Independent Forestry Panel

Public submission

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

The sustainability of the native forest and plantations estate in NSW has been tested by experts' numerous times. From the Comprehensive Regional Assessments in the late 90s, further reviews in the early 2000s, a governmental review in 2010 and the post 2019/2020 fire review. Every time these reviews are undertaken the answer is the same, the science is valid, and the current practices of harvesting are sustainable. Since 2006, many state forestry operations have been certified by Forest Stewardship Certification of Responsible Wood Certification. These are independent bodies that look at global sustainable forest practices in providing certification. Currently the forest industry in NSW contributes $2.9 billion to the NSW economy and employees over 8900 people, largely in regional areas. It also supports the building and packaging industries by reliably supplying products and minimising costs which would increase should timber be sourced from other states or internationally.
Despite the lies of detractors, Old Growth is not logged, Areas of Forest are not clear felled, except for plantations which is authorised under the act. About 1% of the native forest is selectively harvested per year.

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

Native Forest and Plantation Forestry in NSW Wales is one of the most if not the most regulated industry in the state. The Integrated Forestry Operations Approvals process dictates the steps and measures that the industry must take to protect water quality, soil conservation and health, habitat protection for endangered species. These regulations are provided by other government agencies that are experts in their respective areas and there is even a dedicated forestry unit in the Environmental Protection Authority that audit and police the regulation. Key and vulnerable threatened species habitat is excluded from harvesting and survey work both prior and during harvesting ensure that threatened species harm is minimised. Independent recent studies have shown that the numbers of key threatened species (koalas) are found in similar, if not larger numbers on State Forest as compared to National Park. This is despite such areas being subject to historic harvesting operations over the last 150 years.

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

The government owned hardwood and softwood estates in NSW provide a diversity of products to industry. The supply of fibre products is largely fully committed given estimates of sustainable yields over the long term and there are some industries that would benefit from increased supply. This need will only increase into the future within increasing demands for more housing and cheaper construction. Timber products used in construction and packaging are one of the very few biodegradable and sustainable products still in those industries. Any reduction in the supply of fibre in NSW will see an increase in the use of plastics, metals, concrete that are not necessarily biodegradable and have a large carbon footprint rather than timber that sequesters carbon. It seems at best counter intuitive and worst insane to be considering a reduction on the production of fibre products given our desperate need to move towards zero emissions.

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

Private Native Forestry pays an important role in maintaining supply of hardwood timber products to industry and providing employment and revenue to regional communities. That said, it can in no way provide the demand for hardwood timber supply delivered by harvesting of government native forest. We have heard about supplementing timber supply from plantations that would help to reduce the need to harvest both state owned and private native forest. Anyone who uses this argument is at worst lying to justify a cessation of native forest logging or is at best ignorant of the economic and social restrictions to a large expansion of the either the hardwood or softwood plantation estate. Firstly, it would require significant government financial support to allow for the purchase of farmland as the economics of purchasing and establishing plantation do not stack up in a Net Present Value analysis when the likely return time on investment is 30 years (softwood) and 50-70 years (hardwood). Further, we have seen in Australia before the issues in trying to secure large swathes of land from farmers to plant trees. They are strong political body that will resist such moves on their traditional land management practices. If they do agree to sell land they will try and get top dollar for their marginal land in small pockets. You end up with fragmented forests with complicated access issues on the worst quality land. It grows terrible trees that are too expensive to harvest due to access problems and expensive roading requirements. Lastly, it will be at least 35 - 80 years until such plantations will come online. In the meantime, the forest industry, the sawmills, the transportation networks, the skills and knowledge and the regional communities that depend on the forest industry will all be gone. There is already proof for my opinion of the plantation industry. It has been declining for some time now in NSW and across Australia. This is due to increased land costs and costs of establishment, increased barriers from regulation and increased risks of fire, drought, pests and diseases. Further, communities are now starting to protest against the harvesting of plantations as more ignorant people move into rural areas as tree changers and don't even realise that plantations are not native forest. Lastly, plantations do not provide the diversity of timber products that native forests do in both dimensions and species. Poles, piles and girders used in essential industries will no longer be available. Alternatives like steel and concrete will be used instead.

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

Some years ago, the entity now known as Forestry Corporation was created as a State-Owned Corporation with the intent being to manage NSW's commercial forest estate at a profit. It was claimed at the time by politicians and managers that this would give forestry the social license to continue to operate in the face of any community opposition. This is despite other major land manages being largely funded by government. Despites this handicap, the Forests of NSW have continued to provide great recreational value to the people of NSW. It offers a diversity of recreational pursuits not offered by other state land managers including access to dogs, horses, trail bikes, mountain biking, camping, hunting of feral animals and bush walking. It also supports a range of other industries including cattle, apiary, firewood and mining. The economic value of these recreational pursuits and non-timber industries is minimal to the state yet they provide these ancillary benefits to the community of NSW that cannot be provided by other land managers. In addition to this there is a network of roads that provide regional communities with access and there are firefighting suppression activities that help protect rural communities.

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

As stated earlier, timber products are sustainable and biodegradable. The forest that produces the products sequester carbon as opposed to alternative product (concrete, steel, aluminium and plastics) that produce large volumes of carbon. Further, if NSW is not providing local timber and fibre products then there are further carbon emissions from the burning of fuel to import such products from national or international sources. Poor regulation and even deforestation in other countries that are not well regulated will further impact global carbon stores. Governments should be looking at regulation that further penalises construction companies that do not employee timber or timber products in construction and packaging. This will increase demand on timber products, increase their value and help to expand the industry instead of contracting it. This will intern lead to greater areas of forest for carbon sequestration and less emissions for polluting industries.