

Public submission

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Submission to the Independent Forestry Panel: Urgent Call for an Immediate End to Native Forest Logging in NSW

Dear Panel Members,

I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on the future of forestry operations in New South Wales (NSW). I am writing to strongly advocate for an immediate cessation of native forest logging in NSW, based on overwhelming evidence of its un-sustainability, irreversible environmental impacts, and the precedents set by other Australian states, including Western Australia (WA) and Victoria, which have already committed to ending native forest logging. Additionally, NSW native forests offer far greater economic value through tourism and environmental services than their exploitation for low-value sawlogs. This assertion is supported by several economic studies that emphasise the long-term financial and ecological benefits of preserving native forests.

1. Environmental Impact of Native Forest Logging

Native forests in NSW are critical for biodiversity, climate regulation, water quality, and soil protection. Logging directly threatens these functions, particularly in areas critical for endangered species such as the Greater Gliders and Koalas. Research has shown that logging exacerbates fire risk, reduces carbon sequestration potential, and diminishes water yield in forest catchments, all of which undermine NSW's environmental goals and commitments (Lindenmayer et al., 2020).

2. Economic Value of Native Forests for Tourism and Environmental Services

Several recent studies demonstrate that NSW's native forests hold far greater economic value for their role in supporting ecotourism, biodiversity conservation, water filtration, and carbon storage, compared to the returns from harvesting low-value sawlogs. In fact, economic analyses indicate that the logging of native forests often results in a financial loss when compared to the potential revenue from tourism and ecosystem services.

Tourism

Tourism, particularly ecotourism, is a major contributor to the NSW economy. Native forests, such as those found in the Blue Mountains, Gondwana Rainforests, and South Coast regions, attract thousands of tourists annually, supporting local businesses and jobs. A study by the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) found that nature-based tourism generates significantly more revenue than logging in native forests. In the Eden region, for example, the value of tourism was estimated at \$43 million annually, compared to just \$9.5 million from native forest logging (ACF, 2019). This highlights the disparity between the economic returns of conservation versus logging and underscores the long-term benefits of protecting these forests.

Additionally, preserving native forests for tourism has a cascading economic effect on surrounding communities, creating opportunities in hospitality, recreation, education, and Indigenous cultural tourism. Forest-based ecotourism is also a sustainable industry, offering long-term economic resilience without depleting natural resources.

Economic Value of Eco-Tourism

We run a tourist accommodation business in close proximity to the Bulga State Forest. I have had the opportunity to show visitors this unique remnants of forests in my area of the Mid North Coast,

similar tourist assets exist throughout the state. I will focus on the Bulga State Forest which is currently being logged despite strong local community opposition.

The Bulga State Forest, home to endangered species like the Greater Glider, holds immense potential for eco-tourism, which is increasingly becoming a significant part of the local economy. Nature-based tourism in New South Wales is growing rapidly, with more people seeking outdoor experiences, including wildlife viewing, hiking, and forest-based activities. Eco-tourism brings a steady, long-term source of income for local communities, benefiting accommodation providers, restaurants, tour operators, and other small businesses. It also encourages sustainable development while keeping the forest's ecosystem intact.

Compared to logging, which provides short-term gains from low-value timber products, eco-tourism offers recurring revenue that continues to grow over time as tourism infrastructure and interest in conservation expand.

Low-Value Timber Products

The native forests in the Bulga State Forest are primarily being logged for low-value timber products, including wood-chips and pulp, which offer minimal economic returns. These products are often used for short-lived, disposable items that do not justify the environmental damage caused by logging ancient and biodiverse ecosystems. Furthermore, the demand for such products has declined in recent years, making the continued logging of native forests economically unsound.

In contrast, leaving forests intact boosts eco-tourism, an industry whose value far surpasses that of low-grade timber and whose growth is predicted to continue as travellers become more eco-conscious.

Recent Protests & Community Sentiment

Local communities have been actively protesting against the logging in Bulga State Forest, particularly to protect the habitat of endangered species like the Greater Glider. These protests highlight the strong opposition from residents and environmental groups who value the forest for its ecological importance and its role in sustaining biodiversity. The Greater Glider, which relies on old-growth forests, is particularly at risk from logging activities that destroy its habitat and threaten its survival.

These protests reflect a growing public sentiment that native forests should be protected for future generations, and that their value as wildlife habitats and eco-tourism sites far outweigh the minimal economic benefits derived from logging.

Environmental Impact & Protection of Endangered Species

Logging in native forests like Bulga State Forest has a devastating impact on biodiversity, water quality, and soil stability. The removal of trees in these old-growth ecosystems leads to habitat loss for a range of endangered species, including the Greater Glider, and disrupts entire ecological systems.

Protecting these forests is crucial for the conservation of threatened species and the overall health of the environment. Many species that call Bulga State Forest home are not found anywhere else, making the area irreplaceable. Logging also contributes to carbon emissions, whereas intact forests help mitigate climate change by sequestering carbon.

By presenting the economic and environmental benefits of eco-tourism and the importance of preserving native forests for biodiversity, it becomes clear that the cessation of logging in Bulga State Forest is the better option for both the local economy and environmental conservation.

Environmental Services

Beyond tourism, native forests provide critical environmental services, including carbon sequestration, water filtration, and biodiversity protection. Economic studies quantify these services, showing that they significantly outweigh the benefits of logging for low-value timber. A comprehensive report by the Centre for Ecosystem Science at the University of NSW estimated that the ecosystem services provided by native forests, including carbon storage, water filtration, and biodiversity, contribute billions to the economy annually (Keith et al., 2017).

For example, the value of carbon sequestration alone in NSW native forests far exceeds the revenue from timber. The same study found that logging reduces the carbon storage capacity of forests, leading to increased emissions and exacerbating climate change. By preserving forests, NSW can not only mitigate climate impacts but also potentially tap into emerging carbon markets, further boosting economic returns.

Water yield is another critical service provided by intact native forests. Forested catchments in NSW supply drinking water to millions of people and provide irrigation for agriculture. Logging reduces water yield and degrades water quality due to increased runoff and sedimentation (Munks et al., 2021). Protecting forests ensures that these water resources remain clean and abundant, providing long-term economic benefits to agriculture, communities, and industry.

3. Economic Studies of Native Forest Logging

The economic value of logging native forests is declining, particularly as the demand for low-value sawlogs diminishes. Native forest logging in NSW primarily produces low-grade products such as wood-chips, firewood, and pallets, which yield little economic return relative to the environmental and tourism benefits of preserving forests. A report from the Australia Institute (2020) found that NSW native forest logging operations are financially unviable and rely heavily on government subsidies, costing taxpayers millions annually. The same report showed that plantation forestry, by contrast, is more profitable and can meet timber demand without the environmental costs of logging native forests.

4. Criminal Convictions of NSW Forestry Corporation

Recent criminal convictions of NSW Forestry Corporation for illegal logging further highlight the environmental mismanagement of state forests, underscoring the need for an immediate end to native forest logging. These breaches have occurred in critical habitats, such as areas set aside for Koala conservation, and have resulted in fines and court orders (NSW Land and Environment Court, 2022; NSW Environment Protection Authority, 2023). These legal actions reflect systemic failings in the management of native forests and further diminish the credibility of continuing native forest logging in NSW.

5. Case Studies: Western Australia and Victoria

Both WA and Victoria have recognised the unsustainable nature of native forest logging and are transitioning to more sustainable industries. WA announced an end to native forest logging by 2024, citing the environmental and economic benefits of protecting forests for carbon storage and

biodiversity. The WA government is investing \$350 million to support affected workers and expand plantation forestry (Government of Western Australia, 2021). Victoria, too, has committed to ending native forest logging by 2030, focusing on the long-term economic value of forest conservation and ecosystem services (Victoria State Government, 2019).

6. The Role of Plantation Forestry

NSW has the opportunity to expand its plantation forestry industry to meet timber demands without compromising native forests. Plantation forestry is more economically viable, yields higher-quality timber, and can be managed sustainably. This transition would also provide job opportunities in rural areas, supporting workers currently reliant on native forest logging (Keith et al., 2021).

7. Conclusion: An Immediate Stop to Native Forest Logging

In light of the overwhelming evidence of the higher economic value of native forests for tourism and environmental services, coupled with the declining returns from low-value sawlog harvesting, I urge the Panel to recommend an immediate end to native forest logging in NSW. By transitioning to sustainable plantation forestry and protecting native forests, NSW can secure its environmental future, support local economies, and fulfil its commitments to biodiversity conservation and climate action.

I hope the Panel will take these points into consideration in your report to the Government and recognise that the economic and environmental benefits of protecting native forests far outweigh the limited and declining value of logging.

Sincerely,
Anthony Somers.

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