Independent Forestry Panel

Public submission

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

Native forest logging in NSW is increasingly unsustainable. Current practices lead to significant ecological degradation, with a 40% decline in timber yield from public native forests since 2010. The Forestry Corporation's estimates of harvestable timber have routinely been overestimated, contributing to unsustainable logging practices.

In 2018, protections for mature trees were removed, leading to intensified logging efforts aimed at extracting more timber from native forests. This practice diminishes biomass and carbon storage; studies show that the removal of mature trees eliminates vital food sources and habitats for species that depend on hollow-bearing trees. 174 species in NSW rely on hollows for nesting and shelter, and logging drastically reduces the number of hollows created in these ecosystems. Moreover, native forest logging increases fire risk, contributes to erosion and waterway pollution, and facilitates the invasion of weeds and other non-native species. These impacts severely undermine the health and function of waterways, including streams and rivers. Additionally, native forest logging is estimated to release 3.6 million tonnes of carbon into the atmosphere each year, contributing significantly to greenhouse gas emissions. Ending this practice would have an environmental benefit equivalent to removing 840,000 cars from the roads annually, underscoring the urgent need for sustainable forestry practices that prioritise the long-term health of these ecosystems.

Suggested Changes: Immediate cessation of native forest logging practices and a transition to sustainable plantation forestry within 5 years.

Implications:

Industry: The shift would require retraining workers and redirecting investments towards plantation management. While there may be short-term job losses in native logging, new opportunities will arise in sustainable forestry, eco-tourism, and conservation roles.

Environment: This change would allow for the recovery of degraded ecosystems, improved biodiversity, and increased carbon storage. Over the next 30 years, previously logged areas could sequester significant carbon, contributing to climate change mitigation and enhancing the resilience of forest ecosystems.

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

Healthy, unlogged forests are vital to the overall environment and are integral to the cultural identity of both First Nations and non-First Nations communities. These forests, especially mature ones, play a crucial role in generating rainfall, cooling the landscape, and improving air quality. They also provide essential habitat for 150 threatened species directly affected by logging, as well as 269 nationally listed threatened species that rely on the unique ecosystems these forests offer. Native forests contribute significantly to community health and well-being, offering recreational opportunities that enhance quality of life for locals and visitors alike. From my personal experience having access to natural environments has improved my mental and physical health. And I have observed the same in others in my community. For First Nations peoples, native forests

hold profound cultural and spiritual significance, representing an ongoing relationship with the landscape central to their cultural practices and knowledge.
Protecting these forests not only safeguards biodiversity but also honours Aboriginal cultural heritage. Successful initiatives like the Githabul Rangers demonstrate the effectiveness of integrating First Nations knowledge in managing and recovering forest health.
Suggested Changes: Develop and implement a comprehensive conservation plan for native forests within 3 years, emphasizing collaboration with First Nations communities.
Implications:

- Industry: The focus on conservation may initially limit timber extraction but could promote growth in eco-tourism and recreational services. Companies could pivot to producing sustainable products that honour cultural and ecological values.
- Environment: Protecting native forests would help preserve habitats for 150 threatened species and support broader biodiversity, leading to healthier ecosystems. Over 30 years, these efforts would enhance ecosystem services, such as improved water quality and increased resilience to climate change.

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

The demand for timber products in NSW is shifting, particularly in sectors such as housing, construction, mining, transport, and retail. While there is persistent demand for timber, it is crucial to meet this need sustainably through sources like softwood and hardwood plantations. The native forest hardwood division of the Forestry Corporation operates at a loss, running into tens of millions of dollars annually and often requiring additional equity injections from the public. This financial burden raises questions about the sustainability and economic rationale for continuing to rely on native forests for timber production, especially when alternative sources are available.
In 2023, logging in native forests represented only 9% of Australia's total log production, contributing 2.4 million cubic meters to a nationwide total of 25 million cubic meters. Notably, half of the logs sourced from native forests were processed into woodchips for export, reflecting a trend towards less sustainable and less value-added uses of these resources.
In contrast, hardwood logs harvested from plantations amounted to 8.5 million cubic meters, with only 8% designated for saw and veneer production. A staggering 87% of hardwood logs from plantations were exported as woodchips, indicating a reliance on this lower-value market. Advancements in timber technology now allow sawn and treated softwood logs, along with composite timber products derived from softwoods, to effectively replace all current uses of native forest and plantation hardwoods. A recent example is Essential Energy's decision to transition away from using power poles harvested from native forests, indicating broader acknowledgment of sustainable alternatives.
Suggested Changes: Shift focus to sustainable timber sources, including softwood and hardwood plantations, within 5 years.
Implications:

- Industry: This transition would stabilise the timber market by reducing reliance on native forests, leading to more consistent supply chains. Financial losses from native forest logging could be mitigated by investing in plantation forestry and related industries.
- Environment: Over 30 years, sustainable practices would reduce deforestation impacts, restore biodiversity, and lower carbon emissions. The market shift would also encourage innovation in timber technology and product development.

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

Softwood and hardwood plantations should be prioritised to sustainably meet timber supply needs. Investing in plantation forestry can help fulfill market demands while minimising ecological impacts.

Currently, plantations account for 91% of Australia's total log production. To enhance the value derived from these resources, a greater proportion of harvested logs from plantations should be prioritised for use as saw and veneer logs rather than exported as woodchips. The practice of subsidising the logging of public native forests by the Forestry Corporation is uncompetitive and distorts the market, diverting attention from the more profitable softwood plantation industry. Furthermore, high-end and luxury native hardwood products should be harvested selectively from private land and under stringent regulations to ensure sustainability and responsible management.

Suggested Changes: Expand plantation forestry initiatives and enhance management practices over the next 10 years.

Implications:

- Industry: Increased investment in plantations could create new jobs and boost local economies. Plantations can provide a reliable supply of timber, reducing market volatility associated with native logging.
- Environment: Healthy plantations can serve as carbon sinks, contributing to climate targets. Over 30 years, the cumulative carbon sequestration from expanded plantations could offset millions of tonnes of CO2 emissions, helping mitigate climate change impacts.

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

State Forests have the potential to maximise environmental, economic, and social outcomes through diverse management practices, including Aboriginal forest management models. Unlogged native forests provide significant and tangible benefits to both the ecology and economy of NSW. Covering an area of 2 million hectares, these state forests influence various living conditions for numerous towns, contributing to water quality in reservoirs, boosting tourism opportunities, and enhancing carbon storage and sequestration.

The native forest hardwood division of the Forestry Corporation operates at a substantial loss, amounting to tens of millions of dollars, which ultimately burdens the public of NSW. Additionally, this division receives regular equity injections worth tens of millions of dollars. It is unfair for the people of NSW to finance the destruction of biodiversity and critical habitats for threatened species. In contrast, public native forests possess far greater economic value when allowed to thrive naturally without logging.

Suggested Changes: Implement integrated management practices, including Indigenous land management, within 5 years.

Implications:

- Industry: Incorporating Indigenous practices can enhance forest health and increase public support for forestry initiatives. It would open new avenues for collaboration with local communities and promote sustainable practices. Engaging Strategic Leaders in Sustainability to assist with moving the industry into a sustainable future.
- Environment: Collaborative management can restore biodiversity and ecosystem functions. Over 30 years, healthier forests would provide enhanced ecological services, such as improved water quality, flood mitigation, and climate resilience.

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

There are significant opportunities to realise carbon and biodiversity benefits through improved forest management practices. Ending native forest logging would allow previously logged areas to recover and sequester carbon, contributing to meeting Australia's emissions targets.
Supporting carbon and biodiversity markets will help mitigate climate change risks while promoting sustainable land use practices. Assessing the greenhouse gas emissions associated with various forest uses is essential for informed decision-making that prioritises both ecological health and climate resilience.
Logging in native forests in NSW is estimated to release 3.6 million tonnes of carbon annually. Ceasing native forest logging would have an environmental impact comparable to removing 840,000 cars from the roads each year.
By ending native forest logging, previously logged areas would have the opportunity to recover and regain lost carbon, making a meaningful contribution to achieving our emissions reduction targets. The impacts of climate change are heightening the risks to forest health, and ongoing logging practices further exacerbate these threats. Conversely, forests that remain unlogged demonstrate greater resilience to climate change and the catastrophic fires that often result from it.
Suggested Changes: Establish biodiversity markets and promote sustainable land use practices within 5 years.
Implications:

- Industry: Developing these markets would create financial incentives for landholders and businesses to engage in conservation, potentially leading to new revenue streams and jobs.
- Environment: Ending native forest logging would allow for carbon recovery and biodiversity enhancement. Over 30 years, the positive impacts on climate mitigation could lead to healthier ecosystems, improved resilience to extreme weather, and enhanced habitat for wildlife.