

CHRISTINE OBERSTEBRINK

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

Logging native forests is not sustainable. Estimations by the Forestry Corporation of the amount of harvestable timber are consistently over estimated and the yield from public native forests has declined by 40% since 2010. Protection laws for logging mature trees were removed in 2018 and logging was intensified to try and get more wood from native forests.

Logging of native forests reduces biomass and carbon storage, and removing mature trees takes away valuable food sources and hollow bearing trees. At the head of wildlife extinction, Australia cannot ignore the fact that 174 species in NSW rely on hollows for dens and nests, and logging critically reduces the number of hollows that will be created in native forests. According to research, logging native forest increases fire threat and intensity, erosion and the pollution of waterways, and the penetration of weeds and other invasive species. Native forest logging significantly reduces the function and health of waterways, including streams and rivers. It also means more loss of land to people living on waterways because of erosion.

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

Healthy and unlogged forests are critical to the whole environment and both First Nations and non-First Nations culture and identity, and this is ultimately true for all Australians if you look at how we present ourselves on an international level. Forests, particularly healthy mature forests, generate rainfall, cool the landscape and clean the air. This is probably more relevant than widely acknowledged and logging has probably played a significant role in desertification owing to this.

One hundred and fifty threatened species in NSW are directly impacted by logging native forests. And we are losing plant species everyday that are possibly very important for medicine research. Mature and unlogged native forests are critical for pollinators and play a key role in pollination across the landscape, both inside and outside of forests.

Native forests provide recreation and improved health outcomes to locals and visitors alike and are a source of community pride and connection to place. Native forests in NSW hold significant cultural and spiritual value for First Nations people, as they do for many other inhabitants as well. First Nations people and communities have ongoing connection to native forests and forest landscapes are an integral part of cultural practice and knowledge.

There are 269 nationally listed threatened species in NSW and the landscape scale significance of native forests means that native forest logging compromises many ecosystems and habitats throughout NSW.

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

Analysis of statics reveals that logging in native forests accounted for only 9% of the total log production in Australia in the year 2023. Native forest logging contributes only 2.4 million of the total 25 million cubic metres for that year. Half of the logs taken from native forests in 2023 were turned into woodchip and exported.

Hardwood logs taken from plantations made up 8.5 million cubic metres, and just 8% of these logs were saw and veneer logs. 87% of hardwood plantation logs were exported as wood chips. Hardwood sourced from native forests or plantations are no longer necessary for any of the uses identified in this section.

Sawn and treated softwood logs and composite timber products made from softwoods can substitute for all current uses for native forest and plantation hardwoods. The market and demand for native forests is declining rapidly, the recent example of Essential Energy moving away from power poles harvested from native forests is just one example.

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

Plantations already provide 91% of Australia's log production. A higher proportion of harvested logs from plantations should be prioritised as saw and veneer logs, rather than exporting them as wood chips.

Subsidising the logging of public native forests by the Forestry Corporation is non-competitive and distorts the market away from the more profitable softwood plantation industry.

High-end and luxury native hardwood products should only be selectively harvested on private land and under strict conditions.

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

Native forests that are not logged have real and tangible benefits to the entire ecology and economy of NSW. Native state forests cover an area of 2 million hectares in NSW and impact on a diverse set of living conditions for many towns, from water quality in reservoirs, to greater tourism industry opportunities, and carbon storage and abatement.

The native forest hardwood division of the Forestry Corporation operates at a loss that runs into tens of millions of dollars, at the expense of the NSW public. It also additionally receives tens of millions of dollars in regular equity injections. The people of NSW should not be paying millions of dollars to destroy the biodiversity of our own state and critical habitat for threatened species. Public native forests have a much higher economic value when they are allowed to function naturally and without logging.

First Nations Ranger Programs have been hugely successful at managing the recovery and health of native forests. Programs like the Githabul Rangers have shown how First Nations knowledge and management can restore the natural and critical function of forests in the landscape.

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

Native forest logging in NSW is estimated to release 3.6 million tonnes of carbon every year. Ending native forest logging would be the equivalent to removing 840 thousand cars from the roads per year. Logging in a native forest reduces the amount of stored carbon by more than half of the original value. Ending native forest logging will allow previously logged forests to regain lost carbon and make a significant contribution to meeting our emissions targets. Climate change is driving increased risks for forest health and continued logging in native forests is exacerbating that risk.

Public submission

Forests that have not been logged are more resilient to the changing climate and catastrophic fires that are occurring as a consequence