2003

PLANTATIONS VS NATIVE FORESTS

Should forest protection groups be supporting a forest policy that calls for an end to all native forest logging and a transition to plantations?
We think not.

CURRENT SITUATION

1. It has been claimed by one NSW forest campaigner that all major environment groups in Australia support a No Native Forest Logging position (apart from the North East Forest Alliance), this is not so. Some of the groups which do not have a policy to end all native forest logging and move to plantations are: Nature Conservation Council of NSW, West Australian Forest Alliance, Friends of the Earth, West Australian Conservation Council, Tasmanian Conservation Trust and World Wildlife Fund.
2. Some of the concerns about the NNFL position are:
   - It is a very broad 'easy' slogan or catch-all which requires a lot of qualifications and does not address any of the practical questions which it raises such as – does it preclude all private land logging, does it preclude all logging for and by walk-about sawmills, does it extend to 'thinning' etc
   - Plantations have major environmental impacts. They are often more damaging and intensive than previous land-uses such as grazing. They are available for clear-felling and they are intensively managed and heavily roaded. As a result they have major impacts on soil erosion and water quality. They are predominantly monocultures, which involve heavy applications of herbicides and pesticides.
   - There is a growing body of scientific evidence to suggest that plantations represent the worst possible outcome for water yields and that widespread plantations without due consideration of water impacts could have disastrous results for both the environment and the community.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Quotes from a number of scientific papers presented at a workshop on plantations, farm forestry and water in July 2000 are provided below to elucidate the water impacts associated with plantations and why that represents a potential problem to the environment.

Young trees use more water than old trees. They also use considerably more water than understorey shrubs. Therefore, they result in less water being made available to streams and to the environment. This is the reason why logging is recognised as having a major impact on water yields – because of the thirstiness of the young trees that regenerate after logging. It is the very reason why communities object to logging in their water catchments.

Maintaining a heavy stocking of young trees is the worst possible water outcome. It is worse than both cleared land and oldgrowth forest. However, that is exactly what plantations do – they keep a continuous cycle of trees at about 30 years of age. This is a relatively unnatural condition.

However, a natural regeneration sequence of grasses and shrubs to an eventual oldgrowth or mixed age condition of tree species, will result in a much better water

on surface water flow and river salinity. The net effect of large-scale plantation forestry in the high-rainfall upper catchment could be negative in the short-term because of the loss of dilution flows" Powell 2000

"*Preliminary results of sub-regional-scale modelling suggest that large-scale revegetation for salinity management may have unintended negative effects on river salinity and flow unless it is carefully targeted to strategic locations in the landscape*" Powell 2000

"*While increased tree plantings may provide benefits in the management of dryland salinity and water quality, there are potential negative effects associated with reduced water yields and river flows*" Riddiford 2000

"*Water yields in a regrowth forest were found to increase initially and then to decline below pre-treatment levels during the 16 year period which followed the logging of a moist old-growth eucalypt forest in Eastern Australia. Yield reductions of up to 600mm per year in logged and regenerated areas were in accord with water yield reductions observed in Mountain Ash regeneration in Victoria*". Cornish & Vertessy 2001.

Catchments covered with old growth stands of mountain ash yield almost twice the amount of water annually as those with re-growth stands aged 25 years. Vertessy, Watson, & O'Sullivan. (2001).

"*Reductions in water yield through reafforestation constituted a 4 to 21% decrease in annual stream discharge and were statistically significant for a majority of the basins. The reduction of water yields by forests tends to be greater for dry years than for wet years. The result appears to be exacerbation of the streamflow diminution of meterological drought*" Trimble et al 1987

"*Water yields began to decline in all catchments 2-3 years after logging as regrowth eucalypts became established, and the rate of this decline was related to the mean stocking rate of eucalypt regeneration in the next 4 years. This water decline exceeded 250mm in the 6th year after logging in the catchment with the highest stocking of regeneration and basal area regrowth*". Cornish 1993

ALTERNATIVES

Clearly, in light of the scientific evidence and the unquestionable environmental impacts in relation to plantations, any policy which relates to them must address these issues.

Further work is still being done, and more evidence will emerge over the next few years, but at this stage it is clear that plantations are appropriate in some strategic locations in the landscape.

However, in many other circumstances natural succession and regeneration back to native forest over time, and diverse, mixed woodlots that are selectively harvested for high quality timber are a much better water, wildlife and indeed wood outcome than plantations.

Story by JANET HAWLEY

They may have started out as a bunch of "ferals, freaks and ratbags" – vilified, beaten and arrested as they dug in and risked all to hold back the loggers. But after 14 years, the North East Forest Alliance has at last emerged victorious – with the gongs to seal it.

Tree amigos

At loggerheads: (main picture) Dailan Pugh in Whian Whian State Forest; (below) protesters, including Ian Cohen, now an MLC (close-up photo, top left), occupy a "tripod" in an attempt to block loggers gaining entry to Chaelundi State Forest in 1991.

FOR HOURS I FOLLOW DAILAN Pugh's large bare feet, treading and wading behind this gentle giant and tribal elder of the eco-warriors as he glides deeper into the rainforest he knows so intimately.

He pauses beside a 1000-year-old brush box tree – its immense girth studded with orange fungi ears and tangled with vines – thrusting into the canopy. Possums leap from tree hollows, plate-eyed owls hoot.

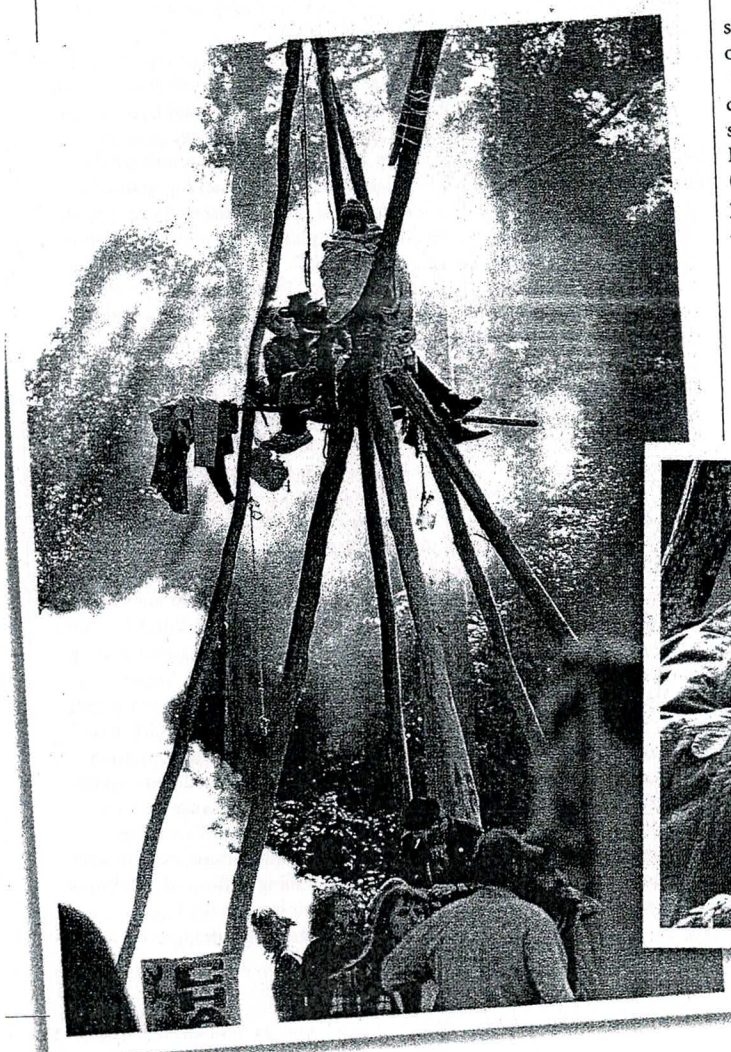
Pugh seems like an old-growth tree himself, with his huge stature, mossy beard, calm strength and inner rings of learning.

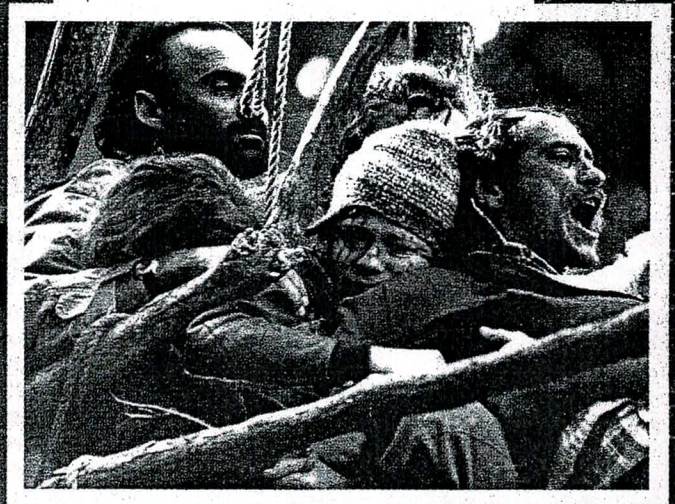
Dailan is the son of the late artist Clifton Pugh, but outside conservation circles, where he's admired, and the timber industry, where he's often hated but ultimately respected, he's little known and he prefers it that way.

The 47-year-old is the quiet central player in an extraordinary, multi-layered saga of how a network of people initially dismissed as "a bunch of ferals, freaks, hippies and ratbags" saved the rainforests and old-growth forests of north-east NSW.

Finally, after 14 years of protracted courtroom battles and on-the-ground, sometimes life-threatening campaigns, Pugh's "tribe", the North East Forest Alliance (NEFA), can claim victory. In March, as a pre-election promise, NSW Premier Bob Carr said 15 "icon" areas of north-east forest (about 65,000 hectares) would be incorporated into national parks.

Says Pugh: "It means NEFA has now saved 725,000 hectares of forests, more than doubling national parks in this region and thereby stopping the old-growth logging here. What we've won was beyond





arrested, but Nan says: "Several police had a soft spot for our cause, and bought our hand-printed T-shirts to wear under their uniforms. Some of them even lined up for head and neck massages – there's quite a famous photograph of that."

Many protesters "blooded" at Terania Creek went on to fight at other campaigns, "and we crap on about the glory days, like a troop of green Anzacs," admits a veteran.

Terania Creek Forest was eventually saved, and the growing public controversy led to the historic decision by the Wran government, in 1982, to stop logging in a large proportion of the state's rainforests. But the loggers' chainsaws continued in other disputed forests – which conservationists argued should have been defined as rainforest – as well as in old-growth forests.

DAILAN PUGH COULDN'T ABIDE THE logging – or "murder and mayhem" in the forests, as he calls it – and decided it would only go ahead "over my dead body". In 1989, with a group of like-minded activists, he set up NEFA.

It's a grassroots alliance of individuals and groups, who work together to protect old-growth forests, rainforests, endangered species and wilderness. "The marvel of NEFA is that its people range from dreadlocked ferals to mechanics and barristers – and everyone respects each other," says Aiden Ricketts, who was a drop-out law graduate during the early blockades and is now a law lecturer.

To the frustration of those who wanted to sue it, NEFA has never been a formal organisation with a formal membership or constitution. It's never had paid staff, assets or an office (people work from home or local environment centres), yet it has been extraordinarily effective. People volunteer time and an amazing variety of skills, from academic research to acrobatic dancing on the arm of a cherry picker, to running pirate two-way radio communications, to setting up the NEFA website. (Click on www. nefa.org.au to check out the "Intercontinental De-luxe Guide to Blockading": with tips on tree-sitting techniques – including the tripod, the cantilever, the monopole and Star of David – and lock-ons.)

In 1990, after Clifton Pugh died, Dailan decided to put aside his own artistic ambitions and use his inheritance to work full-time for the alliance. Pugh and another key co-ordinator, John Corkill (then a teacher, later an environmental consultant and Greens candidate), soon became brilliant self-taught green bureaucrats.

Aiden Ricketts sees them thus: "Dailan has immense scientific and ground-truth knowledge. He turns up barefoot at high-level government meetings and everyone listens because he always knows more than the experts. His focus is fascinating in a long campaign, because he never loses sight of the objective. He's very calm, spiritual and determined; he doesn't have an enemy, only an objective.

"John, on the other hand, is an amazingly skilled and aggressive amateur lawyer, whose eyes burn with the thrill of beating the enemy along the way to reaching the objective."



"State Forests regarded old-growth trees as dying and a waste of space. One forester aptly described this as pinus envy – envy of pine plantations."

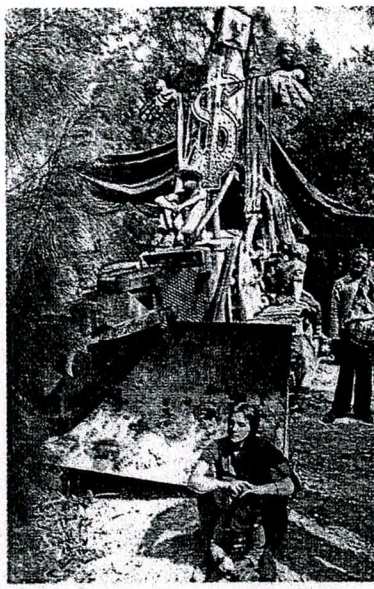


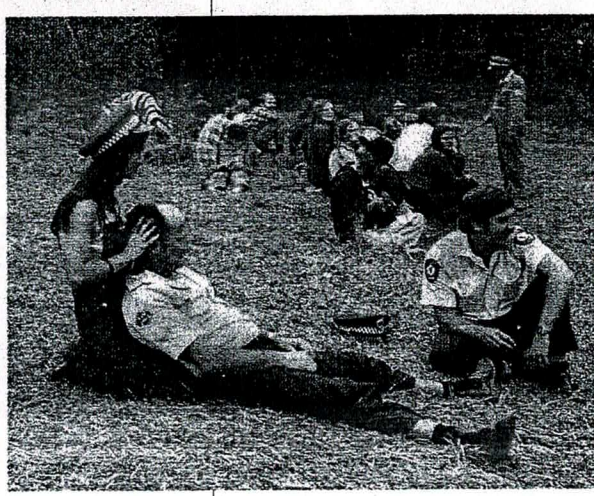
The bush scientist and bush lawyer made a great team. With increasing sophistication and ingenuity, NEFA repeatedly took on the government and Forestry Commission in simultaneous pincer actions of forest blockades and challenges in the law courts and lobby rooms – and mostly won.

Pugh concedes that it's been an evolving battle: "We had to learn new skills and tactics all along the way. We got better at building bigger, more innovative blockades to delay logging, but the police found quicker ways of pulling them down. We found various legal avenues to pursue in the courts, but the government kept changing the laws to close these off. These days it's more political, trying to get results through government."

When NEFA began, State Forests of NSW (then known as the Forestry Commission) "were still in the dark ages," says Pugh. "State Forests had long been a law unto themselves. No other department, such as National Parks and Wildlife, dared challenge them.

"In 1989, I did a review of all State Forests management areas in NSW, and was amaz how backward their resource management was. Their information base was appalling Their maps only showed trees that were commercially useful. They had no data on growth, no idea what other plants and anin were in the forests. If you look at a 1989 management plan, it would say, '10 years previously, a university class was in one spo





Action stations (clockwise from above): at the Terania Creek protests in 1979, police relax with a massage before getting back to business; Hugh and Nan Nicholson with children Elke and Terri and a sign of the times; and a "captured" bulldozer.

the forest … and found these species'. That the sum total of their information!

"They regarded old-growth trees as senes ie, dying, and a waste of space. Chopping t down was called timber stand improveme Their aim was to convert native forests to single-age regrowth stands which were eas to manage. One forester aptly described it pinus envy – envy of pine plantations."

Pugh was now studying a stream of university botany and biology courses, and obsessively devouring scientific papers.

NEFA'S FIRST MOVE WAS TO IDENTIFY major stands of old-growth forest in NSW. A fauna consultant was employed, undertook an extensive survey of endange species of flora and fauna. The next step was protecting the forests. Pugh knew of two earlier court cases where locals had successfully taken State Forests to court to prove that an environmental impact state

DAVID KEMP; FAIRFAX PHOTO LIBRARY (2); MICHAEL QUAIN

EARLY ONE MORNING IN 1992, NEFA activists staged a bold paramilitary coup at the Forestry Commission's Sydney headquarters, locked the building, took over the commissioner's office and used his fax machine to issue *The People's Commission for the Forests New Charter*, a document outlining their vision for NSW's old-growth forests.

Ricketts: "We were accused of being terrorists, and the mainstream environmental movement clung to their chandeliers and went, 'Oh my God, these people are so outrageous, we cannot endorse this!'"

Increasingly, the environment, forests, logging and woodchipping became fierce political issues. In 1996, a year after Bob Carr was elected with the promise of being a green premier, a moratorium on logging was declared while a comprehensive regional analysis (CRA) of the state's forests was undertaken.

NEFA, National Parks, State Forests and the timber industry were involved in the process, aimed at scientifically documenting all types of native forests, the flora and fauna, as well as establishing adequate percentages to be protected as National Parks while logging was permitted in other areas.

"I get a bit cross when politicians like Wran and Carr say they saved the forests. *No, you didn't* **– the people saved the forests."**

Pugh and a NEFA team worked obsessively on the CRA process, then, in 1998, "left in disgust when Carr only handed over three-quarters of the promised areas into National Parks, and sold out the rest to placate the timber industry and safeguard marginal seats. We endorsed what he handed over, but said the blockades were back on."

Pugh was by now suffering burnout, so Susie Russell and Carmel Flint took over the role of NEFA co-ordinators, pushing for the remaining 15 icon areas to become national parks – an ambition which has finally been realised.

Ricketts observes philosophically: "Within a social movement, like peace or environmen you usually don't succeed. You have to live with non success, or partial success, as the be you'll ever get. So it's an incredible feeling to finally win peace in all these forests."

THE IMPACT OF THE NEFA "TRIBE" extended far beyond the forests. It was a subculture that fed an entire regional movement of social and cultural renewal. Says Ricketts, now associate lecturer in the School of Law and Justice at Southern Cross University (SCU) in Lismore: "It changed lives, and indeed saved lives of some characters who were hovering on the edge."

Ironically, too, the forest campaigns proved a fantastic source of job training. Many so-called dole-bludging hippies learned practical and organisationa skills, and gained a sense of empowerment and direction. They went on to study law, environmental science, media, architecture, naturopathy, make films write books and songs, start bands, galleries, nurseries, organic food shops and restaurants. Some even went into local and state government.

"The network of contacts is huge once you're in he NEFA tribe," says Ricketts. "There's now a whole generation of NEFA children who've sprung from elationships that started at the blockades."

So what does an old activist do now that he's given ıp blockading and got a proper job? Ricketts is etting up a public interest advocacy course at SCU o teach people activist skills for any cause, based on he NEFA experience. He's also written a chapter locumenting NEFA's political, social and artistic nfluence for the book *Belonging in the Rainbow Region*, recently published by Southern Cross Jniversity Press.

Pugh and Corkill were both awarded the Medal f the Order of Australia (OAM) in this year's ıustralia Day honours list for their work in orest conservation. Says Corkill, laughing: "We've one from being arrested, vilified, topping hate lists nd threatened we'd have the shit bashed out of us, t ow being given medals! It's very gratifying."

Pugh is now painting again. "People say an artist nly has 10 really good years in a career," he says, nd hopes to hit his run now. "I never regarded ıyself as a hippie or a feral, though others might ave thought I was. I call myself a politically non-ligned conservationist. But I'm very fond of the ippies and ferals, because we couldn't have done without them.

"I take my hat off to the people who went on lockades, and spent months in forests in often very rimitive conditions. They underwent huge traumas bout loggers coming in and bashing them up, police ragging them off to be arrested, fined or jailed. They eren't a rabble – they were committed to making difference. Some might have been on the dole, but ıey were working as hard as in any job. I reckon ıey've repaid more than they got, by saving all ıose forests."

Corkill adds: "I get a bit cross when politicians like Wran and Carr say they saved the forests. *No, you idn't* – the people saved the forests. We put our lives n the line, put thousands of hours into blockades, gal challenges, and put environmental awareness nto the social agenda.

"One of the last things Milo Dunphy, that pioneer nservationist, said to me before he died was: 'lease thank the ferals.' Milo's era of conservationists ıd campaigned in their own, more polite way, but e knew the old ways were no longer effective. He ughed and said: 'Thank God for the ferals.'" ■