

JOSHUA GOWERS

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

Logging in native forests is unsustainable, as it removes older trees that are crucial for creating hollows and habitats for species such as the Koala and the Greater Glider. According to renowned ecologist Professor David Lindenmayer, the loss of these mature trees directly threatens forest wildlife and undermines ecosystem resilience. Current logging practices also weaken protections for key habitats, heightening the risk of extinction for forest-dependent species. The urgency of this issue has escalated after the 2019/20 fires, which severely impacted wildlife populations and made forest recovery even more critical.

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

Forests are vital refuges for many threatened species, providing intact ecosystems essential for their survival. Forests play a crucial role in regulating water quality and flow, which supports regional fishing industries, tourism, and community water supplies. They also hold significant cultural and spiritual importance, especially for Indigenous communities. Maintaining habitat connectivity is essential for biodiversity, as highlighted by Lindenmayer's research, which underscores the role of intact forests in supporting ecosystem health. Additionally, forests provide recreational opportunities for locals and visitors, enhancing both environmental and cultural value.

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

There is no longer a need to log public native forests for timber products required in housing, construction, or other industries. Jen Sanger's NSW Forest Carbon Report (March 2023) from the Trees Project highlights that plantation timber can meet the demand for high-quality and composite timber products. By transitioning to plantation timber, the pressure on native forests is reduced, enabling more sustainable industry practices and supporting long-term environmental conservation.

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

Currently, hardwood and softwood plantations provide 91% of Australia's log production, according to Sanger's 2023 report. Investing in hardwood plantations on already cleared land can meet future timber supply needs while reducing reliance on native forests. A shift toward higher-value plantations could satisfy market demands more effectively, while ending subsidies for public forest logging would encourage sustainable timber production on private lands. This transition aligns with sustainable forestry models that promote economic and environmental benefits.

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

Healthy native forests are critical for securing water resources, providing a range of environmental, economic, and social benefits. Protecting and restoring State Forests can enhance their economic value through carbon storage, job creation, tourism, and recreational activities. Research by Lindenmayer emphasizes that the Forestry Corporation's current operations are financially unsustainable, relying on government subsidies and yielding lower timber volumes compared to plantations. Diverse forest management models, particularly those led by Indigenous communities, could enhance the cultural and social value of State Forests while improving economic sustainability.

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

Logging in native forests releases significant amounts of carbon, contributing to climate change. Jen Sanger's NSW Forest Carbon Report (2023) demonstrates that stopping logging would allow forests to recover, enabling them to store more carbon and support climate mitigation goals. Healthy forests play a vital role in reducing the risks associated with climate change, such as wildfires and drought. By ending logging, forests could mitigate climate risks and enhance biodiversity, contributing to long-term environmental resilience.