

Public submission

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STL Timbers Pty Ltd - NSW

STL Timbers Pty. Ltd is a business based on sustainable production of hardwood products from Private Native Forestry (PNF) and Farm forestry. Established in 2015, it trades in timber products.

We sell sawn timber, sawlogs, poles, girders, firewood and veneer logs.

Our authorised private property operations are undertaken in the Coffs Harbour region and Grafton region and taken to STL Timbers for supply to our customers.

We have 2 fulltime employees and 24-28 staff working in our supply chain. Some of our staff are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait descent.

Between the three companies that we operate, there are 8 family members working in the businesses.

Our staff primarily generate sales of timber products from PNF and farm forestry. However we have added extra skills training in machinery operations, log grading and segregation, safe work practices, silviculture and biodiversity.

Most of our staff have families and mortgages and rely on our operations in rural areas for employment. They live locally or travel within 2 hours of Grafton and support the local businesses and schools.

If the native forest harvesting ceased, the business would close and the staff would lose their jobs, be forced to sell their homes and move to find work elsewhere.

The major source of business for us is private sales to domestic customers and export customers.

We supply local sawmills and pole yards, sawn timber yards in Sydney, Brisbane and Newcastle and some overseas timber yards. Additionally we supply poles and cross arms for electricity generation.

The company currently pays 85% of our operating expenses to local business and services while 15% is paid to businesses out of our area. We custom contract harvesters and sawmillers and find resource from private property landholders.

If native forestry was reduced or closed, as a small business we would be forced to close. The ripple effect is that other small businesses in our local area would most likely close as well.

What is often not understood is that all the companies in forestry are a diverse group with varying products that are not replicated by others but we all work co-operatively.

The other part of our contribution to the community is providing sponsorship for the Coutts Crossing Soccer club. These clubs struggle to make ends meet in small rural towns.

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

We cannot invest in our business due to the uncertainty created by political propaganda about the operation of the forest industry. The industry has operated in continuous forest for over 100 years as it is in our interest as a business and an industry to manage, conserve and maintain forests for the future. There is no intention to wipe out all forests by the industry otherwise it would condemn all of our businesses.

Most of the industry work in forests and timber yards and mills because they like the forests, the outdoors and the working environment. However it is now becoming very stressful due to the actions of professional protestors interfering in legitimate and approved harvesting areas.

Timber is a natural renewable resource that does not need to be mined, irrigated, refined etc. It locks up carbon in the timber product whilst it is being used for 50 – 100 years or more.

In order to improve the forestry operations, the government should review the onerous regulations and delete those that do not achieve environmental protection and outcomes and redefine the regulations that are open to interpretation and are not achieving the best outcome for the forests.

While recognising that Forestry Corporation tried over the last 20 plus years to produce hardwood plantations, many of them were the wrong species in the wrong place without a market for the timber and plantations will produce some products but, in our opinion, they are not at the same standard and quality to that which is produced in native forests.

We recognise the need for better silvicultural practices to improve both crown and private forests. However there needs to be a better balance between silviculture and biodiversity. Currently regulations are tilted too far towards biodiversity.

In relation to the current state of biodiversity in native forests, the forests are over regulated and many regulations are unnecessary as they do not achieve any environmental protections.

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

In NSW, State Forests has better road and trail access and far superior bush fire management. Despite major cuts in the fire fighting capacity in forestry Corporation, they manage their forests with cooler burns that do not damage native wildlife and vegetation. This is a similar practice to cultural burns performed by the First Nations community.

There are usually more classified threatened species found in State Forests than there are in National parks. Despite the media and ENGO headlines, the koala populations are steady and increasing despite the wildfires. Similarly the Greater Glider can be found in stable numbers in the forest of the North East. Neither are threatened with extinction. Dogs, wildfires, car strikes and disease along with urban development are the bigger threats to their survival.

There are over 7 million hectares in national parks and 2 million hectares in state forests in which only just over 900,000 hectares (12%) are available for harvesting. Each year only 0.3% is actually harvested in a good year. With 8.1 million hectares restricted from harvesting I don't see the point in restricting any more.

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

The demand for timber is well above what can be supplied generally. This means that we are rapidly increasing imported timber from overseas from unregulated countries and Islands. As a nation we would be better placed producing our own timber for the expanding market where there is control on how its grown and harvested, its processed in Australia and we are then self-sufficient.

Generally the imported timbers do not produce the same quality as NSW hardwoods and many of the imported timbers come from countries where the harvested areas do not regenerate.

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

In relation to Private Native Forestry (PNF) there is currently not enough timber available through PNF to be able to meet supply. There is no room for expanding the demand for that resource particularly as the heavy regulation on private property deters landholders from participating and if the crown supply keeps diminishing then pressure will be placed on PNF for supply and the prices will make it prohibitive for smaller mills.

In relation to plantations, firstly there is not enough cleared land to establish them and it takes 45 plus years before they can contribute to supply so what happens to the mills during that time. In order to meet supply in the future, It would require either clearing existing native forest to establish plantations or replace good farmland with plantations which will impact on food production.

Despite popular commentary, hardwood plantations once planted and maintained with thinnings do not provide a wide range of comparable products to the current native forest product. Particularly in products like poles, pile and girders and bridging timbers, plantation timber cannot replace all quality or durable products.

With the hardwood industry in NSW contributing \$2.9B to our economy and employing nearly 9000, it makes no economic sense to close the industry. Tourism never replaces the value of the timber industry. Read what has happened to the red gum industry post partial closure – devastation of towns and business.

Topic 5 - The role of State Forests in maximizing the delivery of a range of environment, economic and social outcomes and options for diverse management, including Aboriginal forest management models

The importance of State Forests to our business is vital and cannot be underestimated. A large portion of our work has been in State Forests in the past. We have adapted and incorporated more product from PNF and farm forestry. We have 22,000m³ contract sitting in limbo due to the assessment of the Great Koala National Park and various court injunctions brought about by activist ENGOs against Forestry Corporation. This is why we also focus on PNF.

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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 so many research papers that offer solutions and opportunities for these issues.

Farm forestry on PNF and state forests managed by FCNSW is a positive for reducing carbon and climate change risks to the environment. The timber products harvested lock up carbon and then replanting or regeneration promotes regrowth locking up carbon (old growth trees and forest are dying and produce carbon.) Farm forestry makes it easier to manage our forest and promotes better outcomes.

To better protect the forests from wildfires, the harvesting contractors have larger more efficient equipment for fighting and controlling wildfires.

We would be horrified to imagine what might have happened in the 2019-2020 wildfires if we didn't have all the harvesting equipment that was called on to help fight the fires. Without that equipment ready to deploy, the next wildfires will be stopped at the big blue fire break (Pacific Ocean)