

Public submission

JUDY LAMBERT

Submission ID: 203288

Organisation: *N/A*

Location: *New South Wales*

Supporting materials uploaded: *Attached overleaf*

Submission date: 10/8/2024 5:02:34 PM

Submission to Forestry Industry Action Plan re Future of Forestry in NSW

Dear FIAP Panel Members,

I welcome this opportunity to make a short submission to your deliberations on the future of forestry in NSW.

As a science-trained member of the public with a career spanning research, time as an environmental advocate in Canberra then as a fulltime consultant to a former Federal Minister for the Environment, followed by more than 20 years as co-director of a successful small consultancy business working at the interface between environmental protection and primary production in its various forms, I feel well-placed to make my comments.

Addressing briefly, each of the topics under consideration by the Panel, I offer the following.

1. Sustainability of current and future forestry operations in NSW

It is now several decades since I worked for a Federal Environment Minister faced with having to justify ongoing support for a native forest logging industry whose product went substantially to low-value woodchipping for sale offshore.

Since then, the sustainability impacts of native forest logging have deteriorated. The NSW Forestry Corporation has repeatedly been shown to rely heavily on tax-payer funded government support to prop up a sector that is increasingly an employer whose workforce needs can better be met in hardwood and softwood plantations on already cleared public and private land.

Just as the financial sustainability of native forest logging is unsustainable without government support, so the environmental sustainability of this industry is untenable in the face of climate change.

Not only does native forest logging remove old growth trees that provide hollows that are important habitat for a diversity of threatened mammal and bird species, thus pushing these species towards extinction. Sound science now exists to demonstrate that old growth forests are more resistant to wildfires than are recently logged forests. As the impacts of climate change become more starkly apparent, account must be taken not only of the loss of forest habitat in bushfires such as those of the 2019-20 Black Summer, but also of the need for forests to help mitigate both carbon emissions and wildfire impacts.

With hardwood and softwood plantations already providing the overwhelming majority of Australia's log production, native forest logging is also a small provider of employment, which could be much better directed to sound management of higher value plantation products, especially in rural areas which are already in decline.

Together, these factors all point to the lack of ongoing sustainability of native forestry operations on economic, environmental or social grounds.

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

Since the Rio Earth Summit in 2012 (which I had the good-fortune to attend as part of the Australian delegation), Australia has 'recognised' the global importance of addressing two of the major crises that confront our survival – human-exacerbated climate change and the global loss of biodiversity. Yet, still we have one of the worst records of species loss among developed nations and our track record in addressing climate change is poor.

Logging of old growth native forests is a significant contributor to the loss of habitat for numerous of our native species. Koalas, small hollow-dependent mammals such as the Greater Glider, and hollow-dependent birds, including the Swift Parrot, Glossy Black Cockatoo and several Owl species, are placed at increased risk of extinction both because of loss of their hollows and as a result of increasingly intense and widespread bushfires.

In addition to their habitat values, native forests also provide a number of important ecosystem services, including their role in providing connectivity across the landscape and in maintenance of water quality, as they help regulate water flow and runoff.

The numerous cultural and spiritual values of native forests to Aboriginal people must also be respected. The original Australians maintained our forests over centuries before European settlement, and have since seen those values degraded and, in many cases, destroyed. Out of respect to First Nations 'Australians' and to the benefit of all of us, their knowledge in managing forests sustainably should be respected and encouraged.

3. Demand for timber products, particularly those relating to NSW housing, construction, mining, transport and retail

There is growing evidence that hardwood and softwood plantations can supply high quality and composite products required for building. Already the overwhelming portion of log production comes from a mix of hardwood and softwood plantations, and the opportunities for investment in further Private Native Forestry through plantation production on already cleared land can add to the socio-economic strength of rural areas.

4. The future of softwood and hardwood plantations and the continuation of Private Native Forestry

This is in part addressed in my previous points.

If current government subsidies to prop up native forest logging were removed and redirected to Private Native Forestry on already cleared land, higher value timber products could result and rural communities would benefit in ways that are more sustainable in the longer-term than the logging of native forests is likely to sustain.

5. 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

For too long NSW State Forests has relied heavily on tax-payer funded subsidies to support an industry whose future is unsustainable.

The opportunities for major cultural change in the NSW Forestry Corporation, to an organisation that is truly ESD-focused, are substantial and should be actively pursued.

Not only can intact and restored State Forests, and a shift to plantation production on already-cleared land, provide economic benefits through job creation in producing higher value timber products, but also in enhanced tourism in native forests. Sustainable employment can be found in the benefits that come from increased carbon storage in intact native forests and in better use of already cleared land for plantations. There are also benefits in the reduced risk from more intense bushfires that is associated with recently logged native forests.

Opportunities to realise carbon and biodiversity benefits and support 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 risk to forests.

These are issues which have largely been addressed in my earlier points, above.

In recent years the scientific evidence for the carbon storage benefits of old growth forests over younger, more rapidly growing forests, has been substantially strengthened. Since the 2019-20 Black Summer wildfires, awareness has grown of the extent to which intact old growth forests are relatively better able to withstand the impacts of wildfires and at the same time to play a role in mitigating climate change. As the role of carbon markets grows, so the retention of native forests can better become part of those markets – a far better economic investment than the current subsidising of native forest logging.

Thank you for considering this submission. I trust that, along with the many others I am sure you are receiving, you will heed the available evidence and call a halt to native forest logging in NSW (as both Victoria and Western Australia have done), and to replace it with more viable and less costly alternatives.

Judy Lambert AM, BPharm, BSc(Hons), PhD, GradDipEnvManagement, GradDipBusinessAdmin

