

# Public submission

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

The sustainability of forestry in NSW is governed by the will and laws of NSW, whether native forest or plantation, hardwood or softwood, crown land or private.

There is no other industry in the world as sustainable as forestry yet the noisy minority\* would have us all believe that for native flora and fauna to flourish it must be locked up even though these lands, including forests, have been actively managed for tens of thousands of years. \**Social License to Operate – NSW timber & Forestry, North East NSW Forestry Hub, StollzNow August 2023*

The greatest threat to our flora, fauna and community when land is not managed, is **WILDFIRE**. Wildfire also greatly increases our CO2 emissions. Putting communities, forests (flora & fauna) and firefighters at risk and spending exorbitant figures on firefighting aircraft after the fact is negligent when simple tasks such as decent firebreaks, controlled cool burns, road clearing, thinning and managing our landscape even at a council road-side level, can help control this ever-increasing threat. These simple tasks need to be encouraged or mandated, including fire mitigation education particularly of people in bush areas.

**We are a first world nation and if we can't manage and expand our forestry to be a thriving industry in a sustainable way then who will?** The world understands that trees absorb carbon while growing (c. 50% of a tree's mass is carbon) and timber continues to keep this carbon locked up when utilised in frames, trusses, flooring, decking, cladding, bridges, poles, pallets, mining etc. For every mature tree harvested many more can be replanted thus absorbing even more carbon while growing. It is a continuous circular story of carbon absorption and long-term capture.

There is no old growth forests harvested in NSW. It is illegal. The forests that are harvested are regrowth or plantation. Habitat trees must be kept. The panel should request a demonstration of the lengths Forest Corp ecologists go to, with their ipads strapped to their chests walking and capturing all flora and fauna electronically, weeks prior to harvesting. These layered maps are uploaded to the harvesting crews to adhere to. The EPA can monitor in real time, the movement of the harvesting crews across the coupe.

Sustainability of forestry is being fought on emotion and media hype rather than science. For example we are led to believe that koalas are on the brink of extinction.

National Parks in NSW have never performed estate wide monitoring of koalas nor any other native. The Australian Koala Conservation ENGO was asked to provide its best estimate/opinion to establish a population figure for koalas. In 2018 they supplied a figure of 45,745 - 82,170 Australia wide. After the Black Summer fires this estimate was down-graded to 32,065 – 57,920, thus the koala was placed on an endangered species list based on opinion.

In 2022 the Federal Government funded the CSIRO \$10M for four years to establish the National Koala Monitoring Program (NKMP) to provide a robust, data-driven approach to deriving koala population estimates both across the listed and unlisted ranges of Australia. In 2023 CSIRO released their first population finding (initial estimate) of 287,830 – 628,010. In 2024 they have refined this figure to 224,000 – 524,000. This is far from being an

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endangered species. *CSIRO 2024 update of National Koala Population estimates, 15 April 2024*

The koala numbers in the north east of NSW have also been independently monitored by Dr Brad Laws and his team at NSW DPI. In the largest scientific study to date using acoustic devices, after 7 years of monitoring over 224 sites in 8.5 million hectares from south of Port Macquarie to the Qld border in hinterland forests, numbers of koalas are stable and thriving even in areas with regulated timber harvesting. *Law BS, Gonsalves L, Brassil T, Kerr I (2024) Broad-scale acoustic monitoring of koala populations suggests metapopulation stability, but varying bellow rate, in the face of major disturbances and climate extremes. Ecology and Evolution <https://doi.org/10.1002/ece3.11351>*

How is it that both our NSW State Government and our Federal Government can spend money on this valuable research only to be swayed by the noisy minority.

Strangely, no environmental groups are celebrating nor promoting these new scientifically based koala populations. There appears to be a strong correlation between the endangerment of a soft cuddly native animal and the receipt of vast donations eg WWF has received \$50M in federal funding for koala protection. Wouldn't this money be better spent establishing more forests for the benefit of multiple flora and fauna in conjunction with selective harvesting?

The same trick is being played out with the greater glider and its supposed endangerment. Again there is no estate wide monitoring of this animal in NSW National Parks.

Governments both state and federal are instrumental to the success of forestry however long term, not electoral cycle, decisions must be made and based on science.

An example of governments not understanding the complexity and long term planning for forestry has actually led to the decline of koalas in the Pilliga.

The Pilliga forest is about 500,000 hectares and was known to have arguably the largest koala population in the country. In the early 2000's a review was undertaken by the then NSW Labour Government of forests in western NSW, specifically the Brigalow/Nandewar regions. The research undertaken from this review showed that not only the koala but other fauna and flora were doing very well in the actively managed state forests. However, this science was sadly ignored and a political decision was made in 2005 to convert about half of the Pilliga State Forest into to a State Conservation Area (SCA). A SCA is slightly different to a National Park as a SCA allows for mining, so the government at the time was happy to cease timber harvesting but allowed mining to continue. In summary the koala population has steadily declined since this political decision was made almost 20 years ago. The well managed State Forest has now been largely left unmanaged, fire trails have been overgrown, the cypress pine that used to be thinned and harvested as part of the State Forest estate has out competed the eucalypt species which provided food and habitat for the koalas.

Government decisions do matter but must be made independently of political cycles and based on rigorously reviewed science.

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“The best friend on earth of man is the tree. When we use the tree respectfully and economically, we have one of the greatest resources of the earth”

Frank Lloyd Wright, Architect.

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

To achieve the best environmental values for forests one needs to manage them.

National Parks, State Forests and plantations all need to be managed to control feral animals and plants; wild pigs, goats, dogs, cats, devil's fig, soda apple, lantana, camphor laurel to name but a few. Locking up land does not achieve good environmental results. Forests, and our Australian landscape generally, needs to be actively managed for fire; fire breaks, cool burns, good roads and weed management eg when lantana is left to prosper it grows over bushes and up trees to create 'ladders' for the fire to reach the crowns of trees leading to hotter fires that can spread more quickly with sparks blowing across large areas. Damage to trees is far greater if their crowns are badly burnt.

Cats: 'Feral cats in Australia kill over 1.5 billion native mammals, birds, reptiles and frogs and 1.1 billion invertebrates each year. Predation by cats is a recognized threat to over 200 nationally threatened species and 37 listed migratory species. They have contributed to the extinction of more than 20 Australian mammal species including the pig-footed bandicoots, lesser bilby and broad-faced potoroo. They are a major cause of decline for many land-based threatened animals such as the bilby, bandicoot, bettong and numbat.'

*Dept of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, Feral Cats, 3 October 2024*

Threatened species and healthy forests cannot prosper when being out competed by feral plants and animals.

It must also be acknowledged that fire is very much an important part of the regeneration process in Australian native forests with certain seeds only regenerating post fire events however these fires must be cool burns not wildfire.

Protecting Aboriginal cultural values is highly important as is listening to people who have helped shape this land for millennia.

“Aboriginal people have always lived in the forests ... These days the forests are upside down, sparse canopy and thick understory; it should be the other way around. The thing that is missing is fire.”

John Shipp, Aboriginal Partnerships Leader FCNSW

Environmental and cultural values can also encompass uses such as cycling, horse riding, walking, hunting (including aboriginal hunting and camping) etc.

The biophilic values of forests cannot be underestimated for both the public who visit and those who work in the forests.

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

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Already we import more timber than we produce and despite imported timber having environmental accreditation it is often from dubious sources. 'Global governments are now working with the world's top scientists to finally eliminate the trade of conflict and illegal timber – which is now the third most lucrative business for organised crime after counterfeiting and drug trafficking' *DNA Testing shatters Organised Crime's \$150 Billion Timber Racket* Ross J, Wood Central 6 Aug 2024

As a large first world nation we should be growing and harvesting the bulk of our timber for our housing, construction, mining, transport and retail needs not putting pressure on our neighbouring Asian countries to fill the void. We have much more rigorous laws governing our harvesting.

NSW has the largest state forests in Australia yet instead of preserving and growing this valuable asset for carbon sequestration, future timber needs and regional employment, governments continue to undermine this asset by reclassifying forests as National Parks and State Conservation Areas. Our own forestry Minister has recently requested a reclassification of part of a state forest to be removed from the state forest estate so that trees can be clear-felled for transmission lines. It is unproductive to keep chipping away at the state forest estate and expecting NSW to have enough timber for its future needs.

The demand for timber is only increasing around the world, particularly as governments mandate a greater usage of timber in construction due to timber's negative carbon footprint as compared to cement and steel.

Unfortunately the Victorian & WA State Governments' political decisions to close their state forests has simply led to Victoria's & WA's timber needs being filled by timber coming from USA, NSW, Tas and even Qld. How can any logical person believe that the carbon miles for all this timber movement is acceptable instead of managing their own state forests. This will only lead to higher prices for timber and more costly housing.

Governments and architects around the world are pushing for a greater use of timber as part of their carbon storage. They are proudly promoting timber usage as a carbon friendly building material.

The Aboretum in Paris, a newly built office block also known as the Forest Office stands at 26,000m<sup>2</sup> of cross laminated timber.

In Sweden, Stockholm Wood City is to become the largest mass-timber development in the Sickla neighbourhood with 7,000 office spaces and 2,000 homes, cover 250,000m<sup>2</sup> and have the serenity of a forest.

Altassian is building the tallest commercial hybrid timber tower in the world next to Central station in Sydney.

After closing their own industry in Victoria, Parks Victoria are spending \$53M on the new St Kilda Pier and seem proud to announce 'The timber decking being used throughout the project is emerging as a standout feature as the distinctive curved and tiered seating area nears completion. We're using Darwin Stringybark from Qld, a sustainably sourced hardwood, harvested from State Government and indigenous owned land.' What kind of madness and hypocrisy is this?? Parks Victoria Website

Even the new Coffs Harbour Council chambers has heavily relied on local native hardwood for their flooring and internal cladding however, there is a major disconnect between wanting

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to live in timber buildings & have timber flooring and the need for flourishing state forests not National Parks.

There is always the added biosecurity threat to our native flora and fauna of feral pests being introduced with imported timber.

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

There is of course a future for softwood and hardwood plantations and private native forestry but if governments do not make long term decisions to actively support this type of forestry we will be still discussing this issue in years to come.

Australia is an island, isolated from the rest of the world in many ways. Timber industries flourish in New Zealand, Europe, America and Canada. Most city dwelling Australians are not exposed to forestry and timber production therefore it is hard to make informed decisions regarding its future.

American and Canadian superfunds see the potential of investing in Australian forestry but our own governments are blind.

Governments around the world are developing legislation and regulations to include and increase the usage of the timber as a carbon negative building material as compared to concrete and steel.

Hardwood plantations are a useful addition to our State Forests but they will never replace native hardwood forests.

Softwood plantations also have a role to play in Australia's timber usage but most are exotic species (not native to Australia) and provide much less support for the co-existence of Australian species.

Native flora and fauna prosper in native forests. Over a 10 year period, canopy disturbance to the 20 million hectares of NSW Native Forest from timber harvesting was 0.4%. ie less than half of one percent! - all of which is regrown and harvested cyclically. It is illogical to imagine that this small level of activity could lead to the extinction of any species or that ending this harvesting would save any species.

### **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 is a perverse argument that State Forests don't make a profit so they should be closed down. Likewise, one could only imagine that if they did make a large profit they would be decried as a greedy corporation.

The benefits of State Forests to the people of NSW are more than just the delivery of timber. State Forests provide camping, cycling tracks, horse riding, hunting (including aboriginal hunting and camping) etc. The biophilic values of forests cannot be underestimated for both the public who visit and those who work in the forests. For every mature tree harvested many more can be replanted thus absorbing even more carbon while growing. It is a continuous circular story of carbon absorption and long-term capture.

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A great example of maximising the above outcomes is Guulabaa-Place of Koala, Cowarra State Forest. This new, world-first tourism experience for visitors is designed to include:

- Koala Hospital Port Macquarie koala wild breeding centre – the first of its kind in the world
- Bunyah Local Aboriginal Lands Council café & gallery
- WildNets, a cutting edge treetop experience that's inclusive and accessible to all
- A multi-purpose learning space
- An outdoor picnic area and forest walking tracks
- Art & sculpture including The Big Koala, part of the Hello Koalas Sculpture Trail
- Beautiful local hardwood timber features.

If governments supported State Forestry with long term planning and support, the industry could only prosper. Forestry also provides all levels of employment from timber stackers, contractors, ecologists, geneticists, foresters, robotic engineers, mechanics and many more. The majority of these jobs are in regional areas and support further employment, education and businesses in these regional areas.

No one analyses these outcomes from NSW National Parks who in 2019 (last published fig. from NSW Govt) received \$800,000,000 - one can only imagine that this figure is now close to \$1 billion. This is about a 10 to 1 factor for dollars to National Parks versus State Forests.

Some make the claim that more National Parks would lead to more tourism. People can already camp, hike etc in State Forests. During Covid it should be noted that most tourism ventures were put on hold while forestry was deemed an essential industry and kept working.

### **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 risk to forests**

The best way to increase carbon and biodiversity benefits in NSW is to encourage farmers and the State to grow more trees and create a bigger natural working estate. This argument has been occurring since the 1970s. Imagine if a government back then had had the foresight to increase this estate? We certainly would not be having this argument. Governments need to support all forms of forestry with an ambitious long term plan with sufficient incentives and funding.

Locking up State Forests for ACCUs is a very short-term outlook for small financial gain – definitely not the best outcome for increasing carbon capture. For every mature tree harvested many more can be replanted thus absorbing even more carbon while growing. It is a continuous circular story of carbon absorption and long-term capture sustainable into the future.

Stifling manufacturing in Australia and sending business off shore or relying more heavily on imported timber which on paper might reduce our carbon footprint is a childish, ineffective and short-sighted solution.



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'In the long term, a sustainable forest management strategy aimed at maintaining or increasing forest carbon stocks, while producing an annual sustained yield of timber, fibre or energy from the forest, will generate the largest sustained mitigation benefit.'

*Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) United Nations 2018*

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Encouraging greater forestry cools our soils, leads to better animal welfare for paddock animals, absorbs more carbon.