

Public submission

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Organisation: *Parks and Leisure Australia NSW/ACT*

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Dear Independent Forestry Panel,

On behalf of Parks & Leisure Australia, we appreciate the opportunity to provide input on the sustainability and future management of forestry operations in New South Wales. Our mission is to enhance community health, well-being, and the environment through sustainable practices in parks, recreation, and leisure. In this submission, we address the following key topics, aligning them with our objectives.

1. Sustainability of Current and Future Forestry Operations in NSW

Parks & Leisure Australia strongly advocates for the sustainable management of natural resources, including forests, as they are integral to both the environment and community well-being. Forestry operations must prioritise the preservation of ecological integrity and adopt a balance between economic activity and environmental stewardship. Sustainable forestry practices should limit deforestation, ensure reforestation, and adopt selective logging techniques that preserve forest structure and biodiversity. This is crucial in maintaining the ecosystem services forests provide, such as clean air, water filtration, and carbon sequestration.

We recommend the panel adopts adaptive management strategies that reflect current scientific research on forest resilience in the face of climate change and incorporate long-term sustainability goals into forestry policies.

2. Environmental and Cultural Values of Forests, Including Threatened Species and Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Values

Forests in NSW are home to rich biodiversity, including many threatened species, and are vital to the preservation of Aboriginal cultural heritage. Parks & Leisure Australia supports the protection of these environmental and cultural values. It is essential that forestry operations integrate the conservation of habitat for species such as the koala and swift parrot, and protect areas of high conservation value.

Furthermore, Aboriginal communities have a deep connection with their forests, relying on them for cultural practices, bush foods, medicines, and spiritual connection to Country. We advocate for the inclusion of Aboriginal traditional knowledge in forest management, particularly cultural fire management, which can help restore ecosystems, reduce bushfire risks, and enhance biodiversity.

3. Demand for Timber Products in NSW

The demand for timber in sectors such as housing, construction, mining, transport, and retail is a significant driver of forestry operations. As NSW faces housing shortages, the need for timber products, especially in sustainable construction, is expected to grow. However, meeting this demand must not come at the expense of forest degradation. Parks & Leisure Australia supports the expansion of sustainable timber production through certified plantations and the responsible sourcing of timber from forests that maintain biodiversity and carbon storage values.

We suggest the government incentivise the use of alternative building materials like engineered wood products that can reduce pressure on natural forests while still meeting market demand.

4. Future of Softwood and Hardwood Plantations and Private Native Forestry

Plantations, both softwood and hardwood, play a key role in meeting timber supply needs. Parks & Leisure Australia supports the expansion of responsibly managed plantations that adhere to sustainability certification standards. These plantations can relieve the pressure on native forests while providing economic benefits to rural communities.

Private Native Forestry (PNF) can also contribute to timber supply, but it must be managed with stringent regulations to ensure it does not compromise biodiversity or water resources. The continuation of PNF should involve strict oversight and incentives for landowners to adopt best practices, including reforestation and sustainable harvest methods.

5. Role of State Forests in Maximising Environmental, Economic, and Social Outcomes

State forests should be managed to deliver a wide range of environmental, economic, and social benefits. Parks & Leisure Australia supports a diverse management approach that balances timber production with ecosystem

services, recreation, and cultural values. Aboriginal forest management models, incorporating traditional ecological knowledge, should be an integral part of the future management of state forests. These models could provide co-benefits, including fire management, cultural revival, and biodiversity conservation.

Additionally, we recommend that state forests prioritise public access for recreation, tourism, and education, recognising their value in fostering community engagement with nature and promoting mental and physical well-being.

6. Opportunities for Carbon and Biodiversity Benefits

Forests play a crucial role in mitigating climate change by sequestering carbon and preserving biodiversity. Parks & Leisure Australia strongly supports the development of carbon and biodiversity markets that incentivise the preservation and restoration of forests. By adopting market-based mechanisms, the government can encourage landholders and forest managers to protect critical habitats, store carbon, and support biodiversity.

Forests should also be included in strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change. We urge the panel to assess the long-term climate risks to forests and develop policies that promote climate resilience, such as diversifying tree species in plantations and restoring degraded landscapes.

7. Recreation

Parks and Leisure supports the management of Forest areas that facilitates their use for recreational activities and believe this is an important function that is compatible with sustainable forestry. Accordingly, we consider that the recognition and active consideration of infrastructure and management practices that promote recreation provision in forestry policy and planning documents, as desired.

Conclusion

In summary, Parks & Leisure Australia believes that sustainable forestry practices, aligned with environmental conservation and cultural heritage protection, are key to ensuring the future health of NSW's forests. We support an integrated approach that recognises the multiple roles forests play, from timber production to carbon sequestration, recreation, and the preservation of Aboriginal cultural values. We look forward to working with the NSW Government to ensure that forestry operations contribute positively to the community through recreation use and the environment.

Yours sincerely,

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[Redacted name]

Parks & Leisure Australia NSW/ACT