of service prevailing in the pre-economic rationalist times in which we wrote FFF.<sup>5</sup> They are captured by and hostage to private enterprise in the dominant models of economic rationalism which make public agencies either an imitation of or a servant of private corporations. The 'good corporate servant' model of public service pioneered by forestry now seems to be the norm, and I think this is the real crux of the scandal exposed by FFF, and one we should not have come to terms with so easily.

## **5: FFF and the present : has it all now changed for the better?**

When one looks at the elimination of mainland rainforest logging, there is no doubt that there has been progress in the forestry arena. There is pleasing news from forestry agreements negotiated in some states, notably Qld and WA, about the phasing out of native forest logging and woodchipping.<sup>6</sup> But looking more closely, we can see that progress has been very patchy, and that those who would fight for the forests certainly cannot yet rest from their task. In WA, the Karri has been spared, but Jarrah forests are still under pressure. There is shameful news from Tasmania, where rainforest logging continues, vast volumes of forest are exported as woodchips, corruption is rampant,<sup>7</sup> and the two major political parties have conspired together to defeat democracy and block choice and change in forest policy. Forestry in Tasmania is exempted from the laws that comprise that state's Resource Management and Planning System, which set out sustainable development objectives and obligations.<sup>8</sup> Just recently we heard news of the destruction by careless burning of Australia's -- and probably the world's -- tallest hardwood tree, an ancient Mountain Ash in a forestry concession area in the Styx Valley in Tasmania.<sup>9</sup>

In NSW forest and community activists have been battling NSW State Forests' extraordinary pursuit and promotion of the charcoal industry, based first on the Pilliga Scrub and later on supposed 'residues' in South Coast forests. State Forests has persisted in promoted this degrading and unsustainable use of the forest in the face of enormous public opposition, especially in the affected communities. Is this really the way we want a public agency in charge of an immensely important and sensitive ecological reservoir to

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<sup>5</sup> Articulated for example by Nugget Coombs.

<sup>6</sup> Although notably both these negotiated outcomes depended on bypassing the RFA process and the states concerned drew fire from the relevant minister, Wilson Tuckey. ”.

<sup>7</sup> See Launceston Examiner Wed 15<sup>th</sup> Oct 2003 p5 and Hobart Mercury 15<sup>th</sup> Oct 2003 “Forest Rorting Claims Get Heartfelt Reaction”. See also Manning 8<sup>th</sup> Oct 2003. Appendix 9.1 Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee. Many captured bureaucracy aspects seen to be getting worse, on the evidence of Manning, who, as Forest Practices Officer, was in a position to know. “The culture of the forest industry and the regulatory bodies who are supposed to govern it is one of intimidation, deception and lack of transparency, one which will vilify and exclude those who attempt to bring it to account” (P 507).

<sup>8</sup> Pers.comm. James Prest, PhD. Candidate, UoW.

<sup>9</sup> The mistreatment and inadequate protection of these ancient trees in the Styx Valley was discussed in FFF.

behave ? I fear the wood production ideology still rules unchallenged in the worst states, NSW and Tasmania, and that a modified but still unacceptable volume-maximising rationality still informs the RFA deals for those states (supplemented by less than minimum necessary protection of habitat for other species).<sup>10</sup>

I think one of the worst things that has happened in NSW recently is the removal of the right the public enjoyed prior to the RFA of taking independent legal action to enforce environmental laws through the Land and Environment Court. This measure provided some of the accountability to the public necessary to make talk of 'public' forests meaningful.<sup>11</sup> It also provided some check on the corruption of regulation and environmental standards outlined in evidence from Tasmania. If forestry really has the high standards of environmental practice it claims, it should have nothing to fear from being asked to meet the same standards of practice and accountability as other industries.

And what about the forestry profession itself ? Does St. Martin of Tours, the saint who cut down the sacred groves of the Germanic tribes to demonstrate to these pagans the power of his Christian god, retain his post as the patron saint of forestry ? (Must 'forester' forever abbreviate not 'forest-lover' but 'forest-eater'?) Before we can conclude that the problems FFF identifies in the profession are confined to the bad old days, we need more evidence that the profession is becoming more self-reflective and self-critical, as well as more tolerant of and responsive to ecological criticism and less oriented to promoting 'total use' schemes. For a certain type of forestry consciousness oriented to intervention and production, there is a clearly a challenge in learning to revere the old forest, the forest of prior presences that is able to thrive without the intervention of the forester. Professional foresters have to come to terms also with the fact that forestry has played a major role in developing programs that are devastating to forests (eg in PNG), and develop a critique of this. Ultimately I think foresters have to be like doctors and other caring professions and take a vow not to knowingly harm those in their care.

To test the extent of change to forestry philosophy, I would like to challenge the forestry profession (and call upon AIF to pass a motion) to censure the Tasmanian government, the Tasmanian Forest Service and the Styx Valley concession holder for killing Australia's tallest tree and express lack of confidence in their custodianship of the forests.<sup>12</sup>

The wood-centred conceptual framework developed to such an extent in the professional ideology of forestry also of course draws on support from the larger society. The tradition of Australian forestry shares in the original, 'terra nullius' sin of other Australian colonial knowledges, which is, in the tradition also of St. Martin, to discern no prior presences to acknowledge -- whether as indigenous others, ancestral forces, forest spirits or land partners. We see the nullifying effects of this failure not only in the forests but also in our traditions of land clearance and land degradation. In forestry this lack of reverence

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<sup>10</sup> The stakeholder framework employed also failed adequately to represent public goods provided by forests such as catchment protection.

<sup>11</sup> These provisions had been used often to enforce the compliance of the NSW Forestry Commission with environmental laws in cases such as that over the Chaelundi Forest in 1991. The rights of third parties of third parties to bring proceedings for civil enforcement of relevant legislation were replaced with a provision for government ministers to bring enforcement proceedings. (Forestry and National Parks Estate Act 1998, S.32,35). James Prest. pers.comm.

and recognition was reflected in the notorious stumpage rates set low to provide the cheapest wood, 'royalty' reflecting only extraction, and not replacement costs for the original forest. We have let this tradition of nullification inform the woodchip or 'residue' industry that still rampages through our forests, now making up about 90% of the native forest cut. Recent ecological studies suggest that the old forest of prior presences is irreplaceable, given its great contribution of ecosystem services and the time it takes these to recover from logging.<sup>13</sup>

We now know much more about what is being sacrificed in the way of ecosystem services to keep this marginal industry of woodchipping alive. The new ecological knowledge makes the irrationality of this pursuit plain for all to see. In allowing our current 90% woodchip cut, neo-liberal forest policy in Australia is willing to place at risk invaluable ecosystem services that represent important public goods because it gives higher value to the marginal private goods that derive from woodchip export industries. Not only are the public goods of ecosystem services compromised, so are others in the social arena, because the need for large public funding inputs to sustain private forest industry competes directly with other public choices such as welfare spending. Nothing could more clearly exemplify how toxic for both forests and people is the indefensible, ecologically irrational program of prioritising private over public goods that is the hallmark of neo-liberalism.

In pointing to the cultural theory limitations of FFF I am of course reflecting on what the intervening 30 years has taught me about understanding the wider setting of the failures we identified. There have been many improvements, as we have seen, in our relationships to the forest, but little cause for complacency. We can often go a certain distance in citizen-won improvements in the existing framework before we begin to push the boundaries, bump up against the framework constraints of the wider systems that govern our relationships with the natural world. Beyond this point, we find that in order to change the treatment of forests, we have to change a whole lot of other things as well, about our political, economic and philosophical frameworks -- about our culture. We must avoid an "after the revolution" approach to the issue of social change that can see only a distant ideal, but at the same time we cannot afford to underestimate how deeply the environmental crisis challenges the culture of the west and the commodity world-view.

Nothing illustrates this more clearly than the problem of displacing WPI and evolving traditions of respectful forest use. For both ecological and ethical reasons, we need a culture that can recognise, value and protect mature forests, and this cannot be achieved under a commodity regime (interpretation of value) that makes central the forests' value as cellulose and positions them as vulnerable to cost-cutting pressures. In political systems where commodity is the dominant form, commodity industries can dominate decisions and outcomes via their control of employment and investment systems, and our only alternative to commodity status is the category of non-use, total protection as national park. Neither tradition permits the development of respectful use. I would argue that these choices and the context need to be expanded, but meanwhile, that the second choice of no use is the better because it can leave options open for later stages when

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<sup>13</sup> See Brendan Mackey, this symposium.

more information is available and the option of developing respectful use traditions is more visible and viable.

So before we can finally evict WPI forestry from the sacred groves and switch our forest interactions to respectful forms of use, we need changes in larger political, economic and philosophical aspects of culture. For example, WPI is a wood-centred knowledge system and professional ideology (not just found in foresters but in surrounding professions like resource economists) that is part of a larger reductionist 'resource' worldview which affects much more than forestry and trees. Transcending WPI is a special case of challenge to the instrumental-commodity-resource view of nature in the larger culture of the west, to reconceive the ecological other that provides the basis for all life not as a resource but as a long-term partner – that is, in terms of a partnership ethics. (Plumwood 2002) As a western-based society, we must make the transition from Graeco-Christian forest-phobia amplified by the sado-dispassionate rationality of capitalism into a commodity-resource reduction of forests, to one in which the forest is an ecological partner and mutual provider who, like the land, cares for us as we care for it.

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