

## **LAST MUMBULLA FOREST DEFENDANTS “NOT GUILTY”**

The last 3 court cases arising from the Mumbulla forest protests last year were dismissed in Moruya Local Court last Friday.

The defendants in the case were Bega Valley Shire Councillor, Keith Hughes, Wapengo oyster farmer, Garth Pigram and Bega based forest campaigner, Harriett Swift.

While the three were charged with the relatively minor offence of entering a prohibited forestry area, they were facing a mounting court costs bill of upwards of \$30,000 after defending the charges in court if they had been found guilty.

A total of about 30 charges of various kinds were laid against people during the Mumbulla Forest campaign and of those who defended their charges against them in court, only 2 people had convictions recorded against them. The charges were the result of a 50 day sustained community protest between March and May last year in which logging on Mumbulla Mountain was challenged at all levels.

“We always knew we had strong community support for the stand we took and this is very gratifying that the court has made this judgement in our favour after so many long and difficult court appearances,” Councillor Hughes said.

“The logging was destroying an area of forest important to the Aboriginal community and should not have been logged,” Mr Pigram said.

“It was also important to me as an oyster farmer, to try to stop damage to waterways that logging in water catchments inevitably causes,” he said.

“I hope the experience of the Mumbulla prosecutions will make the Forestry authorities think twice before pursuing peaceful protesters in this punitive way in the future,” Ms Swift said.

She said that questions will be asked in State Parliament later this month about the cost of prosecuting those people who took a stand against the logging.

“I believe that the cost has been tens of thousands of dollars which should be added to the long list of costs that native forest woodchipping imposes on the community, the environment and the forest wildlife,” she said.

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