

## **Inquiry into the Inland Rail Project and regional NSW: Narromine to Narrabri**

### **Submission objecting**

Wando Conservation and Cultural Centre Inc (Wando) is based at Maules Creek approx. 40 kilometres from Narrabri; we engage in research and monitoring to protect the environment of the Pilliga and Leard Forests and the adjacent communities, have a role in educating others as to the unique and invaluable attributes of the forest and encourage others to enjoy the recreational benefits of this special environment. As is the case with many environmental groups in the area we are experiencing severe 'submission fatigue' as the relentless assault on our local environment continues to further threaten a most valuable natural asset. However, Wando feels the grave necessity to express out **strong objection** to the current plans to route some 50kms of the Inland Rail project, linking Brisbane and Melbourne, through the Pilliga Forest.

Wando is grateful for the opportunity to explain out objection to this Parliamentary Inquiry into the Inland Rail Project and Regional NSW

The original proposal is but a distant memory in this project which fails to join Melbourne and Brisbane or to utilise 'a mixture of existing rail, road and power corridors, plus some new connecting corridors'. In the area with which we are concerned, for example, the Narromine to Narrabri section traverses farmland and substantial areas of untouched public forest. The regional can expect to gain little, if indeed any, economic advantage from the proposal – there is no funding or planning for the regional hubs required to access the line and any local use would be dependent on 'working around' the through-trains.

The suggestion in the EIS that an alternative considered for the Dubbo/Narromine and Narrabri section of the route (through Gwabegar and private land) was rejected because there was less potential for conflict with landholders if it went through the forest is unconscionable in its dismissal of the significance of the Pilliga and the environmental damage which will be caused. Even the EIS acknowledges that the Pilliga is the last remaining large example of temperate woodland in NSW. As such it is a refuge area for a rich diversity of native flora and fauna, communities and ecosystem. It has been identified by the Commonwealth Government as one of only 15 National Biodiversity Hotspots and by Birdlife Australia as a globally significant Bird Area. It is a significant carbon sink and deserves protection in the face of the global climate emergency.

The Forest is already facing 'death by a thousand cuts' from coal mining and coal seam gas- further fragmentation is to be avoided at all costs. As is too often the case no account is taken in the EIS of the cumulative impacts of projects such as the Narrabri Gas Project (NGP), the exploration on expired ('zombie') PELs which was stimulated by the approval of the NGP, the APA Western Slopes Pipeline, the Silverleaf Solar Farm and the fencing of the Australian Wildlife Conservancy Saving Our Species on the Forest. There is no possibility of mitigating the impacts on the natural environment and like-for-like 'offsets' do not exist; each fragmentation increases the inroads made by feral animals and weeds.

The treatment of matters associated with Aboriginal Heritage and culture has been inadequate – site-by-site observations fail to do justice to the holistic view of the significance of landscape.

The Pilliga Forest must be protected from the Inland Rail from Narromine to Narrabri.