Independent Forestry Panel

Public submission

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

Forestry operations in NSW are unsustainable in their current form. Of particular concern is that they include substantial logging of natural, old growth, native forests of which even fewer are left since the catastrophic 2019-20 fires. This is unsustainable for the native flora and fauna which depend on these shrinking remnant forests for the survival of individuals and, indeed, entire species. Most unsustainable is that Forestry NSW is currently logging high value areas identified for inclusion in the prospective Great Koala National Park.
With regard to bushfires research over four decades by David Lindenmeyer, in his book The Forest Wars 2024, has demonstrated that logging increases the frequency, intensity and devastation wrought by fire to forests, wildlife and humans alike. Current approaches to forestry are also unsustainable on economic grounds as the industry has been running at a loss and thus subsidised for years at a cost of millions by taxpayers, many of whom (like myself) have serious environmental concerns. Forestry in the future needs to be exclusively based on plantations on already cleared land. It should be targeted towards high value timber for building and furniture. Pulp, paper and fibre can be made from fast growing, more sustainable sources such as bamboo. It is a travesty that our intact natural forests are clearfelled for the export of low value wood chips.

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

The most valuable forests for preserving a rich biodiversity of both flora and fauna are intact natural forests. There is no comparison between old growth remnant forests and regrowth forests after clearfell logging which has removed all forms of vegetation. Many native wildlife - mammals and birds - depend on trees that are hundreds of years old for hollows to live and nest in. An effective ecosystem requires multiple storeys of forests - understorey, middle storey and canopy - with all the diverse flora and fauna contained therein, as well as pristine water courses for diverse species to thrive.

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

Continued logging of intact natural forests for construction material or land on which to build is not going to solve the current housing crisis. The latter has been caused by decades of poor planning and poor policies by both major parties at different levels of government, deficiencies too numerous to detail here, though urban sprawl, McMansions, ‘tree change’ trends, and elite preferences for beautiful native timber in homes play a role. Yes, timber is a fantastic renewable source for construction and other value added products for domestic use and export, but only if it is sourced via plantations not from our shrinking irreplaceable old growth, natural forests nor at the cost of the very existence of unique wildlife that inhabit them. Given the abject failure of mining companies to engage in limitation of damage to forests and meaningful environmental

rehabilitation of mine sites and environs, the destruction of pristine biodiverse rich forests for their short term profit should be strongly resisted.

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

As a renewable source plantations can sustainably contribute to many useful products such as construction materials, furniture, fibre and paper. They do so in an efficient, profitable manner unlike the logging of natural forests which typically runs at a loss. Plantations also provide jobs in forestry, logging, milling and the manufacturing of value added goods which boost the overall economy and government revenue. The financial rewards would be even greater with the foresight to establish plantations of higher value hardwood timber that takes longer to grow. The existence of plantations allows for the preservation of our few remaining natural forests to preserve precious native flora and fauna, maintain water quality, reduce bushfire hazards and provide incalculable aesthetic, spiritual and recreational rewards for local people and tourists alike.

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

State Forests could maximise environmental, economic and social outcomes immeasurably across the board by ending the logging of intact natural forests and instead focusing their efforts on the preservation of said forests and producing timber on a viable long term commercial basis solely from plantations. Any remaining state forests of high value biodiversity would continue to provide invaluable ecosystem services for plant and animal species, including humans.
Research by David Lindenmeyer suggests that an evidence based scientific method be applied to forestry and fire management rather than simply adopting indigenous approaches to cultural burning elsewhere on the continent which were/are not applicable to tall wet forests on the eastern seaboard. He argues that this view of forestry - to justify hazard burning, thinning and logging - is based on an incorrect pre-contact historical representation by some contemporary commentators that the forest landscape managed by indigenous practices resembled a parkland. Rather the record shows that forest in areas such as Victoria and NSW was in fact densely vegetated and thus less susceptible to fire. (The Forest Wars, 2024, pp92-93.) Our struggling forests need less fire, and any fire that ignites needs to be suppressed quickly before it spreads.

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

Intact forests store carbon whereas their logging and burning adds to greenhouse gas emissions. The contribution of deforestation to global heating and altered weather patterns also increases the drying out of forests and accelerates their demise, thus inducing a vicious cycle exacerbating climate change and decline of biodiversity. Logging, too, directly increases the risk of catastrophic bushfires in regrowth forests, the pollution from which adds further to greenhouse gas emissions. A high degree of scepticism is warranted towards so called ‘offset’ schemes which allow fossil fuel pollution or commercial developments causing deforestation to be discounted by ostensibly protecting select forests and other biodiversity hotspots elsewhere. The precautionary principle should apply to the protection of the few remaining wild areas in Australia and elsewhere on this fragile planet already under siege from encroaching climate change.