

Conservationists call for new logging policies, fearing for critically endangered swift parrot

ABC South East NSW / By Keira Proust and Jen Hunt

Posted Tue 1 Jun 2021 at 6:31pm



There are fewer than 300 swift parrots left in the wild, according to research from the Australian National University. Around half visit the Mogo State Forest in winter.

(Supplied: Geoffrey Dabb)

Conservationists have raised the alarm over planned logging in a patch of forest on the NSW south coast that is home to the critically endangered swift parrot during its winter migration.

Forestry Corporation NSW is planning several harvesting areas in the Mogo State Forest over the next 12 months.

ANU researcher Debbie Saunders said that swift parrots have been sighted in one of the patches, known as "compartment 146".

"[In] this one coupe, there have been 180 swift parrots sighted, which equates to [more than] half of what the population estimate is," Dr Saunders said, "despite the fact that every coupe around it has been logged and the whole thing has been burnt as well."

Forestry Corporation spokesman Dean Kearney, who is senior manager for planning in the hardwood division, said he was aware of the endangered status of the parrot, but rejected the parallel being made with logging.

Key points:

- Plans for logging in swift parrot habitat is underway by Forestry Corporation NSW
- Conservationists fear logging will further impact the critically endangered swift parrot
- There are calls for policy changes to be made.

"We are aware of the species that use that forest and we're certainly aware that swift parrot records exist in that area," Mr Kearney said.

"We know they're under pressure, but we don't believe that there is an impact from our harvesting."



Conservationists are calling for logging in Mogo State Forest to stop after finding large trees felled there just days ago. (*Supplied*)

'Voluntary' regulations

In March 2021 NSW Forestry Corporation was fined \$33,000 by the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) for breaches during logging operations on the far south coast.

The EPA said Forestry did not include records of the critically endangered parrot in planning for its operations in three south coast state forests, including Mogo.

In relation to upcoming planned logging, the corporation says it is planning selective harvesting in Mogo State Forest in order to reduce the impact on the endangered swift parrot.

"We've now migrated to a set of voluntary measures that sit on top of the normal Coastal IFOA [Integrated Forestry Operations Approvals]," Mr Kearney said.

"One of the conditions that we have put in place — on a voluntary basis — is that no tree that is greater than 1 metre [in] diameter at the breast height, or 1.3 metres off the ground, will be harvested."



The swift parrot is migratory, spending winter in NSW's coastal forests.
(Supplied: Geoffrey Dabb)

Calls for policy changes

For local environmentalists, though, these voluntary measures don't go far enough, according to the secretary of the Coastwatchers Association on the south coast, Joslyn van der Moolen.

"The voluntary measures that Forestry say they are putting into place, I just see that as a public relations exercise because it's not written up," Ms van der Moolen said. "And it's not enforceable by the EPA."

In a statement, the EPA says it will continue to closely monitor Forestry operations at all stages of logging, to ensure it is compliant with the current regulations.

"Where the EPA identifies a non-compliance, it will take appropriate regulatory action," a spokesperson said.

"Forestry Corporation NSW has an obligation under the IFOA to notify the EPA and [the] general public at least two business days before commencing operations."

Dr Saunders hopes the state government will look at changing its current forestry policies to ensure critical habitat is protected.

"I know that the Forest Agreements allow logging there. My question is why is that still allowed today?" Dr Saunders said.

"Our policy around forest management and native vegetation clearance laws continues to impact on this species.

"Obviously, adopting the right policy in the first place is going to have the most long-lasting impacts."

The ABC has contacted the New South Wales government for comment.