

North East Forest Alliance

NORTH EAST FOREST ALLIANCE

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The Hon. Gladys Berejiklian, MP
Premier of NSW
52 Martin Place
SYDNEY NSW 2000

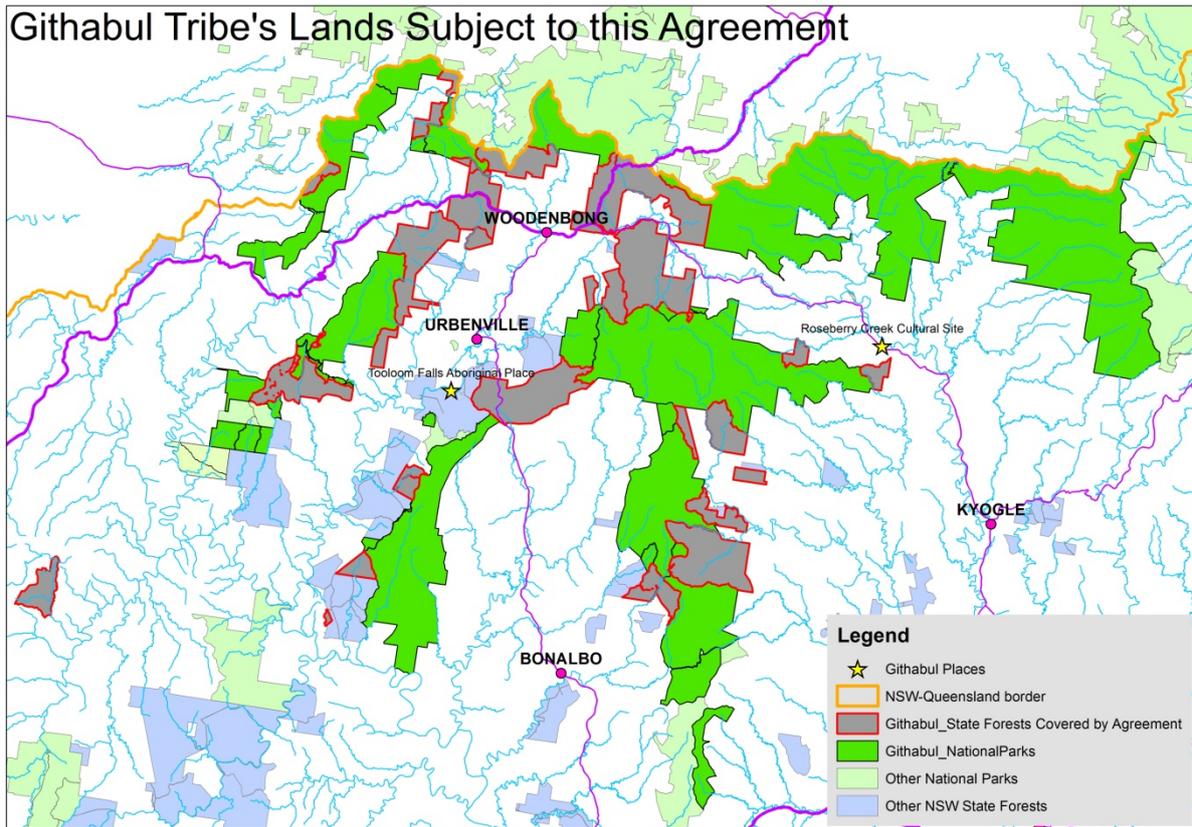
Dear Premier,

On 29 November 2007 the Federal Court of Australia made a consent determination recognising the Githabul People's Native Title rights and interests over 1120 sq km in 9 National Parks and 13 State Forests in the headwaters of the Richmond and Clarence Rivers in north-east NSW.

We write to you on behalf of a consortium of the Githabul Tribe and NSW Conservation groups to ask you to intervene to honour the rights of Githabul Native Title holders over Crown lands, by:

- Transferring care and control of 29,700ha State Forests for which Githabul Native Title rights are recognised, from the NSW government to the Githabul Tribe.
- Assisting in preparation of a comprehensive Plan of Management to safeguard conservation and cultural values and prioritise rehabilitation works.
- In concert with the Commonwealth funding a comprehensive 15 year rehabilitation plan to arrest and repair forest dieback on Crown lands as part of a Githabul Caring for Country program.
- Creating more NPWS positions and training for Githabul Working on Country in National Parks in the Kyogle area.
- Transferring the care and control of Crown lands around the Tooloom Falls Aboriginal Place to the Githabul Tribe.
- Assisting in the establishment of a Githabul Cultural and Tourism Centre on their land at Roseberry Creek.
- Supporting World Heritage Listing for qualifying National Parks in the region.

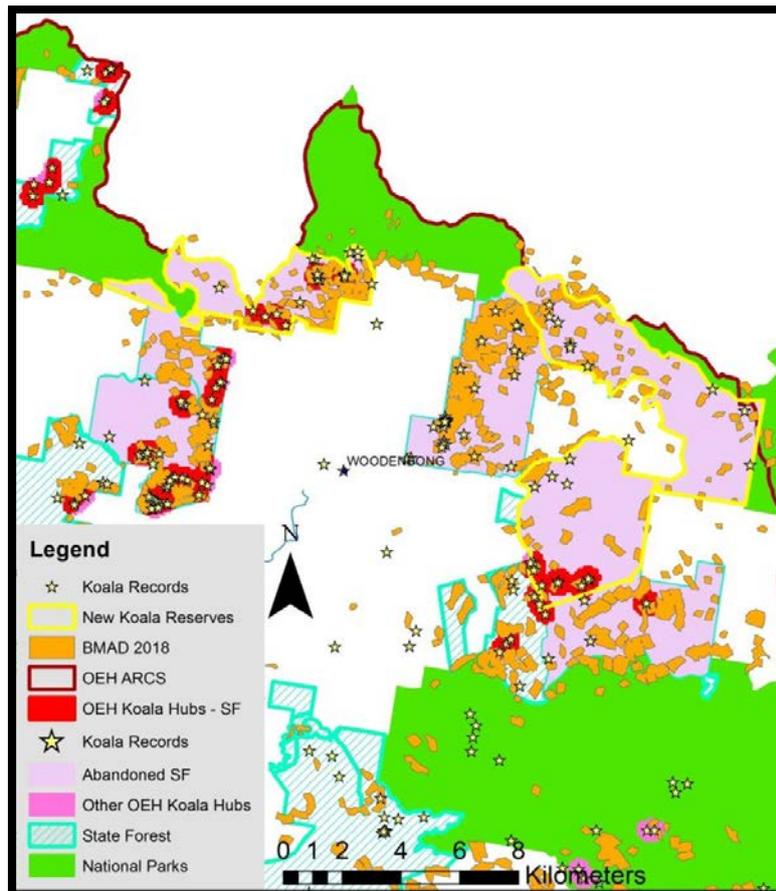
The Memorandum of Understanding we have reached is attached, It is an agreement between the Githabul Nation Aboriginal Corporation and Githabul Elders, and the North East Forest Alliance, North Coast Environment Council, National Parks Association, Nature Conservation Council, Nimbin Environment Centre, Lismore Environment Centre and Casino Environment Centre.



As a first step we are seeking a Government commitment that the care and control of State Forests for which native title rights have been recognised will be transferred to the Githabul Tribe in an appropriate manner that safeguards environmental values. We are seeking assistance to prepare a comprehensive Management Plan to guide management of these lands within 12 months.

These forests have been significantly degraded by logging spreading lantana through the forests and initiating Bell Miner Associated Dieback (BMAD). The most recent assessment by DPI-Forestry identified 7,151 ha (**24%**) of Githabul State Forests and 6,385 ha (**8%**) of Githabul National Parks as affected by BMAD, and [the evidence](#) is that this is significantly under-estimated.

The Forestry Corporation have recently responded to this dieback by abandoning 11,000 ha of these State forests for timber production (Natural Resources Commission 2016), and it is evident that the balance of the Githabul State forests are in a similarly parlous state. Half of the abandoned forests have been identified for conversion to the Mount Lindesay Koala Reserve which will entail transferring management to the NPWS, with as yet no funding. We consider it more appropriate that these areas, along with the balance of the Githabul State Forests, be transferred to Githabul care and control, with funding for management and rehabilitation.



Map showing OEH Koala hubs and Koala records in relation to Bell Miner Associated Dieback as under-mapped by DPI-Forestry (2018) from 2015-17 (orange areas), and areas of State Forests identified by Natural Resources Commission (2016) as being abandoned for timber production (pink areas). Note the high correlation of Koala records with dieback areas, emphasising the urgent need for protection and rehabilitation of these important areas.

Given that BMAD is rapidly worsening, and likely being aggravated by climate change, activities that cause its spread need to be stopped and rehabilitation urgently undertaken. The current Githabul Caring for Country program has a proven success record rehabilitating BMAD affected forests. Initially we consider that an upscaled (with State funding) Caring for Country program based on doubling of current funding to \$3 million per annum for 3 years would allow for increased rehabilitation works, better BMAD mapping, management trials, upskilling and preparation of a rehabilitation implementation plan for the next 12 years. With a goal of rehabilitating all BMAD affected forests over 15 years we expect funding will need to be increased after the initial period. We are seeking guarantees that funding will be continued for the full 15 years subject to satisfactory progress. This would provide significant opportunities for meaningful employment on country.

We are concerned that the Kyogle part of the Richmond River NPWS Area has undergone significant staff reductions in recent years, with its field staff halved. We consider that there is a need for increased staff to manage the existing National Parks and are requesting additional identified Aboriginal positions.

The Tooloom Falls Aboriginal Place is a significant women's site that is being degraded by inappropriate recreational use and is in urgent need of improved management. We are

asking that the Githabul be given care and control of the Crown lands encompassing the falls, along with an adequate buffer and linking areas to other sites.

The region is in close proximity to growing population of south-east Queensland and thus has the potential for significant tourism growth. The Githabul have land at Roseberry Creek adjacent to the Summerland Way, near to its intersection with the Lions Road, with ready access to the Toonumbar and Border Ranges National Parks, making it ideally situated for the establishment of a cultural and tourism centre. It is on the banks of the Richmond River in a pleasant location. The development of a cultural and tourism centre on the site has the potential to be a tourist attractant and provide a significant boost to the Kyogle economy. We are seeking assistance to progress this project.

The Border Ranges National Park, and 9 ex-Flora Reserves, are already inscribed on the World Heritage List as part of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia. The balance of Githabul National Parks have been assessed as qualifying for World Heritage Listing, and in 2010 were included on the Tentative List. It is requested that the re-nomination proceed, which will enable these forests to be given the recognition they deserve, as well as providing increased tourism appeal.

Due to logging spreading and aggravating BMAD it is no longer tenable to manage these forests for timber production as the resource is rapidly diminishing, regeneration is poor, and the costs of rehabilitation (if implemented) are escalating. This is demonstrated by the Forestry Corporation abandoning 11,000 ha for timber production. We consider that the implementation of these proposals will be of benefit in that it will:

- give the Githabul real and meaningful control of a significant part of their native-title lands.
- provide meaningful training and employment opportunities for Githabul people on country.
- arrest ongoing ecosystem decline and initiate urgently needed restoration of these internationally significant forests.
- provide a boost to regional tourism that will benefit the regional economy and job opportunities.

Please give these proposals due consideration and inform us of your response. We request an opportunity to meet with you to discuss this proposal.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dailan Pugh". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

Dailan Pugh OAM, President, North East Forest Alliance.

On behalf of the signatories to the MoU.

Attached: Memorandum of Understanding