

Public submission

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Submission to the Independent Forestry Panel from Elisabeth Dark

Our native forests have been mistreated for too long and logging is driving more wildlife towards extinction. The true value of our forests comes from their critical role in carbon storage, providing a clean and reliable water supply, providing critical habitat, recreation and spiritual connection.

I am an ordinary person who shares with many others an appreciation for our unique flora and fauna. I advocate for Australian birds and their habitats. I support an immediate end to native forest logging and a future industry based on sustainable plantations.

1. Sustainability of current and future forestry operations in NSW

Independent experts say that estimations by the Forestry Corporation of the amount of harvestable timber are consistently over-estimated. Because so many areas are logged out or now in reservations, the yield from public native forests has declined by 40% since 2010. It will continue to decline, despite protections for mature trees being removed in 2018 in an attempt to intensify logging.

Logging is causing devastation to the environmental values of native forests. Unacceptable impacts include: increases in fire threat and intensity, erosion, penetration of weeds and feral animals, removal of food sources for many native animals, reduction in the function and health of waterways including streams and rivers.

174 animal species in NSW rely on hollows for dens and nests. Logging reduces the number of hollows that exist in native forests. From my general knowledge as someone who loves the unique plants and animals that call this country home, I am aware that it can take well over 100 years for a tree to become sufficiently mature to develop hollows.

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

Forests provide vital ecosystem services – clean air, drinkable water and pollinators of crops are just a few. Healthy mature forests generate rainfall and cool the landscape. For our survival, we need all these things – despite often not acknowledging this fact.

Native forests can be a source of community pride and give connection to place. They also provide recreation and improved health outcomes to locals and visitors.

Native forests in NSW hold significant cultural and spiritual value for First Nations people. Many First Nations communities retain strong ties to their country.

There are 269 nationally listed threatened species in NSW, with experts saying that 150 of these are directly impacted by logging native forests. I do not want to see more extinctions – and that is what will happen if logging continues. My father was a professional forester managing public native forests and, were he still alive, would be appalled at the extinction trajectory we are on.

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

We have significant *Pinus radiata* plantations from which to source timber products for housing and other uses. Logging in native forests accounted for only 9% of the total log

production in Australia in the year 2023 and such logging contributed only 2.4 million of the total 25 million cubic metres of logged timber. The market and demand for logs sourced from native forest are declining rapidly.

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

Subsidising the logging of public native forests by the Forestry Corporation, which currently happens, distorts the market away from the more profitable softwood plantation industry.

A higher proportion of harvested logs from hardwood plantations should be processed as saw and veneer logs, rather than being exported as low-value wood chips....a crazy waste of a resource. It makes strong economic sense to value-add and to do that here rather than elsewhere.

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

This opens up exciting prospects that should be investigated. It would require a major rethink of the role of State Forests.

Native state forests cover 2 million hectares in NSW. They affect the living conditions for many people in regional areas, from water quality in reservoirs, to greater tourism industry opportunities, and carbon storage and abatement. The environmental services performed by healthy forests means they have an economic value when allowed to function naturally.

The many millions of dollars currently (mis)spent in losses by the native forest hardwood division of the Forestry Corporation could be channelled into different options. Among these are First Nations Ranger Programs, which have been hugely successful in managing the recovery and health of native forests.

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 be the equivalent to removing 840 thousand cars from the roads per year.

Experts attest that 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 logged forests to regain lost carbon and make a significant contribution to meeting our emissions targets.

Forests that have not been intensively logged are more resilient to the changing climate and catastrophic fires.

To me these are powerful reasons to end native forest logging.

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