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

The concept of sustainability which is commonly promoted relates primarily to sustainable harvesting, that is, the renewal of the timber resource. The basis of forestry, as a science, is focussed on achieving sustainability in these terms. However, sustainability is also an ecological concept, and focusses our attention on habitats, and whether human interactions with those habitats ensures their sustainability. This is where the dilemma arises. Forestry operations may attain timber sustainability, if managed according to forestry science, but may not ensure habitat sustainability. There is now a vast amount of credible research which suggests that species extinction is primarily driven by human land use activities, particularly habitat destruction. In the case of forestry, both past and current forestry operations in hardwood forests are a major factor in habitat destruction. Despite efforts to retain particular 'habitat trees' these forestry operations are inherently unsustainable when it comes to habitat protection. It is not a question of tighter monitoring, or improving standards and regulations. The forestry operations, in themselves, destroy habitat in such a way that the long-term sustainability of that ecosystem is undermined. For this reason alone, hardwood logging of Australia's forests needs to come to an end. This has happened in Victoria and Western Australia and must now happen in NSW.

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

My first point covers this issue where I refer to species extinction.

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

The use of timber in NSW has varied enormously over time. At one stage hardwood timber was used extensively in cottage construction, railway sleepers, fruit boxes, telegraph poles and so forth. Yet over time all of these have been steadily replaced by alternatives, such as radiata pine and composite materials in cottage construction, concrete sleepers and telegraph poles, polystyrene for fruit boxes. It is clear that hardwood timber is no longer required for any of these uses. While pallets are still made from hardwood timber, this can also be changed, with alternatives available which would have a longer life-span than the current usage.

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

While NSW's radiata softwood plantations have been successful over time, the failure to continue their development on the scale that was achieved during the 20th century has left NSW dependent on imports from NZ. This reflects an overall withdrawal of governments from taking responsibility for economic outcomes, a feature of the last 40 years of public policy in this country as a whole. In the case of hardwood plantations, these have never been a real commercial success when it comes to a viable sawn timber industry because the time scale for growth of most species has been far too great for investor returns. Using such timber resources for woodchips

and pulp, or for flooring veneers, does not solve the state's requirements for sawn timber supplies. It is clear, however, that these timber supplies can be met from radiata pine and from various cellulose composite materials, both of which can be sourced from both local plantations, from South Australia and from New Zealand. Promotion of further softwood plantings, under government management as occurred for much of the 20th century, is clearly the way forward. There is no need for governments to promote hardwood plantations as such, though private industry may continue to pursue this course if it deems it profitable.

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

'Multiple-use forestry' was always a public relations strategy to deflect criticisms of the extreme timber focus of the NSW Forestry Commission (the predecessor of State Forests). Nothing much has changed. It's obvious that native forests in Australia should be managed primarily for habitat protection, with ecological considerations pre-eminent. If these are compatible with other uses, such as recreation and education, then these should be included. But activities which undermine, in any way, these conservation goals, should not be permitted. Aboriginal forest management models, particularly fire management, should of course be implemented, alongside the best scientific knowledge about how to achieve ecological sustainability. Timber production should not be a goal for native forests in NSW, and the answer to regional employment will need to be dealt with in the same way that other industries which must come to an end, such as coal-fired power stations and coal mines, must also be dealt with. Governments cannot ignore their obligations to regional communities to directly provide training and public sector employment in all those regions that are affected by inevitable changes like these. Leaving things as they are is simply 'kicking the can down the road' as the saying goes, and condemns such regions to a slow decline.

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

Again, wheeling in climate change has been a device to 'make forests pay', not much better than the various taxation scams which bedevilled forestry plantations in recent decades. The extent to which planting forests mitigate climate change seems unclear, despite the imagery of forests as the 'lungs of the planet'. On the other hand, removing large areas of forest cover does seem to increase carbon emissions. Whatever the case, the core issue is ecological sustainability, not climate change. The latter must be dealt with on a number of other levels, such as industrial agriculture, fossil fuel energy production and transport. Inflating the role of forests in climate change, and using this as a device for giving market mechanisms a greater role in public policy, is not a useful road to go down. Not only is it a great distraction, but it risks destroying public confidence in forest management, as has become the case with the carbon credits offsets schemes which have been shown to be ineffective at meeting their goals.