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

I live and work adjacent to ongoing native forest logging operations in the Bulga State Forest, Having been involved in efforts to ensure the sustainability of Forestry operations for close to 40 years, it is obvious the industry is not sustainable, it never has been and in the existing economy it cannot be.

Forestry's own reporting points out its unsustainability. The yields Forestry takes from active forests have been in decline regionally (and I assume across the state). There are no doubt multiple reasons for these declines, but one in particular is obvious, the trees Forestry harvests have reduced in size, reduced in density per compartment and increased in difficulty to access (as supply increasingly complex, costly chains are prone to disruption). For Forestry to sustain it's yields between harvests it must wait longer which counteracts its ability to be sustainable. Having removed the premium timber from almost all active compartments, forestry is now extracting marginal logs that result in increased costs, reduced premium products, lost biomass and increased inefficiencies. Credible accounts from advocacy groups put the volume of timber used in timber products at less than 10% of the intact forest's biomass. This kind of inefficiency, combined with the inferiority of the final product coming from prematurely harvested forests means more so called 'waste' and increased lower-level use outcomes (e.g. native forests ending up as wood chips).

This brings me to a more philosophical, but important point. Forestry in Australia, particularly NSW, has always been conducted under an extractivist paradigm. Since the first Europeans moved across this country they sought to extract resources for short term gain, with rarely a thought about long-term consequences. Sustainability is a recent concept for NSW resource managers (post 1987 Brundtland report). Where I live, the virgin forests were slash and burnt by Soldiers whose right to their settlement was contingent on them clearing the land. Only, there was no access to market for them to process nor sell the timber. Articles from the Sydney Morning Herald attest to the madness of this government approach. I would argue not much has changed in the 100 years since. For NSW Forestry to become sustainable we have to change the way we think about our Forests and how we manage them. Whenever there has been positive changes towards sustainability of forests, there is a corresponding decline in production, i.e. the way we manage forests is inherently unsustainable.

The NSW department of primary industries itself notes the decline in timber volumes has been 'particularly in native forests due to heightened environmental protection measure and weather damaged supply (in response to bushfire and extreme wet weather and flooding)'

<https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/about-us/publications/pdi/2022/forestry>. The fact is, that as scientific rigour in pointing out the unsustainability of Forest practices (for example, impacts on biodiversity, water quality and water supply, amenity, recreational use and the like) along with conscious consumers, concerned citizens and market pressures have forced Forestry NSW to adapt its practices, it has struggled to sustain yields. When Forestry is forced to operate in ways that should ensure the sustainability of the resource and ecosystems it is extracted from, the enterprise struggles to remain financially viable (hence the massive subsidies and losses Forestry

Corporation operates under). The bottom line is that native forestry in NSW has proven to be unsustainable.

This is not even considering the opportunity cost that NSW taxpayers are forfeiting when we subsidise Forestry Corporation to run our forest estate down. The externalised costs and benefits of native forest logging are no doubt orders of magnitude greater than the immediate factors considered in economic modelling. For instance, under a changing climate, the economic value of ecosystem services afforded by functioning native forests are compounded well beyond the immediate value of the native forestry dependent industry. Considering much of our prized native forests make up the primary land use for the headwaters of our coastal riverine systems, catchment management services will be substantial (yet I assume have not been determined). The very real capacity of our coastal native forests to mitigate drought, flooding, declining water quality and quantity, improve hydrological cycle function at the regional scale, provide cooling, sustain soil quality, reduce landscape instability, reduce costs to repair infrastructure, ensure transport and logistical corridors remain open, etc. etc. etc. must be factored into cost benefit analysis. For example, following the 2022 disasters in the Northern Rivers of NSW, the jointly funded 'Northern Rivers Resilience Initiative' (NRRRI), led by CSIRO, suggested that hundreds of millions of dollars be spent on improving the resilience of the region to withstand future events. Evidence from around the world indicates investments of this kind can repay themselves 5-7 times over in reduced costs to respond and recover from even increasing events such as what happened in the Northern Rivers. There is also well established and growing evidence that maintaining native forests, particularly (actually according to the Kuczera curve, only established forests) are the most cost effective means of providing these kinds of ecosystem services. Hence, not only do current best practice native forest harvesting practices undermine these ecosystem services, they undermine the social, economic and environmental resilience and sustainability of the communities downstream.

The question facing you the panel, the government and our great state, is whether we continue to pretend we can shoe horn our current approach into an increasingly ill fitting reality, or recognise that transformative change is required in order to ensure the sustainability of forestry dependent local economies and our forest estate.