Independent Forestry Panel

Public submission

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

Australian governments, state and Federal, are downplaying the significant damage caused by logging native forests. The World Wildlife Fund understands the bigger picture and condemns this native forest logging in Australia.

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

Australians like myself are realising that we can't trust our federal and state governments to protect us from climate collapse or ecological devastation. In fact, internationally, people are becoming increasingly aware of the failure of our current systems of governments to uphold the best interests of their citizens by listening to the science and taking action to protect the environment from degradation and the climate from potential collapse.
In Australia in 2024, we are seeing the disastrous results of years of policies made by consecutive governments who ensured us they were acting in our best interest. An example of our failed environmental protection policies is that Australia is still the mammal extinction capital of the world.
People are starting to see that the long-term health of the environment that supports us, is often sacrificed for the short-term interests of a minority who benefit financially.
In primary school, I learned that we are human beings and we rely on oxygen, nutrition and hydration to survive. We need to protect our environment for the sake of our own survival. I don't care about Forestry jobs - it is the governments responsibility to look at how we can transition those workers into meaningful employment elsewhere. Australia somehow found enough money during COVID to pay half the country a living wage for a year so there is definitely enough money in the budget to support the transition of the forestry workers and to support the small towns that rely on the forestry industry

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

I believe that we need to consider the long-term outcomes of all decisions that impact on our native forests.
We simply can't sacrifice any more trees. We can use plantation timber products and look at other solutions to the demand for timber products. Sadly, most of the public logging operations are for low value products like woodchips. It's a travesty.

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

We can use plantation timber to meet timber supply needs.
Australia needs to re-examine the validity of exporting our timber, taking into consideration the long-term benefits of protecting our native forests.

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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

What role do State Forests currently play in 'maximising' the delivery of environmental, economic and social outcomes??
In regards to Aboriginal forest management models, the 2022 report 'NSW Forest Monitoring and Improvement Program: Aboriginal Cultural values and renewal in NSW forests post-wildfires' gave a damning assessment of how Aboriginal people are "not adequately involved in land management and decision making, including the identification, management, and monitoring of cultural values, leading to poor environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic outcomes" (NSW Forest Monitoring and Improvement Program: Aboriginal cultural values and renewal in NSW forests post-wildfires
Synthesis report
Natural Resources Commission
August 2022)

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

Ending native forest logging would help Australia's climate goals much more than planting trees
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Australia contains some of the world's most biologically diverse and carbon-dense native forests. Eucalypts in wet temperate forests are the tallest flowering plants in the world and home to an array of unique tree-dwelling marsupials, rare birds, insects, mosses, fungi and lichen, many of which have not even been catalogued by scientists. Yet our country remains in the top ten list globally for tree cover loss, with almost half of the original forested areas in eastern Australia cleared.
This loss has been devastating for Australia's native plants and animals and contributes to global warming through vast amounts of carbon emissions. The global biodiversity and climate change crises are inextricably linked , we cannot solve one without the other.
Earth's ecosystems, such as forests, coastal wetlands and tundra, contain enormous amounts of carbon. But deforestation and degradation by humans is likely to send global warming past 1.5°C, even if we achieve net-zero fossil fuel emissions. Protecting native forests is a critical way to prevent emissions, which must be achieved in parallel with a rapid transition to clean energy.
What is being overlooked in current international climate policy under the Paris Agreement is the crucial role of biodiversity in maintaining healthy ecosystems and their integrity, which keeps carbon stored in forests, not the atmosphere. Healthy ecosystems are more stable and resilient, with a lower risk of trees dying and lower rates of carbon emissions.
The way we currently count carbon stores risk creating incentives to plant new trees rather than protect existing forests. Yet old-growth forests store vastly more carbon than young saplings, which will take decades or even centuries to reach the same size.
On January 1 this year, both Victoria and Western Australia ended native forest logging in state forests. This is a good start. But the rest of Australia is still logging native forests. Extensive land clearing continues for agriculture and urban development, as well as native forest harvesting on private land.
Can ending native forest logging help the climate?
We'll need to go further and ban logging in all native forests in Australia to help meet our net-zero emissions target, while meeting timber demand from better-managed and increased plantations.

Stopping native forest logging avoids the emissions released when forests are cut and burned. It would also allow continued forest growth and regrowth of previously logged areas, which draws down carbon from the atmosphere and increases the amount held in the forest ecosystem.
The natural biodiversity of our native forests makes them more resilient to external disturbances such as climate change. These forests have larger and more stable carbon stocks than logged areas, newly planted forests and plantations.
If we compare forests protected for conservation with those harvested for commodity production in the Victorian Central Highlands, research shows conservation delivers the greatest climate benefits through continued forest growth and accumulating carbon stocks.
There are growing calls to create the Great Forests National Park to the north and east of Melbourne, which would protect a further 355,000 hectares and more than double protected forests in the Central Highlands.
Net zero: deep, rapid, sustained cuts needed
The world's nations are aiming to reach 'net zero' by mid-century. Meeting this target will require deep and rapid cuts in carbon dioxide emissions as well as pulling carbon out of the atmosphere into land sinks, especially forests.
The land sector is unique in that it can be both a source (logging, agriculture) and a sink (forest regrowth, for instance) for carbon. The natural way forests take up carbon can be increased through natural regrowth or plantations.
Unfortunately, the current approach, based on IPCC guidelines, to counting this type of natural carbon storage can lead to perverse outcomes.
The carbon sink from forest regrowth only counts towards the 'removals' part of net zero when it results from changes we make, such as ending native forest logging. It doesn't count if it's regrowth after a natural event such as a bushfire. It's important to count only human-induced changes in our climate targets.
Tree planting, on the other hand, can be counted towards net-zero targets, despite the fact that newly planted trees will take centuries to sequester as much carbon as found in an old-growth forest.
This type of accounting , known as flow-based accounting , can mean a premium is placed on planting and maintaining young forests with high carbon uptake rates, overlooking the substantial benefits of protecting larger trees in native forests.
That is, this approach favours carbon sequestration (the process of taking carbon out of the atmosphere and storing it in wood) over carbon storage (the total carbon stocks already contained in a forest).
A comprehensive approach to forest carbon accounting would recognise both flows of carbon (as sequestration) and carbon stocks (as storage) contribute to the benefits that native forests offer for reducing emissions.
Carbon accounting needs more clarity
This becomes a problem when forests and fossil fuels are included in a net accounting framework, such as the one used in Australia's national greenhouse gas inventory.
In net accounts, emissions (from fossil fuel and land sectors) within a year are added to removals, which includes the sequestration of carbon into forests and other ecosystems.
Because this type of accounting only counts the flows of carbon , not existing stocks , it omits the climate benefits of protecting existing forests, whose stored carbon dwarfs the amount Australia emits from fossil fuels each year.
But if we separated out targets for the fossil fuel and land sectors, we could properly treat forest carbon stocks as an asset, giving us incentives to protect them.
Another problem with net accounting is it treats all carbon as equivalent, meaning a tonne of carbon sequestered in trees compensates for a tonne of carbon from burned fossil fuels. This has

no scientific basis. Carbon dioxide emissions are effectively permanent, as the buried carbon we dig up and burn stays in the atmosphere for millennia, while carbon in trees is temporary in comparison.
As trees grow, their carbon storage compensates for earlier logging and clearing emissions, which is an important climate benefit. But we're not comparing apples and apples , forest carbon doesn't compensate for fossil fuel emissions.