

Item **8.1 2020.81 Allied Natural Wood Enterprises Pty Ltd** ⇨ **Timber Optimisation Hub**

Ordinary Council Meeting 20 October 2021.

Brief summary and quote:

Speaking against the approval of the DA to expand the capacity of the Eden chipmill, Harriett Swift urged Councillors to consider its impacts on the native forests and the climate.

“We cannot pretend that this DA is just about couple of colorbond sheds.

“It’s about the future of the native forests in the Bega Valley and beyond. It’s that serious,” she said.

Address by Harriett Swift

The applicant, government agencies and the Council assessors have all chosen to frame this DA as if it’s just about a couple of colorbond sheds – nothing to do with forests or the broader environment. It doesn’t have to be that way. We’re deluding ourselves if we pretend that the impacts stop at the fence.

To pretend that it’s nothing to do with forests is like saying that Bega Cheese has nothing to do with cows. Or nuclear waste has nothing to do with uranium mining. You just can’t make those artificial separations.

I could go on all day about why logging native forests is wrong, for the economy, the climate, the waterways, public opinion, social licence, soil quality, for taxpayers, for wildlife, for our safety from bushfires but I’ll spare you that.

The main justifications for leaving forests out of the DA decision are:

1. that it doesn’t increase the processing capacity of the mill and
2. it doesn’t influence how much logging of native forests occurs.

Both of those propositions are wrong.

Processing capacity

ANWE and its predecessors have always been woodchippers. Since the mill was built in 1969 it has converted tens of millions of tonnes of the region’s forests into woodchips. During that time, all the old sawmills gradually closed. Blue Ridge was the last sawmill standing when it lost the sawlog WSA to ANWE in 2019.

This gave ANWE a monopoly on all logs from Eden State Forests and since then it’s become even bigger – it’s now the biggest native forest processor in NSW and one of the biggest in Australia since buying the 9 Boral Timber mills, then 2 more native hardwood mills in Victoria. They are big, powerful and used to getting their own way.

ANWE’s sawlog WSA (commencing 1 January 2020) includes a requirement to report milestones in getting the new mill built and getting the DA approved. ^[2]

The final one is that this new development must be commissioned by 30th June this year– 4 months ago - a legally binding agreement with the Forestry Corporation. In other words, it could lose access to those logs unless it gets this DA approved. ^[2]

So that’s 25,000 m³ a year at stake unless this DA is approved. Not much, by chipmill standards you might think.

But, it’s not the whole story. ANWE stands to lose a lot more.

Effects on logging of native forests

The foundation myth of the woodchipping industry is that it uses “waste wood.” Even today, the industry and the governments still cling to that myth and it’s actually written into the legal framework for the logging industry, the CIFOA: a logging operation MUST NOT be driven by low value products such as woodchips or firewood. In 2020, 97.5% of trees logged in the Eden Region became woodchips and firewood. Without this sawmill, it would be 100%; and it would be illegal.

So, without this DA, the Eden Region would lose the legal window dressing for the woodchipping industry as well. It’s that simple and that serious.

Of course if this DA is approved and the mill goes ahead, the main “higher value” products will be briquettes and pallets. This photo is from the Eden tip. It’s not a big advance on woodchips.

Whether we like it or not, this vote is about the future of the forests in the Beg Valley Shire and way beyond, even into Victoria. I’m asking councillors to be aware of that when they vote today. It is a massive responsibility that you, as councillors have before you and I’m asking you to vote against the approval.

Attachment

According to the Department of Planning, (under S. 4.15) all DAs before a Council^[1] must consider a number of matters. These include:

- Impacts ... on the natural and built environment in the locality.

It doesn't say that forests aren't part of the natural environment

I'll come back to that in a minute.

The Department of Planning also says that councils must consider:

- Any submissions (such as from neighbours or other groups).

I remind councillors here that – last time round - more than 160 submissions were received and only 1 (a 24 word single sentence submitted at 2am on a Sunday morning) supported the DA.

In spite of this overwhelming public opposition to the DA, the BVSC staff delegate approved it.

And the third important factor here is:

- The broader public interest

What could be more important than protecting our unique natural assets, our climate and weather patterns, wildlife and helping to inhibit future bushfires?

^[1] <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Assess-and-Regulate/Development-Assessment/Your-guide-to-the-DA-process/Development-assessment-and-construction-approval-processes/Stage-3-Assessment-What-happens-to-my-DA-now>

^[2] https://www.forestrycorporation.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/1214637/allied-natural-wood-exports-pty-ltd-hardwood-forests-sawlogs.PDF

^[3] <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/-/media/epa/corporate-site/resources/forestagreements/coastal-ifoa-protocols.pdf?la=en&hash=62F5AFBB969D14D13A1FDFDE003B7BE8081A50D1>

Part 5: Timber product requirements

31.4 Timber product requirements

1. The approval includes various requirements relating to timber product specifications and volumes in this protocol.
2. A harvesting operation must only be conducted with the purpose of producing high quality large sawlogs, high quality small sawlogs, veneer logs or piles, poles or girder logs.
3. A harvesting operation must not be conducted for the primary purpose of producing low quality logs (including salvage and firewood), pulpwood logs or heads and offcuts.
4. Condition 31.4(3) above does not apply to thinning operations for the purpose of timber production.