

# Public submission

AWU CFMEU MANUFACTURING

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**Securing Jobs  
and  
Sustainable Communities:  
Combined union proposal for the  
New South Wales's Government's Forestry  
Industry Action Plan**

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## **Securing Jobs and Sustainable Communities: Combined union proposal for the New South Wales's Government's Forestry Industry Action Plan**

The Manufacturing Division (CFMEU MD) is the main union representing workers in key parts of the NSW forest industry, including harvesting, haulage, sawmilling, wood product manufacturing, frame and truss manufacturing, as well as pulp and paper production. The Australian Workers' Union (AWU) is the main union representing workers in forest growing and management, including those employed by NSW Forestry Corporation.

We appreciate the chance to share our unions' proposal for the NSW Government's Forestry Industry Action Plan. We note that the proposal is in line with the NSW ALP Policy Platform commitment on the future of the timber industry and we look forward to continuing our discussions with the Panel and the Government as the Industry Action Plan develops. There are 7 key objectives that form the basis of this Forest Industry Action Plan proposal:

1. Well managed forests
2. A Great Koala Park for all
3. Best use of timber arising from forest management activities
4. The prevention of catastrophic bushfires
5. Regulation that supports communities
6. NSW grown and made as a solution to the housing challenge
7. A skilled workforce.

## Context

The forest and timber industry in NSW is crucial to the state. According to latest census data it supports more than 15,000 jobs for workers throughout NSW in the suburbs, regional communities, and timber towns. This figure does not necessarily capture the impact of those jobs. According to the last census data, 1 in 10 people aged over 14 years old living in the Tumut and Tumbarumba area was employed in the three main processing businesses in the area<sup>1</sup>. Without even considering the rest of the timber supply chain, this is an industry of significant size but even greater impact.

The industry has a wider social and economic importance to the state beyond the direct employment it supports. NSW grown, processed and manufactured timber and wood products – from logs and fibre, paperboard, and sawn timber as well as more elaborately transformed wood products like particleboard and panels and wooden furniture – are in high demand. Timber and wood products are a key input to the important housing and infrastructure industry, essential to keeping NSW's growing population housed and the state moving.

The NSW Government has made an admirable commitment to build 377,000 new well-located homes across the state by 2029. These houses should be built by NSW grown, milled and manufactured timber to ensure that NSW taxpayers gain maximum value from that build.

Under current arrangements, wood is sourced from a very small percentage of the state's forests which are managed for timber production, including plantation forests and multiple-use state forests. These forests are not exclusively managed for timber production but are managed in a way that promotes sustainable development by the application of triple bottom line (social, economic, and environmental) principles through sustainable forest management practices.

Approximately 19.9 million hectares<sup>2</sup> of NSW's 80.2 million hectares of land mass<sup>3</sup> is forested. This accounts for about 25% of the state's total land area. If NSW were a country, it would be in the top 20 in world for forest cover. To put it another way, although the state of NSW is populated by only 8.2 million people (0.1%, of the global population), NSW contains 0.5% of global forests.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/SAL13984> and <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/SAL13979> applied to written company reports on employee numbers.

<sup>2</sup> Australia's forests, <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/forestsaustralia/australias-forests#forest-area>

<sup>3</sup> A brief overview of New South Wales,

<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/nature/BioregionsNswOverview.pdf>

<sup>4</sup>FAO, the state of the world's forests <https://www.fao.org/interactive/state-of-forests/2020/en/>

## Objective 1: Well managed forests

### *Proposal:*

- *Deploy adaptive active management across all forest types to ensure ecosystem health and establish resilience to bushfires and climate.*
- *Implement a more streamlined and integrated approach to forest management.*

NSW's abundance of significant forest cover comes with a corresponding responsibility to manage and utilise our forests responsibly and sustainably. Both local and global demand for timber and fibre is projected to grow, and global supply constraints pose significant challenges. Additionally, as the demand for timber and wood products increases, so too does the demand for the ecological services that healthy forests provide. Healthy forests provide essential ecological services, such as carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation, and water regulation.

NSW's forest landscapes have been significantly altered by human activities, necessitating adaptive active management to ensure ecosystem health and establish resilience to bushfires and climate change. Adaptive and active forest management is a dynamic approach that adjusts management practices based on ongoing monitoring and evaluation. It often involves proactive, intentional, and initiative-taking interventions to influence forest structure and composition and can include removing certain trees to reduce competition (thinning), improving the growth of remaining trees and harvesting to promote forest regeneration.

In NSW, forest management is overseen by several organisations and government bodies. These entities manage forests for different purposes, including conservation, timber production, and recreational use. The Forestry Corporation manages approximately 7%<sup>5</sup> of NSW's forests whereas the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) manages approximately 24.5%. Other lands, including those managed by private landowners, local councils, and other entities, make up the remaining forest management activity.

Jackson et al have called for holistic approaches to address forest management challenges in Australia that encompass all forest values across the landscape, rather than the current approach of dividing up forest management across different government agencies and designated land management authorities.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Only approximately 1% of the multiple-use native forests under Forestry Corporation's management are harvested each year. Forests are then regrown by methods mimicking natural regeneration

<sup>6</sup> W. Jackson, M. Freeman, B. Freeman & H. Parry-Husbands (2021): Reshaping Forest management in Australia to provide nature-based solutions to global challenges, Australian Forestry, DOI: 10.1080/00049158.2021.1894383 <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049158.2021.1894383>

## **Objective 2: A Great Koala Park for all**

### *Proposal:*

- *The final boundaries of the Great Koala Park must deliver both a koala park and a sustainable timber industry.*
- *There must be both an effective process and a fair budget to limit the impact of the final koala park on affected workers and their families.*

It is important that the principle of well managed forests is applied regardless of forest tenure including in the proposed 'Great Koala Park'. A key consideration for the designation of any boundaries of the park and its resulting management regime is the work of the Natural Resources Commission which was tasked in 2019 to deliver independent research on north coast state forests as a part of the NSW Koala Strategy.

That research was conducted by eminent koala researchers and overseen by an expert panel. That research makes clear that a park is not needed to protect koalas. That research demonstrates that the koala protections codified in the current forestry rules are effective in mitigating risks from timber harvesting. Furthermore that research found that selective harvesting did not adversely impact koala density, nor the nutritional quality of koala habitat at the research sites.<sup>7</sup>

However, given that there was an election commitment for both a koala park and a sustainable timber industry, should the government proceed with a park, in order to ensure forest health, management activities that may need to form a part of an active adaptive management system include:

- Prescribed burning (cool burns)
- Ecological thinning
- Thin and burn regimes
- Mechanical fuel load reduction
- Pest and disease management
- Strategic fire breaks (development and maintenance)
- Asset-protection zones
- Rehabilitation activities
- Indigenous community forestry

Similarly, should the government choose to proceed with a park, in order to ensure the health of the local timber jobs and the families and communities that rely on them, it is critical that:

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<sup>7</sup> Natural Resources Commission Research program- Koala response to harvesting in NSW north coast state forests Final report (updated) December 2022

1. The park is small enough to ensure a vibrant industry is maintained with sustainable yield volumes and the right species mix.
2. Timber from the above activities is made available to local mills and those mills are assisted to retool to be able to use that fibre to make much needed building products.
3. Displaced workers are given the first opportunity to be redeployed to the activities set out in the previous paragraph.
4. If displaced workers are not well-suited to the new roles in the park, they are supported to access a well-funded program and package to assist them with gaining new comparable employment.
5. The risks associated with a “lock it up and leave it” approach to local communities and the maintenance of conservation values and koala populations is understood and mitigated.

### **Objective 3: Best use of timber arising from forest management activities**

#### *Proposal:*

- *Audit of all timber removed or burned by any government agency to build a picture of the size and quality of timber arisings that might be better used.*
- *Establishment of a sustainable by-products' utilisation framework.*

Australia is a signatory to the Initiative for Greening Construction with Sustainable Wood which recognises that timber from sustainably managed forests provides climate solutions within the building sector. This initiative commits Australia to the advancement of policies and approaches that support low carbon infrastructure and the increase of the use of wood from sustainably managed forests in the built environment.

This commitment has been made in the context of local and global demand for timber and fibre being projected to grow dramatically alongside acute global supply constraints and sustainability concerns associated with deforestation in the developing world.

Given this, Australia has a responsibility to ensure that all wood that is produced locally is used to achieve its optimal social, economic, and environmental potential. An opportunity is presented by the fact that timber products that can be used in the built environment are increasingly not limited to solid lumber but can be engineered product such as plywood, fibre board, Oriented Strand Board (OSB), Glue-Laminated Timber (Glulam), Laminated veneer lumber (LVL), Engineered Wood Flooring (EWF). These products are able to be produced from wood arising from forest management activities which was previously understood as 'waste' or only good for firewood.

As outlined in our submission to the Legislative Council's inquiry into the timber industry in 2021, if there is any additional wood and timber from the implementation of a new strategy of biomass and hazard reduction, it should be available for utilisation commercially (provided that the resources are able to be delivered and processed in a socially, environmentally, and socially sustainable fashion)<sup>8</sup>.

We make clear in that submission that a commercial yield should not be the driver of the strategy.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Shirmer et al found in their study that acceptability in the community of management methods such as Mechanical Fuel Load Reduction was lessened if there is a perception that the activity is driven by commercial imperatives rather than other factors.<sup>10</sup> Despite this, surveys undertaken in that study found that

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<sup>8</sup> AWU and Manufacturing Division, 2021, p 22

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> MECHANICAL FUEL LOAD REDUCTION TRIALS – SOCIAL ATTITUDES June 2018 Jacki Schirmer1, Mel Mylek, Helena Clayton mechanical-fuel-load-reduction-trials.pdf (agriculture.gov.au)



sale of timber removed in MFLR was supported by almost half (49.6%) of rural and regional Australians, and 44.1% of major city residents while only 20% would not support it.<sup>11</sup>

It is our view that appropriate safeguards can be put in place as a part of a sustainable by-products framework to ease community concerns about how forests are managed whilst also increasing the amount of timber available for use not waste.

Clearly a balanced approach is required because as observed by the *Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission* in the U.S, “together, revenue-generating forest and rangeland management and the development of markets for treatment by products offers an opportunity to offset costs, as does the commercialization of by-products of ecological restoration.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> 21.2% of rural/regional and 27.2% of urban Australians were unsure Ibid, viii

<sup>12</sup>ON Fire, p 63

## Objective 4: The prevention of catastrophic bushfires

### *Proposal:*

- *Retain timber industry expertise and capacity.*
- *Develop an optimal hazard reduction regime.*
- *Recognise and protect timber jobs that are fundamental to the state's emergency response coordination efforts.*

Out of control catastrophic bushfires are a major threat to lives, properties and environmental values including flora, fauna, habitat, and carbon stored in forests which is emitted when burnt. By way of example, when it comes to threatened species of flora and fauna “Forestry operations”<sup>13</sup> is ranked by experts behind catastrophic bushfires and several other more substantive challenges such as land-use change, predation by introduced species, competition from introduced fauna, disease and/or pathogens and hydrological change.<sup>14</sup> Catastrophic bushfires pose a serious and ongoing threat to forests, and the flora, fauna and habitat within them. Adaptive active management is required to establish resilience to bushfires. This can include fuel load reduction and management to control fuel loads.

In our unions' submission into the Legislative Council's inquiry into *the long-term sustainability and future of the timber and forest products industry*, our unions recommended that the NSW Government commission an experts' review of the hazard reduction regime across different forest tenures in NSW. This recommendation remains relevant today. The NSW Government must commission an expert's review to recommend an optimal hazard reduction regime to meet the objective of the prevention and mitigation of catastrophic bushfires.<sup>15</sup> We further contended that there should be an unprejudiced, unideological analysis of an optimal hazard reduction regime for fire mitigation across forests of all tenures, just as other jurisdictions have undertaken.<sup>16</sup> In our union's perspectives, this review process will be essential in ensuring a sustainable timber industry, and an industry that can actively support the conservation of forests, their flora and fauna, across NSW.

Other jurisdictions we referred to in our 2021 submission included the United States where the bipartisan *Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission* has since found the need to dramatically increase the landscape-scale use of prescribed fire and cultural burning, as well as continue the use of mechanical thinning and

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<sup>13</sup>Operational forest management activities related to wood production, such as silviculture, harvesting, maintenance of forest roads and fire-trails, fire management relating to wood production, plantation operations and development, and indirect or off-site effects, including impacts of escaped plantation species.

<sup>14</sup> Australia's State of the Forests Report 2018, Table 1.45: Threat rating and threat categories for forest-dwelling threatened species, as at 2016 Australia's State of the Forests Report 2018 (agriculture.gov.au)

<sup>15</sup> The Australian Workers' Union, The CFMEU Manufacturing Division Joint Submission into the inquiry into the long-term sustainability and future of the timber and forest products industry June 2021 Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Industry <https://www.awu.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/20210600-NSW-Parliament-submission-into-long-term-sustainability-and-future-of-timber-and-forest-products-industry.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*, p 21

harvest and targeted grazing.<sup>17</sup> The Commission argues that this requires strategic landscape-scale planning and implementation at a speed and scale commensurate with the need, and that accomplishment of such work also should be done in partnership and across all tenures to address areas of highest need.<sup>18</sup>

As well as implementing the most appropriate adaptive and active management approach, there is also a need to maintain the skills and capacity to not only undertake that management work but also to have a first response capacity.

In NSW, Forestry Corporation is a statutory firefighting authority. This means that Forestry Corporation's bushfire prevention, mitigation and suppression activities (including preventing and managing fires and protecting communities) is a key part of the State's coordinated firefighting response. To do this Forestry Corporation employs a highly trained and skilled firefighting workforce that carry out annual hazard reduction, training, and maintenance programs. Forestry Corporation also maintain (both directly and through their contractor program) a firefighting fleet, fire prevention and protection equipment, and heavy plant that is used along with a network of fire trails and fire towers to aid rapid detection and early suppression of fires in State forests.<sup>19</sup> Timber workers, and the timber industry broadly provide a key support and management role for the state's emergency response coordination. Importantly, Forestry Corporation provides personnel, machinery and contractor networks— this expertise, skills and equipment is not easily replaced.

Victoria's Inspector General of Emergency Management observed after the 2019-20 Black Summer Bushfires that the timber industry provided an important support capacity to fire management in Victorian forests. The Inspector General went on to highlight the challenges that the cessation of native forest harvesting by 2030 posed to the states fuel management program and bushfire response capacity across the state.<sup>20</sup> NSW has the opportunity to learn from the mistakes of other jurisdictions. The State's ability to fight (and prevent) catastrophic bushfires is tethered to a thriving timber industry – the two are inextricably linked. Any changes to the timber industry must be viewed as changes to the state's firefighting capacity too. Contractors supply the machinery that enable the state to protect regional towns, and regional communities. Forestry Corporation supply the highly trained personnel that support other firefighting agencies. Without these two arms of the states firefighting coordination efforts, NSW will be left worse off overall and our capacity to prevent catastrophic fires, protect communities and people will be diminished.

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<sup>17</sup> ON FIRE: The Report of the Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission wfmmc-final-report-09-2023.pdf (usda.gov) p 54

<sup>18</sup> The commission reports that the Forest Service alone has set a goal of using thinning and beneficial fire to treat 20 million acres of national forest land and to support the treatment of 30 million acres of other federal, state, Tribal, and private lands over the next decade to mitigate wildfire.

<sup>19</sup> Forestry Corporation Annual Report 2019–20 Written and compiled by Forestry Corporation of NSW, 10, Available online: Forestry Corporation of New South Wales Annual Report 2019-20 p 6

<sup>20</sup> Inquiry into the 2019–20 Victorian fire season Phase 1 Community and sector preparedness for and response to the 2019–20 fire season, p 171 Inquiry into the 2019 20 Victorian Fire Season.pdf (igem.vic.gov.au)

## **Objective 5: Regulation that supports communities**

### *Proposal*

- *Immediate review of the Coastal Integrated Forestry Operations Approvals process.*
- *Joint briefings with the EPA, relevant ministers and industry participants on the limitations of EPA decision making powers conducted by appropriately qualified legal practitioners with a view to better and more consistent decision making.*
- *Removal of dual consent requirements for Private Native Forestry to allow for regulation of PNF at the level of appropriate expertise- the state agency.*

In NSW, the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) is the regulator with responsibility for monitoring timber harvesting, particularly in public native forests. They play primarily a compliance role and in recent years appear to have taken on a more activist role in forestry, undermining industry and community confidence.

The EPA operates under the portfolio of the Minister for the Environment in NSW. The Minister is responsible for setting environmental policy and overseeing the EPA's activities. While the EPA operates independently in many of its enforcement decisions, it reports to the Minister and follows broader government directives and policy frameworks.

In contrast, in Tasmania a different approach sees the Forest Practices Authority develop Forest Practices Plans (FPPs), which are legal documents that must be followed for any forestry operation, and these plans contain detailed environmental protections regarding soil, water, and biodiversity. Tasmania's Forest Practices Code provides detailed prescriptions for protecting soil, water, and habitat, but is also more adaptive and collaborative than the enforcement-driven approach of the EPA, an approach which provides less certainty for workers.

The other regulatory issue that needs attention in NSW is the approach to private native forestry that unnecessarily constrains timber production from this tenure. Currently this timber is often difficult to access due to 'dual consent' requirements where timber that is already subject to rigorous state government regulation is then also required to meet the unique and often capricious requirements of local councils. Removing this unnecessary duplicate regulation could see private native forestry managers more willing to work with state agencies to maximise the value of their timber.

## **Objective 6: NSW grown and made as a solution to the housing challenge**

### *Proposal:*

- *Prioritise the use of NSW timber & timber products first on all government projects.*
- *Support increased plantation establishment by using the “NSW timber first” policy to stabilise demand for NSW grown, milled and manufactured timber.*
- *Develop a timber modular housing industry in NSW by stimulating demand including through a roll out of modular housing, beginning in timber communities.*

Government policy that requires the prioritising of NSW grown, milled and made timber and products on all government projects is central to increasing the materials available to meet the housing challenge now and in the future. Adopting similar principles to the Tasmanian Wood Encouragement Policy<sup>21</sup>, a NSW timber first policy would mean that the government is creating maximum value for NSW residents at every stage of a project including by increasing local job creation.

A policy to ensure that social housing, community infrastructure and other government and supported initiatives are built with NSW grown, milled and manufactured timber and timber products would both encourage investment in further plantations by sending a signal to the private sector that NSW is a reliable market and allow for more stable business planning and retention of skilled staff along the supply chain.

In ensuring the maximum utilisation of NSW grown, milled and manufactured timber in the construction of government and government supported initiatives, the government would also maximising the best social, economic, and environmental outcomes from their investments.

For context, of the 22.5 million hectares of forests in NSW approximately 1.7% are the state’s 390,000 hectares plantation forests. These plantations are divided into softwood and hardwood:

- Softwood plantations: Around 314,000 hectares.
- Hardwood plantations: Around 76,000 hectares.

Most of the timber production occurs in these plantation forests with 84.6% of logs harvest in 2022-23.<sup>22</sup> The other logs are derived from NSW’s Multiple Use Public Native Forests and private native forests.

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<sup>21</sup>Tasmanian Wood encouragement Policy,

[https://www.stategrowth.tas.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/525543/Tasmanian\\_Wood\\_Encouragement\\_Policy.pdf](https://www.stategrowth.tas.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/525543/Tasmanian_Wood_Encouragement_Policy.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> ABARES, Australian forest and wood products statistics Production to 2022-23,

<https://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/research-topics/forests/forest-economics/forest-wood-products-statistics>

With approximately 25% of NSW forested and approximately 35-40% of NSW classified as arid or semi-arid (making these areas less suitable for forest growth due to limited rainfall and harsh conditions) there is still plenty of land for more plantation forests in NSW and more is needed to meet future demand for housing. However, the fluctuations associated with the housing construction market makes supply chain participants like timber producers vulnerable to seasonal vagaries and as a result, investment in plantations less attractive. This was a point made by the Manufacturing Division's NSW Secretary Alison Rudman in a public hearing on the Legislative Council's inquiry into the 'Procurement practices of government agencies in New South Wales and its impact on the social development of the people of New South Wales': "For timber workers working in the timber supply chain, particularly in the softwood sector, working security comes from being largely reliant on private building plans... whereas a reliable government contract would make a tremendous difference to ensuring these workers have secure hours and jobs that allow them to support their families".<sup>23</sup> Alongside sensible land use initiatives such as strategic plantation expansion zones, a NSW timber first policy is a practical step to actively encourage ongoing investment in plantations (and the subsequent timber supply chain) in NSW.

To meet housing challenges now and into the future, NSW needs to support the development of a modular and prefabricated timber housing industry in the state by giving employers the confidence to invest early in super-efficient manufacturing processes. A NSW timber first policy will do just that and in turn provide critical for NSW reaching its housing targets. This is because of the advantages of modular and prefabricated wooden component-based building systems compared to traditional residential housing construction including labour, materials, transport, quality control and approvals. By way of example, offsite prefabricated construction could reduce total construction times by 20-50% and costs by up to 20%. Importantly, in building projects timber waste is a significant problem, with industry insiders suggesting that between 20-30% of timber purchased for construction ends up as waste. Worse still, according to a U.K. study, as much as 10-15% of wood procured for new construction projects ends up in recycling or waste streams without being used at all.<sup>24</sup> This does not occur to the same levels in modular housing where precise cutting allows for material optimization and any offcuts easily enter recycling streams.

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<sup>23</sup> Rudman A, REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS BEFORE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES PROCUREMENT PRACTICES OF GOVERNMENT AGENCIES IN NEW SOUTH WALES AND ITS IMPACT ON THE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE PEOPLE OF NEW SOUTH WALES UNCORRECTED At Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney, on Wednesday 3 July 2024 Transcript - 3 July 2024 - Standing Committee on Social Issues - Procurement practices inquiry - UNCORRECTED.pdf (nsw.gov.au)

<sup>24</sup> Carmine Esposito, National Waste Associates: Wood Recycling for the Construction Industry (Don't Let Your Money Get Hauled Away!) <https://www.nationalwaste.com/blog/wood-recycling-for-the-construction-industry-dont-let-your-money-get-hauled-away/>

The benefits of this emerging NSW modular housing industry could be further enhanced by beginning the roll out of this housing in the timber communities where it is made by working with local councils on land releases. In many of these towns, it is difficult to get enough skilled workers to expand to scale because of shortages in accommodation for workers and their families. If working in these areas for an agreed period was to give workers enhanced ongoing access to this type of housing, it would have the dual benefit of securing the workforce and securing in-proximity initial demand for new businesses.

## **Objective 7: A skilled workforce**

### *Proposal:*

- *Ensure that the timber industry becomes an ‘employer of choice’ for workers and prospective workers by ensuring that government money is prioritised for projects that support secure jobs and safe work.*
- *In major sectors of the industry set up RPL tools linked to SOPs to ensure proper recognition of skills.*
- *Thicken the market by aggregating demand through local skill development services linking public and private sector employers.*

In a competitive labour market, there is added pressure to attract and retain workers by becoming collectively an ‘employer of choice’. Whilst primarily the responsibility of employers and unions, the government can support that process in two ways. The first is by ensuring that where government money is provided to businesses, one of the considerations in which business receives that funding is the percentage of the workforce in direct, permanent employment and the safety record on the business. Safe and secure jobs have a demonstrated economic uplift for the entire community and this is a policy lever that will allow the government to ensure that employers who prioritise these community benefits<sup>25</sup> are rewarded for doing so.

The second way for the government to assist the industry to be an ‘employer of choice’ is by helping employers to offer quality jobs and clear career pathways through training and accredited recognition of the unique skills in the workforce. A stable and properly skilled workforce is also integral to ensuring sustainable forest management activities and a healthy building products sector. Optimisation of forest management, processing and manufacturing practices and maintenance of workplace safety are all activities that require a significant level of expertise.

However, there are challenges to ensuring these skills remain in the industry. Critically, workers who feel uncertain about the future of an industry will not spend time gaining specialist training in that industry. However even where those workers do want to access training, the remote nature of many worksites in the industry; structural and funding barriers, again due to the remote nature of much of the industry; and evolving training drivers, preferences and demand which do not fit in the traditional Vocational Education and Training (VET) model all influence how accessible that training is.

Currently, a substantial portion of training in the forestry industry is conducted on-the-job by in-house subject matter experts. Merely encouraging more people into the sector will not resolve the currently existing skill gaps. Further investment must be made in order to provide sufficient resources and financial support to upskill existing

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<sup>25</sup> Discussion paper – Job Security, <https://www.fwc.gov.au/documents/sites/award-review-2023-24/am202321-discussion-paper-job-security-181223.pdf>



and potential workplace-based trainers and assessors to make that training accessible. For example, it can take anywhere from eight to twelve months for a worker to be properly trained in how to operate paper making machinery, highlighting both the skill requirements necessary for such machinery, but also the importance of workplace training in enabling workers to develop practical skills and knowledge relevant to their roles. That training can only be delivered in the workplace.

To overcome the skills gaps present in the industry, it is essential that the value of this on-the-job training be properly recognised. A potential avenue for this is through linking workplace standard operating procedures to national competency standards and corresponding partnerships with industry-specific RTO networks which assure sufficient training quality whilst not requiring workers to be physically present within a TAFE institution.

An industry specific model of training management is particularly needed given the vast geographic spread of the industry. A successful model of this in the New South Wales context was when ForestWorks worked with employers, employees, and training providers to access existing funding sources to undertake skills sets, full qualifications and non-nationally recognised programs as party of the NSW Government's Bushfire Local Economic Recovery Fund Grant to support Skills Development in the Snowy Valley and adjoining Local Government Areas (LGAs) for forest and timber businesses and workers. ForestWorks engaged TAFE NSW to support this project both in a project management support and training provider capacity.

## **Conclusion**

Timber workers, their families, and communities are the backbone of the timber industry in NSW. They deserve more than just job security—they and all families in NSW deserve a reliable and sustainable supply of timber and market for the goods they produce that guarantees long-term work opportunities. This in turn gives them a stable platform to negotiate for fair pay and good conditions that lift entire communities.

Ensuring that the Forestry Industry Action Plan addresses the seven objectives above are concrete steps that the government can take to ensure houses for more NSW residents, secure and respected jobs for timber workers and environmentally sustainable manufacturing to build the NSW economy.

## Appendix

### ***NSW ALP 2024 Policy Platform***

NSW Labor recognises the value and role of our forests in storing carbon, protecting biodiversity and supporting regional communities. NSW Labor is strongly committed to contributing to the delivery of Australia's commitments under the COP26 Glasgow Leaders Declaration on forests and land which include halting and reversing forest loss and land degradation by 2030 in recognition that deforestation increases greenhouse gas emissions.

NSW Labor also supports other priorities of the Forest & Climate Leaders' Partnership such as greening construction with sustainable wood and supports a sustainable future for NSW's forests and forest products industry to help achieve this objective.

Labor will update the NSW Forest Industry Roadmap to ensure it is contemporary and for purpose.

NSW Labor will:

1. Recognise the skills, knowledge and competencies of timber workers and their communities, as well as the central role First Nations communities play in restoring country and determining social, economic and environmental benefits flowing from forest management activity.
2. Expand NSW's plantation estate and processing and value adding capabilities to better satisfy increasing domestic and international demand for high-value, sustainably sourced and produced wood products, and develop an industry plan that facilitates regional job growth and vibrant sustainable communities.
3. Expand the objectives and benefits of public ownership and support, ensuring public investment delivers an equity stake or continued dividends for the people of NSW.
4. Support methods and systems for new management regimes for NSW forests that incentivise protection, conservation, restoration and/or sustainable use of NSW forests. This must prioritise the ongoing need for management, the effective use of by-products and restorative management where required along with the promotion of good and decent work.
5. Deliver the management and restoration of native forests, recognising and rewarding carbon and biodiversity values and the need for their active and ongoing management.
6. Harness the social, environmental, and economic benefits that our forests can provide.
7. Support increased supply of timber for residential housing construction, including support for new methods of engineered timber, modular housing and other methods to more economically utilise timber resources.