

PROPOSED

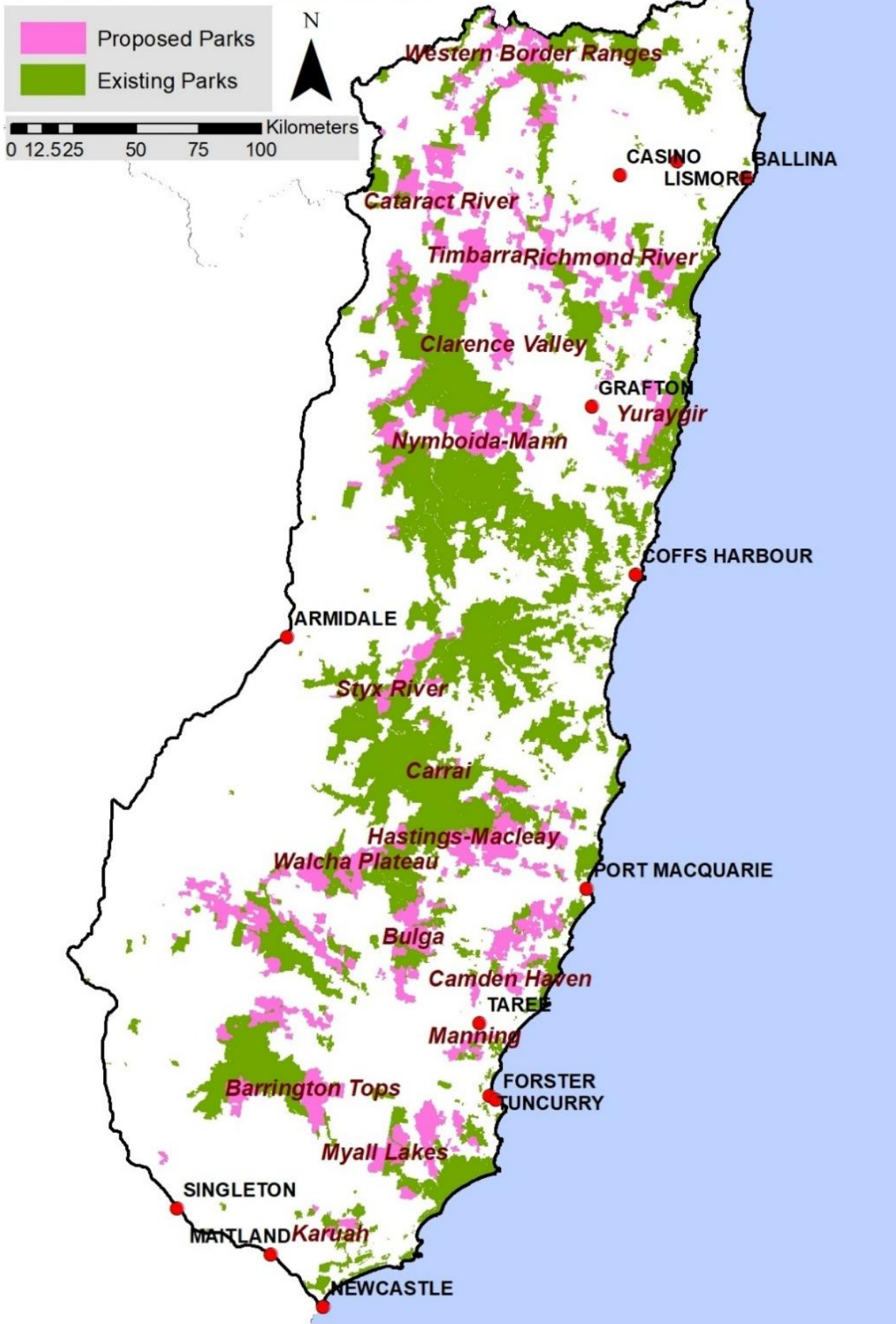
NORTH EAST FOREST PARKS

North East Forest Alliance



North-east NSW comprises the region north from the Hunter River to the Queensland border and west from the coast to the New England Highway on the tablelands. Identified as one of the world's centres of biodiversity. The proposed North East Forest Parks comprise 573,568 ha (all) of native forests on State Forests. The addition of these will significantly improve the viability and connectivity of current reserves, creating a 2.2 million ha world-class reserve system covering 29% of the region.

North East Forest Parks



These parks are long overdue. The 1992 National Forest Policy committed to creating Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CAR) reserve systems for forests. In 1997 Nationally Agreed Criteria for the Establishment of a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative Reserve System for Forests in Australia (JANIS 1997) identified explicit minimum reserve targets. From 1996-8 the NSW and Commonwealth Governments undertook a Comprehensive Regional Assessment (CRA) that generated and collated a vast amount of information on NSW's forests to allow the identification of a CAR reserve system. After a preliminary assessment identified that it would require protecting most of north-east NSW's State forests, at the industry's insistence the NSW Government intervened to guarantee continuation of the then timber allocations for another 20 years, curtailing the achievement of a genuine CAR reserve system. After the 20 years were up, the Governments refused to undertake the promised reassessment.

The JANIS targets were based on protecting 15% of the pre-colonisation extent of forest ecosystems. In 2022 Australia signed onto the Global Biodiversity Framework, committing to protect or conserve 30% of our land and seas by 2030, prioritising areas of high biodiversity value, adequately sampling the full range of existing ecosystems, and creating well connected networks of reserves. This significantly ups the ante, and once again identifies the State forests of north-east NSW as one of the highest national priorities for inclusion in the national reserve system.

It is well past time to protect all public native forests in north-east NSW and deliver the promised Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative reserve system committed to back in 1992.

Reasons for Creating the North East Forest Parks

It is proposed that all native State Forests in north-east NSW be created as the North East Forest Parks and added to the National Reserve System, because:

- Some 327,815 ha (57%) of the proposed North East Forest Parks were identified by the NSW Government agencies in 1998 as reasonably required for a CAR reserve system, in addition to areas subsequently reserved, though political imposition of minimum timber supply curtailed their protection – its time to complete the CAR reserve system
- Adding these forests to existing national parks is required to honour NSW and the Commonwealth's commitments under the Global Biodiversity Framework, to achieve the goal of protecting 30% of our land area (30by30) by prioritising areas of high biodiversity value, adequately sampling the full range of existing ecosystems, and creating well connected networks of reserves
- North-east NSW is recognised internationally and nationally as having outstanding biodiversity and as being a priority for increased reservation, this proposal includes;
 - internationally and nationally recognised biodiversity hotspots
 - world heritage value rainforests and eucalypt forests
 - identified areas of high diversity and endemism for a large range of Australian taxa
 - areas identified as important for phylogenetic diversity and endemism, and
 - areas identified as paleo refugia
- The Commonwealth's biodiversity values mapping shows the whole north-east NSW to be one of Australia's highest priorities for inclusion in the 30by30 reserve system
- The Commonwealth's combined biodiversity and representative values mapping shows the North East Forest Parks to be amongst Australia's highest priorities for inclusion in the 30by30 reserve system
- Protection of North East Forest Parks will increase overall reservation of north-east NSW to 29.1%, a needed increase for inadequately protected bioregions;
 - The primary bioregions encompassed are NSW North Coast, South-east Queensland, and New England Tablelands, with 29.8%, 14.3% and 13.2% (respectively) currently reserved

- Based on IBRA subregions, 24% of north-east NSW is below 10% reserved, and 54% has 10-20% reserved
- There are 275 Plant Community Types (PCTs) mapped as occurring within the proposed North East Forest Parks, with 166 (61%) of these having less than 30% of their original extent in existing national parks, representing 310,010 ha (57%) of mapped vegetation. Of these, 46 PCTs are <1% reserved and 70 are very poorly (1-15%) reserved.
- North-east NSW's forests are nationally significant for their variety and density of threatened plants and animals, demonstrating their vulnerability, and the importance of stopping logging, and instead protecting and restoring habitat, if the goal of no further extinctions is to be honoured;
 - Within and adjacent (with 1km) to the proposed North East Forest Parks there are records of 241 species classed as threatened in NSW, with 16 Critically Endangered, 88 Endangered, 135 Vulnerable and two endangered populations
 - The North East Forest Parks represent 0.7% of NSW's land area yet support 23% of NSW's Threatened terrestrial species, most notably 48% of threatened frogs, 30% of threatened birds and 52% of threatened mammals
 - There are 132 species in or adjacent to the North East Forest Parks that are listed as nationally threatened under the EP(BC) Act, with 14 identified as Critically Endangered, 48 as Endangered and 70 as Vulnerable.
 - North-east NSW is nationally significant for the variety and density of nationally threatened forest fauna and flora species they support.
 - Every year the habitats of thousands of individuals, of dozens of species threatened with extinction, are logged
 - Of the 175 priority fauna species in north-east NSW, logging is identified as a serious threat to 68%, and a primary threat to 25%
 - Over 70% of populations of priority species do not have viable populations in the current reserve system
- The current reserve system is highly fragmented, though its size, viability and connectivity can be significantly improved by the protection and rehabilitation of the North East Forest Parks, improving the viability of flora and fauna populations and species' ability to migrate in response to climate change
- North-east NSW is a nationally important climate refugia, incorporating paleo refugia that have functioned as places where species have been able to survive and evolve during millions of years of major climatic upheavals in the past, with amongst the best prospects of maximising the retention of its outstanding biodiversity into the rapidly warming future
- Recovering forests will help mitigate the impacts of climate heating on biodiversity and regional communities by restoring moist microclimates, reducing the risk and intensity of wildfires, increasing stream flows in dry times, and reducing runoff and flooding in wet times
- These forests are of outstanding national importance for carbon sequestration and storage, and thus play a disproportionate role nationally in removing atmospheric carbon;
 - With most of a logged tree left in the forest to rot or burn, and most of that removed made into waste or short-lived products, logging generates large volumes of CO₂
 - Logging has more than halved the volume of carbon stored in forests, releasing millions of tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, which can slowly be regained as protected forests mature and regain their lost carbon