

## Explaining the definition of old-growth forest - karri forest

A very short background to accompany the more detailed document, *Old Growth Forest Definitions and Recommendations Summary*

Imagine you're walking through an ancient karri forest, with massive old karri and marri trees, nesting hollows for birds and mammals and a beautiful, diverse under-storey. Eventually, you come across a stump from one tree that has been cut down at some time in the last 150 years.

That one stump automatically disqualifies 2 hectares of the forest you've been walking through from old-growth status, and the whole area can now be clear-felled.

There is another problem that results from what the State Government agencies<sup>1</sup> call the *minimum area rule*. It says that an old-growth karri forest has to be at least 2 hectares in size, and it has to be square. Long, thin areas of old-growth or patches with winding boundaries perhaps alongside a stream or road are also disqualified, even where there are *no stumps in the forest at all, ie: it has never been logged but doesn't meet the minimum area rule*.

This definition needs to change in order to fully protect the South West old-growth forests.

Some people within the timber industry are claiming that the forests we're talking about are 'regrowth forests'. Regrowth karri forests are forests that have been clear-felled or very intensively logged in the past. The vast majority of the karri trees are the same age because they have all grown up together after intensive logging. It looks like a plantation. In contrast, old-growth forests look like old forests - they have ancient trees as well as younger trees and saplings, trees with very old canopies and nesting hollows for birds and mammals and old decomposing logs on the ground. They have a high diversity of tree ages and types. They look and feel like ancient forest ecosystems.

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<sup>1</sup> The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) and the Forest Products Commission (FPC)

## Explaining the definition old-growth forest - jarrah forest

A very short background to accompany the more detailed document, *Old Growth Forest Definitions and Recommendations Summary*

The definition of old-growth jarrah forest has never been great, but it got a lot worse in March 2017. These issues were exposed in Barrabup Forest. The definition of old-growth jarrah forest was made worse at that time; the old-growth karri definition has always been as bad as it is now.

When the Conservation Commission of WA was responsible for old-growth assessments (until March 2017), survey teams used to go into the forest and do surveys to see whether the forest still had old-growth characteristics even if there had been light logging in the past. If a forest had around 5 stumps per hectare and an intact old-growth canopy, it was still considered old-growth forest.

Now that the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) does the assessments, there are no surveys to consider canopy maturity. Instead, where there are 6 stumps found in a 2-hectare square (an average of 3 stumps in a hectare), that forest is automatically disqualified from old-growth status regardless of whether the forest still has old-growth forest characteristics. DBCA also disqualifies half-hectare cells if they have more than 2 stumps in them.

Another problem is that if jarrah forest is known to be 'affected' by *Phytophthora cinnamomi* (sometimes called jarrah dieback), it is automatically disqualified from old-growth status. This problem is not new. It's been around since old-growth mapping was done in the 1990s for the WA Regional Forest Agreement, and fixing it is long overdue.

The minimum area rule that wrongly disqualifies small and irregularly shaped old-growth karri forest also applies to old-growth jarrah forest, leaving genuine old-growth forest available for intensive logging.