Independent Forestry Panel

Public submission

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

- Native forest logging is unsustainable. I live on the mid north coast of NSW and I have watched the degradation of State forests over the last 30 to 40 years. The range of timber and the size of the trees felled has continually decreased as frequency of logging increases. My understanding is that the yield from public native forests has declined by 40% since 2010. Unfortunately, as with many industries that harvest 'wild' populations, the dollar incentive is to always take more than is replaceable. This is the case with forestry and will only end when there is so little left that it is no longer economic. One could argue that that time has come. An immediate stop to logging of our native forests is possible and desirable.
- Forests provide multiple resources. While foresters concentrate on timber, forests support our biodiversity, our climate, our medicines, our education, our well being. To lose such a rich resource for timber alone leaves both Australians and the whole planet impoverished and vulnerable. Forestry practices are unsustainable in 2024.
- The practice of harvesting timber changes the forest ecosystem irretrievably, and therefore is unsustainable. Long gone is the practice of walking into a forest, selecting one or 2 trees, cutting them down with handsaws. Modern practices using large scale machinery result in large areas being clear felled, huge gaps in the canopy appear, changing the microclimate on the ground, soils are disturbed, animal habitat destroyed. Since protections for mature trees were removed in 2018, logging has intensified to try and get more wood from native forests, and destruction of soils and habitats for forest dwelling animals has intensified accordingly. The forests change. Fires become more intense, fire prone species proliferate, weeds penetrate previously native vegetation. Logged forests are unsustainable. I can drive through a forest and tell you whether it has been logged or not. I can tell just by observing the species of bird present, or I can measure the diameter of the tree trunks, or the soil moisture. The ecosystem has changed since logging. It follows that logging is unsustainable if we value our native ecosystems.
- At a time when so many countries around the world are concerned about the sustainability of the planet with increasing carbon emissions and resultant global warming, and so many Australians are paying for roof top solar systems to do their bit to reduce their carbon emissions, it is a no-brainer to stop logging of the native forests that are our most important carbon absorbers. Forests are critical for carbon storage, and should be valued and prized as a national asset. Every tree that is cut down (let alone all the undergrowth and mid-storey that go with each tree via bulldozers) reduces the carbon capture and storage that we will rely on to achieve net zero. Interestingly, it seems that eucalypt forests are especially good at absorbing carbon compared with other tree species (although this is hard to measure) (see https://onetreeplanted.org/blogs/stories/how-much-co2-does-tree-absorb?)

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

I maintain that forests are irretrievably changed by logging. Therefore their environmental and cultural values are changed forever.

The criteria that I rely on to make this statement include:

- The number of trees providing habitat for arboreal animals which include tree hollows has been reduced in logged forests, to zero in many forests. These habitats take centuries to develop but are removed by loggers seeking to fulfil their timber quota with little thought for the 'apartment block' they have destroyed/bombed.
- In NSW alone more than 174 species rely on hollows for dens and nests. With removal of these old trees, indeed every tree, the number of hollows available now and in the future is reduced. Animals immediately displaced die. I have witnessed this with removal of old trees on the mid north coast of NSW, whether the tree removal was from logging in a forest or removal of individual trees in urban areas. Relocated animals rarely survive.
- Australia's native fauna is unique on a global scale. Our arboreal marsupials are remarkable for their adaptation to their forest habitat. Many species are now threatened and forestry practices should take some responsibility for this fact. Of course land clearing for many purposes share that responsibility. Maintaining our existing forests would allow for conservation of arboreal habitat that these species sorely need.
- While arboreal marsupials are the obvious dependents of the forest, and have received 'air-time', more focus and recognition of other species and their dependence on forests would amplify the unsustainability of logging. So many birds, reptiles and frogs rely on forest habitat for their survival, not to mention insects and soil biota. For years I have surveyed frog populations in local national parks and logged forests. In disturbed, logged areas the species composition changes and declines in abundance and diversity.
- It is worth noting that without the fruit bats, our great pollinators, the forests would not be there at all for timber or anything. Mature and unlogged native forests are critical for not only the bats but other pollinators such as many of the insects, which play a key role in pollination both inside and outside the forest. Indeed the forests supply important breeding grounds and refuges for many species. The interplay of all species rely on healthy forest ecosystems which cannot be maintained with modern logging practices.

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

- Logging in native forests is unsustainable. Therefore, logs from native forests cannot continue to be relied upon for timber products. My understanding is that native forest logging accounted for only 9% of the total log production in Australia in the year 2023. This percentage is low enough that it can be replaced by more sustainable products immediately. While plantation timber is an obvious substitute, the value of steel frames for building should not be underestimated as a viable substitute, bearing in mind it is a more fire resistant product.
- It is unsustainable, and unforgiveable given the drastic environmental impacts logging has, that half of the logs taken from native forests in 2023 were turned into woodchip and exported.
- While hardwood logs taken from plantations made up about 4 times the timber taken from native forests, a large percentage of these were also exported as wood chips. This export industry is unsustainable and needs to be phased out as soon as possible. Quick growing soft woods could be used during the phasing out period.
- Sawn and treated softwood logs and composite timber products made from softwoods can substitute for all current uses for native forest and plantation hardwoods
- Fortunately, the market and demand for native forest timber appears to be declining. Forestry practices need to respond by scaling down and phasing out.

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

- Soft wood plantations are profitable and already provide a large proportion of Australia's log production. These plantations are limited in their habitat qualities and should never replace native forests. However, as a source of timber they are useful and can act as carbon absorbing farms as they grow, particularly if planted on cleared land. They should never be seen as a substitute for native, old growth forests.
- With the phasing out of wood chip exports, these logs can fulfill a large part of timber supply.
- hardwood products should only be selectively harvested from hardwood plantations

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

- Native forests, including those under State Forestry control, are a huge asset to the state and the nation as unlogged, natural habitat. They cover an area of 2 million hectares in NSW. If this area is allowed to grow, trees allowed to mature, it could represent a huge investment in the future of NSW. It will contribute to the land area that is conserved in a natural state as Australia and other countries strive to conserve 30per cent of its land mass. It provides an asset for biodiversity and will contribute to the conservation of many threatened species. It will improve water quality by providing a vegetation filter for water entering rivers and reservoirs. Better natural environments contribute to the tourism economy. In fact public native forests have a much higher economic value when they are allowed to function naturally and without logging. These forests will be a critical resource for carbon storage.
- For these benefits to materialise, Forestry staff will need to change their priorities, personnel with different qualifications and perspectives will need to be employed and goals will need to be reset. Currently, the native forest hardwood division of the Forestry Corporation operates at a loss that runs into tens of millions of dollars, at the expense of the NSW public so such a change should not be hard to justify.
- The biodiversity asset in itself should lead to biodiversity credits that may bring income in itself. Currently, the people of NSW are paying millions of dollars only to see biodiversity destroyed along with critical habitat. It should be a priority for all administrators to work towards maintenance and improvement in biodiversity. State forests are the key to this.
- First Nations Ranger Programs have been hugely successful at managing the recovery and health of native forests. Programs like the Githabul Rangers have shown how First Nations knowledge and management can restore the natural and critical function of forests in the landscape

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

- Forests are the greatest assets when biodiversity and carbon absorption are considered, compared with many other ecosystems. To reduce their ability (by logging) to be biodiversity hot spots and capture carbon, works directly against our efforts as a nation to meet our Paris agreement targets and for the world to limit temperature rise. Their conservation for these purposes far outweighs their economic value for timber (which is actually negative economic gain).

- As I said above, at a time when so many countries around the world are concerned about the sustainability of the planet with increasing carbon emissions and resultant global warming, and so many Australians are paying for roof top solar systems to do their bit to reduce their carbon emissions, it is a no-brainer to stop logging of the native forests that are our most important carbon absorbers. Forests are critical for carbon storage, and should be valued and prized as a national asset. Every tree that is cut down (let alone all the undergrowth and mid-storey that go with each tree via bulldozers) reduces the carbon capture and storage that we will rely on to achieve net zero. Interestingly, it seems that eucalypt forests are especially good at absorbing carbon compared with other tree species.
- Native forest logging in NSW is estimated to release 3.6 million tonnes of carbon every year. Ending native forest logging would turn this around to be a mechanism for carbon capture. Storage of carbon in the forest would increase.
- Ending native forest logging will allow previously logged forests to regain lost carbon and make a significant contribution to meeting our emissions targets
- It is well known that the more diverse the forest, in both age structure, species and genetic diversity, the more resilient the forest is to large changes in environmental factors such as increasing temperature. We need to do everything in our power to develop diversity in our forests. Such diversity is reduced by logging.