

South East Timber Association Submission on the Snowy Monaro Regional Council (SMRC) Settlements Strategy

1. INTRODUCTION

South East Timber Association (SETA) members advocate for policies that allow for active and adaptive management of native forests on both private and public land. SETA expects government policies and practices will maintain environmental values in the long term. This submission will focus on the private native forest estate in the SMRC area.

It is of great concern that the rezoning of private native forest to Environmental Management (E3), will fail to maintain all environmental values, currently existing in the lands to be rezoned. The rezoning will also deliver negative social and economic outcome for affected land owners, including SETA members, and is diametrically opposed to at least four of the 12 planning priorities outlined in the Local Strategic Planning Statement (LSPS). These being:

- Identify protect and encourage restoration of environmental value in the Snowy Monaro Region;
- Move towards a carbon-neutral future;
- Promote, grow, and protect agricultural production and industry; and
- Provide for employment lands in appropriate locations that maximise the potential for business growth and efficiency.

Pre-existing rights to derive income from those lands will be stopped, as E3 zoning precludes timber harvesting. This will devalue the affected land, without compensation, while council will no doubt expect rates to continue to be paid.

The road and fire trail network established during timber harvesting operations, which provides a basis for prompt initial attack on bushfires, will scrub up and fall into disrepair. At a time when more bushfire mitigation is desperately needed, fire break infrastructure will become unusable, as landowners seek to balance lower income, by cutting costs of access maintenance and pest plant and animal control. Cost cutting will deliver negative environmental outcomes.

2. E3 ZONING – ROOTED IN TERRA NULLIUS ECOLOGICAL VIEW AND THE MISUSE OF THE PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE

The major unspoken assumption underpinning E3 zoning is, with the exclusion of human disturbance, including timber harvesting, the existing biodiversity values will be maintained and be enhanced, as the environment "recovers."

Contrary to the terra nullius ecological view, much of the Snowy Monaro landscape evolved over the past 15,000 years or more in an environment of regular disturbance, as Ngarigo People managed the land and influenced the biota adaption through the regular use of fire.

Ignoring the fire history of the Monaro and the Australian landscape more generally, has resulted in denser forest understorey, unhealthy forests and contiguous three-dimensional fuels, that result in catastrophic bushfires, when we have significantly below average rainfall for one or more years.

Many threatened and more common species are adversely affected by changed fire and food regimes. With the exception of the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, most conservation land managers, regulators and policy bureaucrats, using the protection of the "precautionary principle," default to the lock up and neglect regulatory regime. This is a safe option, because if nothing is done



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(precautionary approach) and threatened species populations decline or become locally extinct, no one can be blamed, if nothing has actually been done.



Hundreds of Thousands of Hectares of "Protected" Land, Was Incinerated in the Last Fire Season and in Earlier Bushfire Disasters. Is This Ecologically Sustainable? Photo J Waalkens.

Just one example of the failure of passive management of the conservation reserve system across three states is provided by the following table from the Threatened Species Scientific Committee established under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, when it released a conservation advice approved by the Minister on 5 May 2016 (TSSC 2016)

Available quantitative data are summarised in the table below.

Population	State	Decline
Ben Boyd National Park	NSW	44% (1999 to 2008)
Nadgee Nature Reserve	NSW	47% (1999 to 2008)
Port Campbell	Vic	>70% (past 10 years)
Pines Flora and Fauna Reserve	Vic	100% (extirpated around 2006)
Mt Lofty Ranges – northern metapopulation	SA	100% (extirpated around 2009)

3. MAPPING

3.(a) E3 Zone Mapping

According to the *FAQ – Draft Rural Land Use Strategy* "This zone is generally intended to be applied to land that has special ecological, scientific, cultural or aesthetic attributes, or land highly constrained by geotechnical or other hazards."

The only RU3 Forestry zoned land, where forestry is authorised under *Part 5B of the Local Land Services Act 2013*, appears to be private softwood plantations.

PNF used for timber and firewood production still provides wildlife habitat and corridors.



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The E3 zoning map appears to be a blunt instrument, applied across almost all, if not all, private native forests (PNF). Much of the E3 zone mapping covers forests lacking more than ordinary ecological, scientific, cultural or aesthetic attributes.

Recommendation 1: It is recommended that the E3 zoning only apply to PNF that has demonstratable ecological, scientific, cultural or aesthetic attributes.

To implement this recommendation, Council must engage with landowners and Local Land Services (LLS) staff to identify PNF that has the stated attributes.

The first photo below shows private native forest less than six weeks after a wildfire burnt over 100,000 hectares in one day. Three years prior to the fire, the forest was thinned and a post thinning fuel reduction burn carried out. It should be noted that zoning changes do not stop bushfires.

The second photo shows nearby national park with un-thinned regrowth and more than 20 years of accumulated fuel.



Burnt by Bushfire January 2020. Thinning and Post Thinning Fuel Reduction Undertaken Three Years Prior.



Burnt by Bushfire January 2020. Mature and Un-thinned Regrowth, With Unmanaged Fuel in Nearby National Park.



Which forest management approach will give the flora and fauna inhabiting the above forests, the greatest chance of surviving bushfires?



Long-nosed Bandicoot Living in Managed PNF



Lyre Bird living in Managed PNF

3.(b) Mapping Errors

SETA members are aware of the many errors contained in the southern NSW Old Growth mapping layer. The Sensitive Regulated Land mapping suffers from significant errors, for the same reasons as those applying to the E3 zone mapping.

Inaccurate mapping and simplistic ecological views held by state government bureaucrats have resulted in the debacle surrounding the Koala State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP) 2019 and Guideline. These bureaucrats and relevant ministers, who chose to ignore the mapping errors and flawed policy conditions, sit far removed from those most impacted by negative triple bottom line outcomes that will result from the SEPP.

SETA members expect that council staff and councillors will have a much stronger focus on ensuring any PNF mapping and policy changes deliver positive outcomes from ecological, social and economic perspectives.

However, the only RU3 Forestry zoned land, where forestry is authorised under Part 5B of the Local Land Services Act 2013, appears to be private softwood plantations.

Page 70 of the Snowy Monaro Draft Rural Land Use Strategy states: "*Simultaneously, mitigation measures will have to be employed to assist in transitioning to a carbon-neutral future.*"

Timber and paper manufactured from PNF sources, along with affordable firewood, come from native forest, which is the most carbon positive and renewable ecological and production system in the Shire. With the conditions and protections applying under the PNF Code, sensible land zoning will allow ongoing delivery of better environmental, social and economic outcomes from this land, than a broadscale E3 zoning lockup will deliver in future.

Page 81 of the Snowy Monaro Draft Rural Land Use Strategy states: "*Forestry is a well established industry within the east and south east, particularly Bombala and is vital to its ongoing economic viability and growth. The forestry industry consists predominantly of softwood plantations of radiata pine occupying an area of 33,000 hectares as well as a softwood timber mill.*"

The E3 Zone mapping affecting all private native forest, effectively eliminates the production of the most effective carbon store and sustainable building material available in the Shire. Given the impact of the 2019-20 bushfires on future state forest plantation and hardwood resource, eliminating private property hardwood supply options will magnify the ongoing social and economic impacts of

the fires. How does council strike an appropriate balance between environmental, social and economic factors, which are all critical to the sustainable future of the shire?

Lockup and neglect mismanagement, has been the outcome delivered by broad E3 zoning in other LGAs. This simplistic planning approach has delivered negative triple bottom line outcomes time and again, particularly in relation to bushfire mitigation and subsequent impacts on human lives and property, farming and biodiversity.

It has also been noted by SETA members that the E3 mapping has included at least one significant area of eucalypt plantation, just the tip of the error iceberg.

Recommendation 2: It is recommended that council staff establish a working relationship with LLS forestry staff, so they fully understand the environmental protections provided under the forest codes of practice.

3.(c) Snowy Monaro Biodiversity Study 15 December 2019

The above study makes a number of references to the mapping used as the basis for the report.

Page iv: *"For example, a project is currently underway by the NSW Government to map vegetation types across South East NSW using a consistent classification schema, but the data were not available for inclusion in this assessment and report."*

Page 13: *"Biodiversity values documented in the assessment criteria described above represent a mix of available (surveyed) map products, distributional model predictions and field sightings. Unfortunately, the full distributions of vegetation types, threatened species and Endangered Ecological Communities are poorly described for the region. A project is currently underway by the NSW Government to map vegetation types across South East NSW using a consistent classification schema; however, the data were not available for inclusion in this assessment and report."*

Page 14: *"The vegetation mapping available for this study is split into coverages based on former Local Government Area (LGA) boundaries (i.e. Snowy River, Cooma-Monaro and Bombala) with significant gaps in coverage, and no consistent classification schema."*

Page 14: *"Similar to the lack of a standardised vegetation classification schema for the region, there was no clear guidance available on the conservation status of mapped vegetation types (i.e. a means to infer which vegetation types are Endangered Ecological Communities, etc)."*

There are a number of additional comments, which are effectively disclaimers as to the reliability of key biodiversity data. For example, on page 19, under heading 4.3, **Caveats**, "the consultants state: ***"Field surveys and data confirmation should form a key priority for any area proposed for land use or zoning changes. A number of submissions to the Snowy Monaro Region Planning and Land Use Discussion Paper 2019 also highlighted this point."***

This comment confirms that the council would be extremely unwise to make sweeping additions to the E3 zoning layer or changes to the land zoning in general, until reliable, ground validated mapping is available.

Recommendation 3: It is recommended that no changes are made to the current council land zone mapping until reliable, ground validated mapping is available.

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