Independent Forestry Panel

Public submission

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

In an era where we urgently need to create "negative emissions" (i.e. draw down carbon) as well as minimise our positive emissions (i.e., from burning fossil fuels, reduce ruminant methane), logging of native forests can no longer be argued to be "sustainable". Stopping logging would both avoid emissions as well as increase carbon drawdown, acting on both sides of the emissions weigh-scale. There are plenty of analyses by scientists to show the huge contribution of native forests to our emissions accounting. Take the recent report from CSIRO, for example (https://www.climatechangeauthority.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2024-09/2024SectorPathwaysReviewAgricultureandLand.pdf).

Native forest logging is also unsustainable in the light of the biodiversity crisis we are simultaneously facing. The economic value of transitioning of these forests to the biodiversity markets (e.g., via the Federal Government's Nature Repair bill, and via the NSW government's biodiversity conservation schemes), as well as to the tourism and recreation markets, must be evaluated against the current economic value of logging in any discussion of current and future sustainability.

Logging of non-native forests for the production of timber which stores carbon long-term, for example, for building materials, as opposed to products with short-term carbon storage (e.g. paper) may well be sustainable economically and environmentally in some situations. The native forest logging economy can relatively easily be transitioned into that.

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

The biodiversity crisis in Australia is largely a result of over-extractive land use (as opposed to environmental pollution, for example). NSW has already lost around 50% of its native trees as a result of agriculture and forestry. Most of the land used for these industries is now considered irreversibly degraded as a result of invasive species or farming of monocultures. Now, more than ever, native forests need to be protected from logging in order to preserve what is left of the precious and rare species that they support. Where in the sand does one draw the line and say industry has taken enough of Australia's unique biodiversity? If not now, in thick of the current biodiversity and climate crises, then when?

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

Timber as a building product, if used for long-term purposes (i.e., not for paper and cardboard, or for pallets) is a valuable product and can contribute to carbon storage and drawdown. Where required in large volume, the plantation industry should provide it. To provide it, instead, from existing native forests that harbour valuable biodiversity and, as mature trees, contribute to carbon drawdown much more than young, growing forest, cannot be defended, in this era of carbon and biodiversity crises.

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

Plantations are the answer for meeting the demands for long-term products. It doesn't matter whether it is private or public forestry: the most important thing is that it does NOT involve more land clearing (i.e. removal of existing native woodland or forests).

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

Like all industries, State Forests needs to adapt its business model to suit the current economic and environmental landscapes. Today, the nation's priorities are carbon drawdown, avoiding emissions and protecting biodiversity. It cannot justify continuing to send our valuable native forests offshore as pulp. It must find ways to transition to the production of high-value, carbon-storing products. It must find a new production model that does not further damage biodiversity, i.e., new plantations, not old forests. It must diversify by using native forests as tourist and recreational attractions.

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

All of these aspects are covered in the above.