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

At the outset I would like to state categorically that I strongly reject any notion that current forestry activity is in any way sustainable, economically or ecologically, and it should most certainly not be allowed to continue.

In fact, the timber industry has never operated sustainably since the 1800s when it took a mere 45 years to render Red Cedar virtually extinct, and it never recovered.

For over 25 years, I have been a vocal critic of the way Forestry Corporation and the earlier Forests NSW and NSW Forestry Commission which, since 1916, have collectively seen other iconic species such as Hoop Pine logged to the point where they were no longer viable. Over the past 25 years, they have escalated the intensity of logging operations across the forest estate seemingly in the knowledge that time (and timber) is running out. Despite this, timber volumes from state forests have dropped, as smaller and smaller trees remain to be logged,

All this is reported in the 2022 "Insights Report" to the NSW Government

<<https://www.nrc.nsw.gov.au/news/62-insights-report>> which asserted that

the business-as-usual management of state forests would lead to 'sub-optimal outcomes at best, or ecosystem and industry collapse under worst case scenario'.

Key findings of that report included:

—^a A detailed account of carbon stored in all NSW forests 1990 to the end of 2020 found that these forests are at risk of becoming net carbon emitters.

—^a Only 10 percent of forested vegetation in the NSW Regional Forest Agreements areas are currently within their recommended fire frequency thresholds, with large areas at risk of a decline in plant biodiversity due to increased fire frequency.

—^a Catchment water flows have been declining in forested areas over the last 30 years, especially on the south coast of NSW. Almost half of the 90 catchments analysed showed statistically significant decreases in stream flows in this period.

—^a Total hardwood supply in the Coastal IFOA region declined between 2003-19 for both high and low-quality logs, with additional significant short-term reductions in hardwood supply and projected sustainable timber yields following the 2019-20 wildfires, particularly on the south coast.

The chronically unsustainable nature of native forest logging has long been recognised, with publications such as <<https://australiainstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/P209-Money-doesnt-grow-on-trees-NSW-Forestry-Final-Final.pdf>>, which reported the huge financial losses incurred over the past 23 years, so is therefore subsidised by taxpayers.

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

Australia's native forests are home to some of the world's most unique flora and fauna, with areas on the NSW north coast in particular, recognized internationally as biodiversity hotspots.

However, that biodiversity continues to decline as reported annually in State of the Environment Reports, a fact repeated in 'Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010 ,2030', which includes logging activity as a contributor to that decline.

That document

<https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0021/213717/Background-Documents-Commonwealth-Biodiversity-Conservation-Strategy-2010.pdf>

opens with the critically important observation that: 'It is worth remembering that our survival is critically dependent on looking after our natural environments and their biodiversity', pointing out: 'This web of life represents our store of natural capital and from it we get the things we take for granted each day: the clean air we breathe, the fresh water we drink and the variety of foods and fibres that we consume.' These ecoservices alone should be enough reason to protect native forests from logging.

Forests also provide enormous opportunities for nature-based tourism. The University of Newcastle's study showed that the creation of the Great Koala National Park would generate more than 9,800 extra full-time equivalent jobs across tourism, infrastructure, and science and education, and inject \$330 million in additional wages into the region, over the next 15 years <www.hrf.com.au/gknp>.

Right now those forests, with their amazing diversity of life are under ever increasing threat. Over-logging of state forests has resulted in massive weed problems that Forestry Corporation has failed to address. This has contributed to the devastating Bell Miner Associated Dieback that has devastated forests along the east coast and hinterland areas, not only impacting on state forests but also threatening the viability of the private native timber industry.

Over the past 25 years since the signing of the Regional Agreements, Forestry Corporation boasts that it has been managing one million hectares of forest for conservation. This includes some of the most valuable and diverse forest ecosystems in NSW, including old-growth forest, rainforest, endangered ecological communities, riparian zones, and wetlands. However, over that entire period, not a single dollar has been spent on weed control in that one-million-hectare estate. As a result, much of that forest is now clogged with invasive exotic weeds, resulting in a decline in biodiversity and in some cases, Cat's Claw Creeper for example, the killing the native forest. Clear-felling is causing serious erosion problems, particularly in our drinking water catchments. This is contributing to the water quality problems that have seen water restrictions imposed, as water in the region's largest drinking water catchment, the Clarence Valley, became unfit for human consumption as a result.

<<https://www.nbnnews.com.au/2023/02/15/logging-activity-could-be-to-blame-for-clarence-valley-water-problems/>>

Evidence provided Australian National University researchers (Lindenmayer et al) shows that logging of native forests makes them more flammable, placing humans and wildlife in ever-increasing danger.

<https://baysidebush.org.au/system/files/articles/2020%20Recent%20Australian%20wildfires%20made%20worse%20by%20logging%20and%20associated%20forest%20management%20-NatureEcolEvol.pdf>

In terms of Aboriginal cultural heritage values, forests clearly have great significance to indigenous peoples. However, I would question the wisdom of allowing cultural hunting activities unless confined to feral animals, as most native wildlife are already in decline.

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

There is a high demand for timber for housing and construction, and one best met by the plantation sector which is far more efficient and profitable than native forest timber.

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

The benefits of plantations are many. There will always be a demand for timber, and we strongly advocate for a just transition from native forest logging to the use of plantation timber as an imperative. Thousands of extra jobs will immediately be provided in the short term to enable the expansion of the plantation sector. This is on top of the additional jobs that should result from tourism and recreational opportunities in the state forests once logging ends.

Plantations are a far more efficient and profitable way to produce timber, as Forestry Corporation's own figures confirm. Also, if planted strategically, they could contribute in a major way to slowing floodwaters and help protect flood-prone communities.

If public forests are closed to logging, it will be a phased process, and private native forestry, and plantation forestry will continue. There won't be a total collapse of the timber industry as some would have us believe.

As has been promised in other states where native forest logging is being phased out, state government will need to support and retrain any displaced workers and offer generous compensation to any timber related company that wishes to opt out of the industry.

Unlike in the past, forestry today is highly mechanised with skilled machine operators, so minimal jobs would be lost, as timber will still be provided, but from plantations, Those machine operators that might be displaced, have skills that are in high demand in the mining and agricultural sectors and should have no problem finding alternative employment. Also, Forestry Corporation employs one of the best trained fire-fighting units in the county, another profession that is in increasing demand as global temperatures increase.

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

It is important to recognise the absence of social license for logging in state forests, In doing so I provide the following rationale, pointing out that logging is incompatible with:

- a. our region's investment in nature-based tourism enterprises,
- b. Australia's international commitments to emissions reduction,
- c. nationwide attempts to address Australia's biodiversity crisis,
- d. the aims of all biodiversity plans and strategies of all three tiers of government,
- e. international wildlife treaties covering migratory birds, and
- f. local government's responsibility to provide quality drinking water to its residents.

We also note the following:

- a. Both the Western Australian and Victorian Governments have announced the closing down of logging in public forests, with a just transition to plantation timber production and have provided end dates for native forest logging in those states
- b. Shoalhaven Council's motion to the Local Government NSW Conference in November 2022, (Motion 100 - Shoalhaven City Council - Logging in NSW native forests - "That Local Government NSW advocates for the ending of logging in NSW (public) Native Forests"), which was passed by a significant majority.
- c. Southern Cross University's survey of the Clarence electorate, which the industry identifies as a 'timber community stronghold', held at the last state election found 69% of respondents in favour of ending logging in state forests, with only 18% in support of logging.

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

It makes sense that, with an urgent need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and meet international obligations to combat climate change, to stop logging and land-clearing and allow forests to function normally and store as much carbon as possible.