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# Old Growth is Not Just Timber, As Most Know

By Beth Schultz

IN an article published in The West Australian on 16 March 2001 ("Time to cut forestry critics down to size"), Don Spriggins and the Institute of Foresters demonstrated once again that they just don't get it. They still think old-growth forests should be chopped down and old-growth trees sold as wood.

They try to marginalise those who disagree with them, calling them unqualified extremists, and ignore the fact that it's not just a small minority but the vast majority of Western Australians who want what's left of our old-growth forest protected.

Mr Spriggins tried to rebut alleged myths about south-west forests.

Here is an answer to each of his rebuttals.

1. All streams and rivers rising in State forest remain fresh. Forest streams may still be fresh but only from a

human perspective. Research shows that even in the high rainfall karri forest (which CALM assumes doesn't have a salinity problem) and even with the prescribed buffer of uncut vegetation, after clear felling there is an increase in salinity that is harmful to aquatic ecosystems. As large expanses of lower rainfall jarrah forest are clear felled, there is a high risk of increased salinity of both land and water.

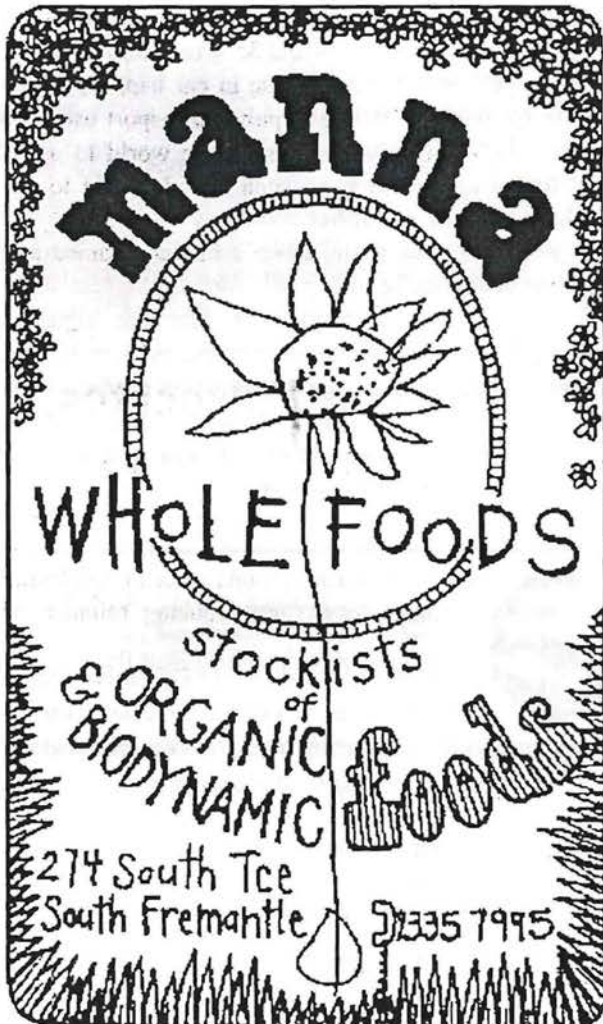
2. After 150 years of logging only two species have disappeared from forest areas. Ten species of fauna, including the western bristlebird and the red-tailed phascogale, are known to have disappeared from forest areas. Logging and associated burning must be considered as contributing factors because they destroy habitat. However, no one knows how many species have disappeared from forest areas since Europeans started logging and burning because no surveys were conducted before these destructive activities began.

3. Every forest-dwelling species found in old-growth forest is also found in regrowth forests. There is more to old-growth forest than big old trees and birds and mammals. For example, the humus on the floor of unburnt old-growth forest contains whole communities about which we know very little. There has been no comprehensive flora or fauna survey in either old-growth or regrowth in any of the 22 forest ecosystems identified during the Regional Forest Agreement process.

4. Of the 346,000 ha of old-growth forests in the South-West, most is already in reserves. The Labor Party has moved quickly to implement its promise to protect all old-growth forest, as defined by CALM. However, even if 100% of this old growth forest is protected, that still amounts to only 10 per cent of what was growing here in 1829.

5. There is a considerable area of old-growth forest coming on in the South-West. People who want to log old-growth forest often misinterpret the meaning of old-growth. A fundamental criterion is that the forest hasn't been subjected to intensive industrial exploitation. Old growth, like an original work of art, is irreplaceable. Regrowth is just a copy. It can only ever be old regrowth.

6. Karri trees do not live for thousands of years. Scientific studies indicate that karri trees on average do not live much more than 250 years. I am not aware



of anyone claiming that karri trees live for thousands of years. Individual trees can live for a thousand years - if given the chance. They don't just die and fall over at any particular age. To chop them down on the pretext that one day they will die and fall over is as crazy as saying we should kill people off at 50 or 70 years of age because they will die one day. Furthermore, standing dead old trees provide important habitat.

7. The community is constantly told by extreme environmentalists that good quality logs capable of producing sawn timber are being burnt as firewood or converted to woodchips. No one can guarantee that no sawlog ever has been burnt as firewood or turned into woodchips but the percentage would be very small. The volume of sawlogs that have been squandered as woodchips and charcoal can never be accurately calculated, but it is enormous. To take just marri, according to the Regional Forest Agreement, 80,000 cubic metres of marri sawlogs can be produced annually from 2004. At this rate, since wood chipping began in 1976, WA could have produced two million cubic metres of marri sawlogs. In fact, we produced less than half a million. This indicates that since 1976, 1.5 million cubic metres of marri sawlogs have been wood chipped. When

conservationists sawed up one old growth jarrah log, they produced a truckload of high-quality sawn timber. The log had been written off as a charlog and abandoned in the forest for two years. Hundreds of thousands of such logs have been turned into charcoal or lie rotting throughout the forest.

Apologists for old-growth forest logging try to divert attention from poor forestry practices to salinity. They refuse to recognise that their attitudes belong to a past era or to accept that unless the management of our forests changes radically, WA's environmental problems will get worse.

For example, species like western ringtail possums and white-tailed black cockatoos once common in the Wheatbelt have retreated to the forest region - their last refuge. If the forests continue to be logged and burnt at the rate and intensity allowed under CALM's forest management plans, such species will face extinction.

For 80 years the foresters who have managed WA's public forests have generally promoted wood production at the expense of all other values. The community now knows there are better things to do with old-growth forest than chop it down. It's time Mr Spriggins got the message. ■

## Concerns Over Jarrah Logging

THERE is increasing concern over the Government's announcement that it will guarantee 20,000 cubic metres of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade jarrah sawlogs to the Nannup mill until 2013.

Conservation Council vice-president Beth Schultz said, "We understand why the Government has promised to keep the Nannup sawmill supplied. We are pleased that the Government is looking after the workers."

"The move towards value-adding is good but needs to be more specific. Just drying and dressing jarrah is not really value adding. The timber must be used for high-value furniture and craft products."

"The down side to the announcement is the commitment to supply 20,000 cubic metres of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade jarrah sawlogs for the next 12 years. Where will the logs come from?"

"This commitment has been made before we have a figure for the sustainable cut of jarrah logs and before we have found out what is ecologically sustainable management of jarrah forest, let alone achieved it."

"And they are still talking about 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade jarrah sawlogs, with no mention of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade sawlogs, even though these contain significant amounts of first grade timber. With the focus still on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade sawlogs, CALM's wasteful practices will continue to

generate huge volumes of lower grade logs for which there is no market. Whatever happened to whole bole logging, where the sawmills would be required to take the whole tree and make the best use of it?"

"There must be no further commitments of our forests until we know the sustainable cut and are actually practising ecologically sustainable forest management."

"We were interested to note that the company receiving the \$1.4 million in government assistance, M & B Sales Pty Ltd, sells a range of softwood products. We hope they expand their plantation-based sector and end any reliance on logs from old growth trees in previously logged forest," said Dr Schultz. ■



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