

Public submission

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I am the immediate past Chair of Forests and Wood Products Australia, a major sponsor of research and development, with co-funding from industry levies and the Federal Government. I am also a current trustee of the Gottstein Trust, and retired some years ago as the CEO of one of the major local timber importing companies.

I, like many participants in the timber industry, am most concerned about the lobbying by some groups to stop the harvesting of native timbers in NSW.

This push by the environmental lobby has no scientific basis and relies, at best, on imperfect and manipulated information.

For example, a number of scientific studies have shown that selective harvesting of forests in NSW has had virtually no impact on the Koala population in NSW, compared to the damage done by land clearing, housing development and other habitat destruction.

For all participants in the timber industry, it is essential that forests in NSW are sustainably managed to ensure supply of timber for future generations. There is no real evidence that this has not been the case in NSW, and with good forest stewardship there is no reason why this should not continue.

As has occurred with the closure of native forestry in Victoria and WA, the result is not only a significant loss of jobs, but companies have now been forced to import hardwoods, much from dubious sources. Despite recent federal government legislation to stop the import of “illegally logged” timber, this continues in order to satisfy market demand, and brings with it significant bio-security risks.

There is strong demand in Australia for locally grown hardwood products. Plantation grown timber products satisfy some of the needs of the Australian market, particularly for home building, but are unsuited to other applications such as furniture, decking, stairs, flooring, paneling, joinery, pallets, and many other items. Australian grown hardwoods are wonderful products for many of these applications, and if harvested sustainably, should continue to be used.

As a consumer, I would prefer to buy long lasting hardwood furniture and joinery which is good for the environment, stores carbon and last for generations. This is the “ultimate renewable” material.

The focus of government should not be the possible shut down of this important part of the forest industry, but should be on ensuring long term sustainable forests that are available for selective harvesting as well as being a wonderful place for the public and the numerous animal species to live in, and enjoy. These are not mutually exclusive.

I urge the NSW government not to succumb to the demands of well-funded activists whose zeal to shut down an important industry will do immense damage, with no benefit to the environment.

John Simon
12th October 2024