

Public submission

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FEDC – Casino NSW

Established 45 years ago in [REDACTED], FEDC is a family owned company that now employs two generations of the family. It has a specialist harvest and haulage division that is contracted to Forestry Corporation in their managed public native forests and provides contracting in private native forestry. We are specialists in native hardwood.

FEDC transports harvested logs to various mills generally in the upper North East of NSW, however more recently with numerous anti-forestry protestors and court injunctions, we have had to send crews much further afield in order to provide work.

We have the contract to collect mill waste from the region of Casino, Grafton to Coffs Harbour which is taken and ground down at our site. It is then transported to Cape Byron Power for use in energy production. This mill waste without an outlet like Cape Byron, would be burnt or landfilled.

Our base is in Casino and we have small depots in other rural towns in the upper North East.

We employ 55 full time and 10 part time staff, which includes 3 members of the family. Most of the staff live in the [REDACTED] area although we have some that travel a considerable distance to attend work. Our business is an equal opportunity employer and we have employees that are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait descent.

FEDC takes on at least one new apprentice each year, particularly in our own machinery workshop which has 6 full time staff qualified to keep the trucks and machinery in top class working order. Additionally we have an office administration trainee who focuses on specialist data and record keeping.

Our staff are specifically forestry trained and generally hold down career forestry jobs. Few have worked in other jobs and would struggle to find alternate employment if the native forest industry was reduced or closed. In an area like Casino there is no other employment opportunities. They are a loyal hardworking workforce who have families and mortgages. We currently are the only harvest crew north of Grafton.

Specialising in both government and private property harvest contracts, FEDC also provides other services such as roading, fence line maintenance and firebreaks. There is a strong demand for the services we provide and the mills appreciate our efficiency and professionalism. It's a partnership, a business ecosystem that thrives on both competition and co-operation.

As a company policy, FEDC spend 100 % of its operating expenditure in Casino. We appreciate other business and services in our local area. Its part of being a community. We procure tyres, fuel, vehicles, spare parts, protective clothing, equipment and the like locally.

Any decision to phase out harvesting in state native forests would have a domino effect on Casino and its businesses. Some would close and others would reduce by 30 - 40%. FEDC would have to reduce staff – something we are reluctant to consider.

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The Casino community is tight knit and FEDC sponsors rugby and netball teams, the Truck Show and Beef Week. More than \$15,000 is injected into these community based events and teams.

Topic 1 Sustainability of current and future forestry operations in NSW

There is a huge lack of understanding and awareness of what sustainability is in a forest. In one of our private native forests, we have selectively harvested it three times in 45 years and this has produced \$250,000 in royalty.

Forestry Corporation employs highly competent and professional forest science staff who have planning, mapping and regulatory requirements documented to an incredibly high standard. They undertake comprehensive ecological surveys of their forests.

Yet the Corporation has been under siege for a number of years and have lost staff from unacceptable bullying, harassment and stalking by anti-forest protestors and local environment activists.

To that end all of us working in the forests are subject to an unacceptable degree of risk from those people who frequently invade closed forestry operations where occupational health and safety requirements are paramount. It is not acceptable that police resources are constantly being used to remove the protestors and little or nothing occurs as a consequence. If government offices and officials in Sydney were subjected to similar behaviour, something would be done. This is an unsustainable situation.

All of these issues add to the cost of producing native hardwood which is in high demand but now very hard to produce and deliver. This comes at a cost to FEDC as our contracts with Forestry Corporation are subject to constant change and stand downs due to the activist behaviour without compensation.

NSW native forests have the capacity to meet the demand sustainably because they are professionally and actively managed with the best outcomes for biodiversity.

NSW State forests have been sustainably managed for timber for more than 100 years. NSW foresters were among the country's first conservationists, dedicating vast tracts of forests for sustainable timber supply. These are forests that would have otherwise been cleared for agriculture.

New South Wales is an international leader in Environmentally Sustainable Forest Management (ESFM) because of its level of on ground protection. NSW has close to 9.7 million hectares of publicly owned and managed native vegetation with 8.7 million hectares (90%) managed exclusively for environmental conservation. Less than 1 million hectares (10.2%) is available for sustainable timber supply. The high level of environmental protection is achieved through a CAR¹ Reserve system that was established 25 years ago in eastern NSW and since expanded into western NSW. The reserve system now includes a comprehensive set of harvest exclusion zones on State forests. Approximately 60% of native State forests are now managed exclusively for environmental protection.

¹ Comprehensive, adequate and representative

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With this level of protection, harvesting in native forests certainly contributes to improved forest health. Yet few of us have confidence to invest in our businesses because decisions made about forests are political ones not scientific ones.

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

Under the current management model there is a legal obligation to protect things at an individual level but no requirement to protect them at a whole of landscape scale. The 2019-20 Wildfires highlighted the weakness of this model. In the space of a few months environmental, economic and cultural values were destroyed on mass along with the billions of dollars of investment that had been directed toward their protection.

Forestry Corporation has an extensive First Nations cultural heritage program along with active participation in cultural burning practices.

Biodiversity and threatened species protections are vital for the health of a forest, however regulatory agencies have interpreted the regulations without on ground practicality and flexibility yet they demonstrate opportunistic behaviour in trying to find as many “threatened species” as possible in order to restrict or close native forestry. The recent stand downs relating to the Greater Glider when overnight the rule set dramatically changed, did little for the Gliders which are in healthy numbers on the North Coast, but crippled forest businesses for weeks and up to months. Recent drone surveys relating to the assessment area for the establishment of the Great Koala National Park have shown large numbers of both koalas and gliders. Yet the ENGOs remain committed to their narrative that the environmental values of the state forests have resulted in a high level of threatened species.

State forest have the largest number of records on fauna and flora in NSW – far greater monitoring than what occurs on National parks

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

A simple statement is all that is needed. Hardwood supply cannot meet demand, which is why timber imports are rapidly rising. While the cost of living has slowed housing construction, and the economic conditions have seen an increasing number of construction companies fall into administration or bankruptcy, supply still cannot meet the demand.

FEDC had hoped that during the COVID epidemic, Australians and more particularly state and federal governments, would have recognised that being reliant on an international supply chain is high risk. Timber and more particularly hardwood timber is vital in the movement of whitegoods, food, mining and rail transportation. It confounds the industry that forestry can produce cost effective durable poles, piles and girders for energy transmission, wharves and bridges and yet a government would encourage the use of energy intensive substitute products and justify that as an environmentally beneficial decision.

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

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In New South Wales most hardwood plantations were established in the late 1990s and early 2000s as long rotation sawlog plantations. The plantations take between 35 and 50 years depending on soil and weather conditions to reach maturity, so most are now mid

rotation. If new hardwood plantations are established to supplement dwindling native forest supply they will start producing small sawlogs from about 2050. That said there is a history with the MIS schemes failure and plantations that were established with the wrong species in the wrong places. Hardwood plantations would need to take the place of agricultural productive land and then deliver a questionable ROI after 20 or more years. Very few will invest. Most land holders will move to agricultural commodities that produce a return within 3-5 years.

Softwood has a better outlook but we are still living with a major decline in plantation forestry.

Private Native Forestry (PNF) only contributes approximately 30-35% of the volume now and does not have the capacity to replace state forest supply.

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

You only have to read the comprehensive annual reports from Forestry Corporation to understand the breadth of programs covered by this topic.

Topic 6. Opportunities to realise carbon and biodiversity benefits and support carbon and biodiversity benefits, and mitigate and adapt to climate change risks, including the greenhouse gas emission impacts of different uses of forests and assessment of climate change risk to forests.

I defer to the Timber NSW submission which comprehensively answers this topic.