

AMBER FORREST-BISLEY

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Topic 1. Sustainability of current and future forestry operations in NSW

To the Independent Forestry Panel,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the unsustainable nature of native forest logging in New South Wales (NSW) and to advocate for a transition towards more sustainable forestry practices. As highlighted by recent findings, native forest logging not only threatens biodiversity but also undermines critical environmental, cultural, and economic values in the region.

Unsustainable Native Forest Logging

Native forest logging in NSW has proven to be unsustainable. Since 2010, timber yields from public native forests have declined by 40%, despite repeated overestimations of harvestable timber by the Forestry Corporation. The removal of mature tree protections in 2018 and the subsequent intensification of logging has exacerbated this issue. Mature trees play an essential role in carbon storage and provide vital habitats, including hollow-bearing trees, for 174 species that rely on these environments for dens and nests.

Moreover, logging in native forests increases the risk and intensity of bushfires, promotes erosion, and leads to waterway pollution. In addition, logging enables the spread of invasive species, further diminishing the health of ecosystems across NSW. Healthy waterways and ecosystems are integral to the wellbeing of communities that depend on these forests.

Topic 2. Environmental and cultural values of forests, including threatened species and Aboriginal cultural heritage values

Impact on Environmental and Cultural Values

Forests, particularly mature and unlogged native forests, provide significant environmental, cultural, and social benefits. Unlogged forests generate rainfall, cool the landscape, and filter the air, benefiting both urban and rural communities. These forests are crucial for maintaining pollinator populations, which in turn support biodiversity across the landscape.

The impacts of native forest logging are particularly acute for threatened species. In NSW, 150 threatened species are directly affected by logging, with the destruction of their habitat threatening their survival. The long-term consequences for biodiversity in the state are profound and unacceptable.

For First Nations peoples, the spiritual and cultural significance of native forests cannot be overstated. Native forests are central to cultural practices, and their destruction through logging represents not just environmental degradation, but the loss of cultural heritage. First Nations-led forest management programs, such as the successful Githabul Rangers, have demonstrated the importance and effectiveness of Indigenous knowledge in managing and restoring native forests.

Topic 3. Demand for timber products, particularly as relates to NSW housing, construction, mining, transport and retail

Economic Viability and the Future of Plantations

Native forest logging contributes minimally to the overall timber industry. In 2023, logging in native forests accounted for only 9% of the total log production in Australia, with half of this

harvest being exported as woodchips. Hardwood sourced from native forests is no longer necessary for critical infrastructure, as sawn and treated softwood logs, alongside composite timber products, are more than adequate substitutes. The declining demand for native forest timber is evidenced by examples such as Essential Energy moving away from native forest hardwood for power poles.

Plantations, on the other hand, already supply 91% of Australia's log production. This is a clear indication that the future of the timber industry lies in sustainable plantation forestry. A higher proportion of logs harvested from plantations should be prioritized as saw and veneer logs, rather than being exported as woodchips. Furthermore, subsidies provided to the logging of public native forests by the Forestry Corporation distort the market, diverting focus from the more profitable and sustainable softwood plantation industry.

Topic 4. The future of softwood and hardwood plantations and the continuation of Private Native Forestry in helping meet timber supply needs

Economic Viability and the Future of Plantations

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Topic 5. The role of State Forests in maximising the delivery of a range of environmental, economic and social outcomes and options for diverse management, including Aboriginal forest management models

Economic, Social, and Environmental Outcomes

Native state forests cover 2 million hectares in NSW and impact the quality of life for many local communities. Allowing these forests to function naturally, without logging, has far greater economic potential. The native forest hardwood division of the Forestry Corporation operates at a financial loss, with tens of millions of dollars in public funds being used to subsidize unsustainable logging operations. In contrast, these forests provide immense value through eco-tourism, water filtration, carbon sequestration, and biodiversity.

It is clear that logging public native forests is not economically viable, environmentally sustainable, or socially responsible. Instead, these forests should be preserved and managed to maximize their ecological, economic, and social benefits, including providing sustainable jobs in tourism, conservation, and carbon markets.

Topic 6. Opportunities to realise carbon and biodiversity benefits and support carbon and biodiversity markets, and mitigate and adapt to climate change risks, including the greenhouse gas emission impacts of different uses of forests and assessment of climate change risks to forests

Climate Change and Carbon Storage

Public submission

Ending native forest logging in NSW would be a major step toward addressing climate change. It is estimated that logging in native forests releases 3.6 million tonnes of carbon every year. Ending this practice would reduce carbon emissions significantly, equivalent to removing 840,000 cars from the road annually. Logged forests lose more than half of their original carbon storage capacity, meaning that halting native forest logging would allow these ecosystems to recover their carbon-storing potential and contribute to the state's emissions reduction targets.

In addition to carbon storage, forests that are not logged are more resilient to climate change, including the increasing intensity of bushfires. Protecting these forests is essential for ensuring the long-term resilience of NSW's natural environment.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The ongoing logging of native forests in NSW is environmentally destructive, economically unsustainable, and culturally harmful. Public native forests have far greater value when left unlogged, supporting biodiversity, carbon storage, tourism, water quality, and cultural heritage. Sustainable timber production is already achievable through plantation forests, which provide the vast majority of Australia's log supply.

I strongly recommend the following actions:

End native forest logging in NSW to protect biodiversity, cultural heritage, and ecosystem services. Prioritize plantation forestry for timber production, ensuring a sustainable supply of saw and veneer logs.

Support Indigenous-led forest management programs, which have demonstrated success in restoring and maintaining forest health.

Invest in eco-tourism and carbon markets, harnessing the economic potential of unlogged forests for community and state-wide benefit.

By taking these steps, NSW can ensure the long-term sustainability of its forestry industry, while safeguarding the health of its ecosystems and cultural heritage.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on this important issue. I urge the Independent Forestry Panel to take bold and decisive action to protect NSW's native forests for current and future generations.