

Public submission

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Submission to Independent Forestry Panel

I support an end to public native forest logging because of the harms I have witnessed to local wildlife populations, from ongoing logging cycles over 4 decades, living as a state forest neighbour in a north coast timber community.

The catastrophic bushfires of 2019-20 were devastating to threatened species populations and while the dry season that year was extreme, I believe that industrial logging has degraded healthy forest structure across NSW state forests, exacerbating fire intensity in local, wet sclerophyll forests during 2019 spring fires.

Observing the presence of recovering populations of koalas and greater gliders, owls and stream breeding frogs in fire impacted older forests, I am convinced that we need to immediately stop logging in these older forest habitats to protect these remaining populations of threatened species and to allow younger regenerating forests to grow old, providing future climate refuge for our unique and threatened wildlife into a warming future.

I also support a managed transition out of native forestry to an ecologically sustainable 100% plantation timber industry, with financial and training support for forest workers, contractors and downstream processing facilities to pivot to the management, harvest and processing of plantation logs.

We cannot turn back the clock on what has been lost, but we can go forward with a new vision that benefits all of us into the future, including restoring public forest habitats for the survival of our unique and precious wildlife and restoring forest resilience for the safety and climate security of our rural communities into the future.

1. Sustainability of current and future forestry operations in NSW

Australia exports around five times the volume of its timber resources compared to imported timber volumes, including significant quantities of plantation timber. There are positive opportunities for growth in the timber industry in manufacturing high-value timber products here in NSW, not continuing to flog native forests and exporting wood chips and plantation timbers.

Construction of housing typically uses only a small fraction of wood from native forests. 95% of timber used in housing construction comes from plantation pine trees - less than 5% comes from native forests for which there are sustainable alternatives.

Native forests logging results in huge amounts of waste wood, with less than 10% of the timber logged ending up as a high value timber product. Approximately 60% is left on the forest floor after logging, another 30% ends up as wood chips, firewood and other low value products (which can be sourced from responsibly managed hardwood plantations).

Restructuring the forestry industry for a rapid transition out of native forest logging is essential but requires the plantation industry improve its responsible management of existing plantations for increased saw log production, plus improve standards to meet the public's social and environmental expectations.

Ecologically sustainable forest management (esfm) principles must be applied to plantation grown timber operations to ensure the integrity of ecosystem services (i.e. water quality and habitat connectivity) are maintained across rural landscapes and critical water catchments.

Financial support is critical to help restructure the downstream wood processing sector to enable processing and manufacture of plantation wood into higher value products. This will ensure the sustainability of future forestry operations, contribute to future domestic wood supply and support forest industry and wood processing workers into the future.

Programs to encourage the uptake of farm forestry on private lands needs to prioritise the growing of mixed native timber species endemic to local areas where cleared marginal lands could grow wood for the future, improve biodiversity values and water retention on farms and provide benefit from future opportunities in carbon markets.

Ideally, governments should be encouraging and supporting farmers and landholders to invest in restoring native forest resources for the use of future generations, instead of relying on private native forest owners and the PNF industry to provide unsustainable volumes of native hardwood logs from over-logged, remnant private native forests.

Many retiring farmers and native forest owners consider the logging and selling of private native timber as a retirement fund (in lieu of superannuation funds), but in doing so the private native forest logging industry is enacting long term cumulative harms to the climate resilience of forests and rural communities. Intensive logging in mature forest landscapes will degrade remaining endangered species habitats, threaten local water security, catchment health and fire resilience in these forested landscapes.

Stronger PNF regulations are needed to prevent the industrial exploitation of native forests on private land and to protect threatened species populations, including stricter regulations for plantation establishment, management and harvesting regimes to meet community expectations, protect water supplies from excessive chemical use, conserve and restore existing remnant native vegetation for habitat connectivity. Best practice landscape design principles need to be implemented at a local and regional scale.

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

If we want to protect NSW threatened species from the steep trajectory of extinction we must stop removing their forest homes, crushing and removing understorey food resources and disturbing their safe home ranges. Logging in

native forests directly impacts 174 hollow dependent fauna species and disregards non-timber flora species as dispensable vegetation, despite these species playing a key role as food sources for pollinators that are essential to forests and farming.

Industrial logging cycles do not allow native forests to mature and provide the ecosystem services critical to supporting healthy wildlife populations, maintaining river flows, generating reliable rainfall, filtering stream flows and providing natural fire resilience.

Extensive logging in state forests and regional water catchments is increasing the harms to surrounding communities during extreme drought with increased bushfire risk to public forest lands, adjacent property, homes and businesses. Bushfire risk and climate change is making home insurance unaffordable for property owners living in bushland and there is mounting evidence that logging increases the intensity of fire in wetter forests for up to 30 years. These tall, wet forests are carbon dense wildlife refuges that must be protected to ensure climate resilience for threatened species populations.

Mature forests are essential for surviving climate risk and to maintain community resilience in the decades ahead for both indigenous and non-indigenous people whose cultural connections to land and place have significant value for educating the next generations, building community resilience, conserving and restoring nature.

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 to build houses. Changing the structure of wood processing facilities, we can provide our hardwood needs with sawn and treated softwood logs and composite timber products made from softwoods can substitute for all current uses for native forest and plantation hardwoods.

Native hardwoods comprised 2.4 million (9%) of Australia's log production of 25 million cubic metres in 2023. Half of the logs taken from native forests in 2023 were turned into woodchip and exported. Saw and veneer logs comprised just 8% of the 8.5 million cubic metres of logs obtained from hardwood plantations, with 87% exported as woodchips.

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

As previously noted at 1. Improving the responsible design, establishment, management and harvest of plantation resources is critical to gaining a social licence and to maintain landscape habitat connectivity, water and biodiversity values, provide healthy working conditions for plantation employees and grow suitable timber resources.

Strengthening private native forestry regulations is critical to maintain biodiversity, fire resilience and water security as we tackle worsening climate extremes. Native hardwood timbers are a precious and irreplaceable resource, but threatened species habitats must be protected from unscrupulous operators and landscape fire resilience factored into all PVP approvals. Currently all PVP approvals fail to consider cumulative impacts to landscape scale fire risks and water security for downstream properties and communities.

and 3. Native forest logging is not needed for housing construction. Our timber needs can be met from a thriving plantation sector, where existing plantation resources are carefully managed to provide saw logs and fibre for a range of higher value building products manufactured here in NSW. Government subsidies for public native forest logging distorts the market, promoting demand for native timbers, while the more profitable softwood plantation sector could be filling demand.

Increased future wood resources can be established on marginal lands with benefits accruing from carbon (and biodiversity) markets and careful management over the long-term realising a sustainable harvest of both softwood and hardwood logs. Financial incentives over the short term are needed to kickstart a thriving farm forestry sector that sustains businesses, jobs and improves farm sustainability.

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

Allowing our public native forests to grow old will yield real benefits to the environment, economy and people of NSW. Maturing forests will deliver gains in carbon mitigation, biodiversity will be restored, and water catchments will begin to function at their best to mitigate the impacts of severe weather events. As state forests grow old they will generate regular rainfall, improve water security during droughts helping to regulate river flows in dry times.

First Nations Ranger Programs have been hugely successful managing the recovery and health of native forests. Programs like the Githabul Rangers have shown how First Nations knowledge and management can restore the natural and critical function of forests in the landscape.

Ending the loss-making public native forest logging industry will save taxpayers millions of dollars and allow biodiversity to thrive in regional water catchments, enhancing the recreational values of our forest landscapes and contributing millions to local economies through tourism visitation.

Employment opportunities in rural areas will be enhanced by a need to control

invasive species, mitigate against bushfire risk and maintain public access for recreational visitation, educational programs and cultural events.

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 of native forests reduces the stored carbon volumes by more than half. Ending native forest logging will allow forest to grow old maximising their carbon storage potential and contributing to NSW emission reduction targets.

Climate change poses increased risk to forest health and industrial logging is exacerbating the risks of severe fire, fire frequency and biodiversity loss. Unlogged forests are more resilient to climate impacts, moist understories resist fire incursion and mature forests generate rainfall, store large quantities of water in the humous and soil releasing it slowly during dry seasons, helping to maintain stream flows during severe droughts.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Meredith Stanton
Forest Grower and NSW state forest neighbour.