Independent Forestry Panel

Public submission

NAME REDACTED Submission ID: 205258

Organisation:	*N/A*
Location:	*New South Wales*
Supporting materials uploaded:	*N/A*

Submission date: 10/13/2024 10:30:28 PM

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

The sustainability of forestry operations in Australia is at a crossroads - from a business perspective, the need for security of timber supply is paramount in ensuring that the workforce, harvesting and mill businesses and corporate and forestry expertise is not lost as a result of ongoing insecurity. How much timber we choose to supply is largely a political decision, and delaying or wavering over such a decision will cause stakeholders to exit with little chance for rebuilding the sector. It is important to recognise that Australia has one of the most strictly regulated forestry industries in the world, and despite historical challenges and bad practices, we now have the knowledge and capacity to ensure that harvests are undertaken in a sustainable manner. We know that demand for forest products is increasing with a growing world population. We also know that reducing our own capacity to supply timber puts pressure on markets which are substantially less sustainable than ours. The impacts of decisions made regarding the NSW industry have global ramifications, and need to be analysed within a global systems context. NSW needs the capacity to flexibly ramp up supply of timber as current markets grow and new markets emerge. Currently we are at risk of losing this capacity. Although it may seem that this pertains primarily to the native forest industry, the expertise that exists , silvicultural, stewardship, fire fighting, geographical, ecological and technical , within the native forest industry is vital to the future of the plantation sector as well.

The sustainability of individual forestry markets should be viewed in the context of the relative sustainability of other resource markets. We need to view the potential risk to forests against the actual risk to the environment posed by timber alternatives. Steel, gas, concrete, plastic and other materials cause direct disturbance to the environment as a result of the extraction and manufacturing processes, and indirect from the consumption of fossil fuels as a result. Timber and forest regrowth (and while it may not equate to an intact natural forest) are carbon sinks and stores, and with very little relative input required to regrow a forest, earn the title of the most sustainable resource we can use. Removing the product from the market does not mean the demand disappears. It shifts to less sustainable sources.

What is not sustainable is the social environment in which the forest and timber sector operates. While operational scrutiny is welcomed, the constant barrage of protestors, vexatious litigation, unbalanced media representation and constant shutdowns are disruptive, expensive and are a direct cause of staff exodus. If a commitment is made to ensure that the forestry industry can continue to operate, a commitment to the physical and mental wellbeing of staff must also be made.

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

The largest threats to flora and fauna species and biodiversity within NSW forests are climate change, land use change and pest and weed incursion. Forestry operations, while having some impact, are not the main threat to the forest values listed above. It is no doubt important for flora and fauna to have refuge from direct human impacts, and we have a large network of protected

areas for this purpose. Protected areas do not allow for a full range of forest values within their estate however. People value forests for recreation, refuge, fuel, food and other uses, some of which are incompatible with a protected area model.
The public discourse around native forest harvesting needs to shift away from linking forestry with deforestation and fauna extinctions with no evidentiary basis, and place more emphasis on the benefits of forest products, and the undesirable alternatives we are left with if timber is removed from the equation. The idea that formal reserves are the only place where biodiversity is secure is also disingenuous, as the major threats to forest ecosystems have little regard for land tenure. In fact, as the Victorian situation has shown, removing the ability of people to use forests in regulated situations leads to further misuse of protected areas. The inability to provide an option for people who wish to collect firewood, hunt or ride motorbikes in a licenced and available area can lead to greater environmental damage, regulatory expenses and the criminalisation of previously legitimate activities.

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

While we can accept that forestry practices of the past were often unsustainable and poorly thought out, we must also accept that timber has driven the process of advancing Australia's social, industrial and economic wealth. Railways, power networks, housing, business, and culture all rely on the raw material of timber and the myriad of products derived from it. It is still true today that timber and wood fibre products are a crucial resource. Not only that, timber and wood fibre products are a climate-positive solution to the challenges of resource use in a growing economy. Manufactured timbers such as CLT are versatile building materials which can stretch a resource further than previously imagined. While we have ambitious targets to build thousands of new houses, Australia is a net importer of construction timber. The solution to housing security for millions of Australians is reliant on the forest practices and market vagaries of foreign countries.

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

It's often said that we need to transition away from native forestry and increase the plantation estate. That this is the solution to the supply crisis, and can replace the timber we currently harvest from native forests. However, as the lack of movement on the One Billion Trees program would suggest, the reality is far different. Finding land for plantations, especially while delivery of renewable energy targets is eating up large swathes of suitable land, and agricultural activities have faster and more predictable returns on investment, is a hard task. If plantations are the solution, action needs to be taken immediately, and an interim resource guaranteed for mills and business to continue operations in the meantime. Hardwood plantations need to be off-limits for conversion to National Parks. In light of climate change and species response to a warming climate, plantations should cover a variety of bioregions and species in order to provide mitigation in the case of crop failure.

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

Areas of native State forests are an important part of the forest estate. Not as intensively harvested as a plantation forest, and not set aside completely for ecological protection, State forests are an intermediary place, where multiple forest values can be realised at once. While Australia's extinction crisis continues, there seems to be little evidence to suggest that threatened

fauna species have better outcomes in National Parks than they do in State forests. In regional NSW, State forests are often an island refuge, the only trees in a swathe of country cleared for crops. These forests are often home to populations of threatened species, but rather than use this as a justification to add these forests to the NPWS estate, understand that these species have survived against all odds due to agricultural land practices, and can continue to thrive in these areas alongside the forestry operations that have been historically occurring in these areas. These island forests were created to provide local timbers, firewood, recreation reserves and wildlife habitat for the people of the towns they service. The option for local management of these forests still exists, albeit in a model completely different from the centralised management and distant from market model currently in existence.

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

Locking up forests as a means to accrue carbon credits, while selling those credits to industries producing a less sustainable product is a perverse outcome. Understanding the carbon stored in timber products, and including that calculation in an assessment of resource sustainability is a way to properly understand the benefit of using timber over other materials. This may lead to markets which potentially subsidise the cost of timber for manufacturing and housing, and encourage timber producers to turn their products into long life items rather than pulp or biofuel.