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

Logging of native forest is not sustainable. I first began to understand this over forty years ago. In 1981 I moved to Elands in northern NSW, near Wingham, to live adjacent to several State Forests including the Bulga State Forest, currently the scene of protests and arrests of community members attempting to protect this remnant habitat for endangered species including the Greater Glider and the Koala. Over the years I have witnessed many changes in forest management and silvicultural practices such as Timber Stand Improvement (in many cases an ecological disaster), clear felling and wood chipping that have collectively led to the degradation of these once magnificent forests.

We were fortunate when the Wran Labor government ended rainforest logging in 1982, before the rainforest was completely exhausted. Many rainforest dependent mills closed, such as the plywood mill at Yarras on the upper Hastings River. Half a century later, much of the logged rainforest is still struggling to recover as it is being suppressed by vines and it will be centuries before there is anything like the diversity of the original exquisite rainforest structure.

Public concern and protests (in which I was involved) against 'old growth' forest logging in the late 1980s and early 1990s resulted in the Carr Labor government coming to power on a promise to protect the remnant old growth forests from further logging. Carr essentially kept his promise in 1997 by partly conserving the 'old growth'. The end of old growth forest logging saw many mills close, especially those tooled to manage large logs. There were rash promises then that extensive hardwood plantations would be established, but subsequently there was insufficient government enthusiasm or investment.

I was humbled to receive an Order of Australia in 2000 for Services to Conservation and the Protection of Old Growth Forests. Meanwhile, the pressure on the remaining native forest started to increase. The wretched Wood Supply Agreements demanded the poor forests, already sadly depleted, give even more and supply timber well in excess of their ecologically sustainable capacity.

For almost thirty years I have witnessed the 'industrial' scale logging of my local native forests and the steady decline in their integrity at the hands of the NSW Forestry Commission and more recently the NSW Forestry Corporation.

The first European to see the magnificent tall eucalypt forests in the catchments of the Upper Manning and Hastings rivers was John Oxley in 1818. In his diaries Oxley describes trees "lying on the ground, six, eight and ten feet in diameter" (1.8m - 3m). The average log being taken from the forests today will be less than 40cm.

A healthy native forest structure, like a healthy human population, has a range of age classes; from the young to the adolescent to the mature, the aged and senescent. The remnant native forest in State Forests now lacks this diversity. The trees are mostly young or barely mature. Each logging cycle further compromises the ecological integrity of the forest. The frequency of the logging cycles of 40 years and often less (as demanded by the wood supply agreements) ensures few trees reach maturity.

A visit to the hardwood lowland State Forests (e.g. Yarratt and Kiwarrak surrounding Taree) instantly shows the total lack of mature trees (i.e. those aged 100 to 200 years or more). We know that eucalypts do not develop suitable hollows for large arboreal mammals and forest owls until the trees are at least 150 years old or more. Trees of this age have all but disappeared from the lower altitude landscapes.

Similarly, the mountain State forests are being rapidly depleted of hollow trees. These mountain forests of the Upper Manning and Hastings now provide the last homes to various endangered species forced into the hinterland by land clearing in the valleys.

There is little doubt, and much evidence, to show that both the quality and the yield of timber from native forests is steadily declining and further exploitation of native forests is both economically and ecologically unsustainable. The belief that because we have logged our forests for a hundred years means that we can keep doing it, is a myth. History tells us that humans will take everything unless they are restrained. Native forest logging must end immediately.

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

Many of the environmental values of our native forests are still waiting to be discovered. For example, the medicinal properties of many native plants remain unknown. Australia is home to more than 150,000 native species, and taxonomists are making great progress in documenting them. On average, approximately two new species are identified each day, highlighting the nation's incredible biodiversity.

Meanwhile, Australia has the unenviable record of having the highest level of mammal extinctions in the world with over thirty species now lost since colonisation. Species that had thrived on the Australian landscape for hundreds of thousands, even millions of years have tragically disappeared in just a few decades. Habitat destruction is one of the major drivers of extinction. Native forest logging today is extinction logging.

Of particular concern in the tall eucalypt forests of northern NSW is the demise of the Greater Glider and the Koala, both now listed as endangered. Greater Glider populations have declined by 80% in just 20 years whilst Koalas are forecast to be extinct by 2050 without immediate remedial action.

I know, as I write this, that the NSW Forestry Corporation is logging the habitat of the Greater Glider and the Koala in the Bulga State Forest, just a few kilometres from my home. At the same time the Forestry Corporation is logging Kiwarrak State Forest near Taree. Both Kiwarrak and Bulga State Forests are listed by the NSW Government as Areas of Regional Koala Significance (ARKS) and are supposed to be protected, but clearly, they are not. Bulga State Forest was one of the few forests that remained unburnt in the 2019 Megafires. As unburnt forest, Bulga is now a significant refugia for species that managed to escape the surrounding forest and should not be being logged. Kiwarrak, on the other hand, was intensely burnt, losing a reported 80% of its koalas. As the Koalas in Kiwarrak are now recovering from that devastating impact, their forest should not be being logged.

I am a member of the Mid Coast Council Koala Reference Group which has developed the Mid Coast Koala Conservation Strategy, funded by the NSW Government, The Strategy has identified the ARKS for koala conservation. When Mid Coast Council learnt that the ARKS in Bulga and Kiwarrak State Forests were to be logged they wrote to the Forestry Corporation asking them not to log either of these forests due to their importance for koalas. The Corporation declined and logging commenced in Kiwarrak last month and in Bulga last week.

The community does not sit idly by and watch the destruction of this critical habitat for endangered species. They have not in the past and they certainly will not in the future. In the last week over a dozen local residents have been arrested in Bulga State forest as they put their

bodies on the line to stop the industrial logging equipment wreaking carnage in critical Greater Glider and Koala habitat. The need for good law-abiding people having to protect our endangered species because the government cannot is disgraceful.

This absurd situation is further compounded by recent court decisions that found that 'the Forestry Corporation has proved it cannot be trusted and its cavalier attitude to threatened species and their habitats must end,' Just a matter of weeks ago the Forestry Corporation was convicted of further criminal offences with the court finding that the Forestry Corporation "will continue to undertake forestry harvesting activities and has not sufficiently demonstrated genuine contrition and remorse for its commission of the offences.'

Aboriginal Cultural Heritage is strongly connected to country. Forests are seen as part of this relationship and protecting them ensures that Aboriginal cultural practices tied to the land, such as bush medicine, traditional hunting, and foraging, can continue. Aboriginal communities have millennia-old knowledge of sustainable land management practices. With the end of logging, there could be opportunities for Aboriginal people to lead conservation efforts, leveraging their traditional ecological knowledge to ensure forest health and biodiversity. Aboriginal people, especially through the Commonwealth Government's Indigenous Ranger Program would be able to assist with the recovery of our depleted native forests which, in some cases may take hundreds of years

The cessation of native forest logging in NSW could provide Aboriginal people with opportunities to reassert their cultural practices, take a lead in land stewardship, and benefit economically through sustainable development and eco tourism.

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

Less than 10% of Australia's log production is from native hardwoods. Mills dependent of native forests have steadily declined over the last 50 years . New houses are now largely built from brick, steel or pine, not hardwood.

Many of the products from native forest logging are of low value. Any future hardwood needs can be met from plantations and from composite timber products. The argument that ending native forest logging will lead to the importation of timber from less sustainable logging overseas does not hold water. The government can control the import of timber and can refuse the import of timber from questionable operations and sources.

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

Obviously, the future of any native hardwood industry lies in plantations. Hardwood and softwood plantations currently provide over 90% of Australia's log production. Private Native forestry (PNF) is a possible option for meeting some of NSW's future timber needs. However, it has been correctly reported that PNF is inadequately monitored. There are other concerns surrounding PNF operations in Areas of Regional Koala Significance and in the critical habitats of other endangered species. Again, the future needs to be based on private landholders being incentivised to establish plantations and incentivised to protect their remnant native forests rather than sell it.

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

There are 2 million hectares of State Forests in NSW that provide critical water resources for town reservoirs, offer potential for increased tourism, and act as important carbon sinks. These

economic benefits would only grow if logging were to cease. In 2023, Forestry Corporation lost \$15 million on its hardwood operations, amounting to a cost of \$1,281 per hectare logged. This is despite receiving \$31 million for community service obligations and ongoing substantial equity injections. Taxpayers should not be funding the degradation of forests or the destruction of habitats for threatened species. Public forests offer far greater economic value through water supply, tourism, and carbon storage than through logging. Ending logging in public native forests is clearly in the best interest of taxpayers.

In the early 1990s, a conservationist, I spoke against old growth forest logging to a rally of timber workers on the Wingham town green. Col Dorber, the then president of the Forest Products Association, who spoke after me, told the crowd that if I had my way, towns like Wingham and Wauchope 'would die.' On the contrary, Wingham and Wauchope have prospered, but the myth that native forest logging will decimate rural communities persists.

What must not be allowed is for timber interests to exploit the attachment of traditional owners to country by trying to disguise commercial logging as 'forest gardening'.

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 CO₂ annually, equivalent to the emissions of 840,000 cars each year. Logging has more than halved the amount of carbon stored in these forests. By stopping logging, forests can begin to recover their lost carbon, playing a crucial role in helping meet climate goals. The devastating 2019/20 wildfires highlighted how climate change, through increased droughts and fires, is already severely affecting trees, forest species, and rainforests. Halting logging is essential to allow forests to absorb CO₂, mitigate the impacts of climate change, and restore their resilience to future disasters.