Independent Forestry Panel

Public submission

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Independent Forestry Panel Submission
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Background

I am writing this submission as a deeply concerned resident of so-called NSW, regarding the unsustainable practice of native forest logging and its devastating impact on native species, the climate, and sacred Aboriginal land. As a mother of two and a second-generation settler living on stolen Gadigal land, I experience daily anxiety and grief over the ongoing harm to our environment, with native forest logging playing a significant role in this destruction.

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

The native forest logging industry is simply not sustainable. We're seeing logging occur in places where threatened species desperately need protection, not more destruction. A recent study found that 43 species, already struggling due to past deforestation, continue to suffer as logging persists (Ward et al. 2024). This practice not only wipes out critical habitats like ancient hollow-bearing trees but disrupts the balance of the ecosystem, leaving animals like the Koala and Southern Greater Glider without suitable homes (Au et al. 2019).

The impacts of logging don't stop at habitat loss. It's making our forests more dangerous by turning logged areas into tinderboxes that are far more prone to severe fires. The aftermath of the Black Summer fires showed a disturbing trend: logged forests consistently burned with greater intensity than untouched areas, even under milder fire weather (Lindenmayer et al. 2022b). This increased fire threat lingers for decades, meaning we're not just risking today's environment but locking in hazards for future generations (Taylor et al. 2014; Wilson et al. 2022).

We also need to face the fact that native forest logging is hurting itself. The more these areas burn, the less viable timber they produce, creating a vicious cycle where forests can't grow back fast enough to be harvested before they're scorched by the next wildfire (Cary et al. 2021; Bousfield et al. 2023). Plantations are the sensible alternative, with studies showing that native forests, once logged, are four times more likely to burn than timber plantations (Bousfield et al., in re-review).

Financially, native forest logging doesn't add up either. It's propped up by massive government subsidies, putting a significant burden on taxpayers. In 2019-2020, for example, the Forestry Corporation of NSW received $249 million in subsidies yet still reported losses (Frontier Economics 2023). This kind of economic drain isn't unique to NSW; it's a pattern across the country (Lindenmayer 2024).

It's clear that native forest logging isn't just an environmental problem but an economic one. Continuing down this path puts both our natural heritage and public funds at risk, with consequences that will far beyond our lifetimes and will severely effect generations to come.

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

Native forests hold immense environmental importance, provide critical habitats for threatened species (Ward et al. 2024), and possess deep cultural significance for First Nations peoples (Gott 2005). These irreplaceable values are at risk of being lost if logging continues. The simplest and most effective way to preserve these values and prevent further degradation is to stop logging native forests altogether (Murray et al. 2024).

Logging also desecrates sacred sites, songlines, and animal totems that are central to Aboriginal culture. This ongoing destruction, especially on stolen land, perpetuates cultural genocide. Continuing to harm these forests is not only an environmental crime but a violation of the deep spiritual and cultural connections that have existed for thousands of years.

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

The native forest logging industry has mainly focused on producing high-volume, low-value products like woodchips, paper pulp, and packaging materials (Lindenmayer and Taylor 2022; Australia and National Forest Inventory Steering Committee 2018; ABARES 2021; Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry 2023). Meanwhile, most of our sawn timber—about 90%—already comes from plantations (ABARES 2021; Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry 2023). This shift shows that plantations can meet timber demands, as they've been doing for years. Places like New Zealand have run a plantation-only timber industry for over two decades, and South Australia has done the same for much longer (Lindenmayer and Taylor 2022).

The reliance on plantations for sawn timber, while using native forests for lower-value products, explains why plantation-based operations are profitable and provide more jobs, whereas native forest logging struggles to stay afloat and has fewer employment opportunities (Keith et al. 2016; Keith et al. 2017). This economic reality has been confirmed through studies in southern NSW (Frontier Economics and ANU 2021).

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

The future of the forest and timber industries in NSW undeniably lies in plantations. Compared to native forest logging, plantations are more profitable, create more jobs, generate fewer greenhouse gas emissions, and pose a much lower fire risk. They also grow wood crops more quickly, making them less vulnerable to being destroyed by wildfires than native forests with long rotation cycles (Cary et al. 2021).

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

Native forests hold vital environmental and cultural significance, providing crucial habitats for threatened species (Ward et al. 2024) and being deeply important to First Nations communities (Gott 2005). However, logging threatens these values, despite claims from industry groups that activities like thinning make forests more resilient to wildfires (Bennett et al. 2024; Keenan 2024). In reality, there's no solid evidence to support this. Studies show that thinning can actually increase fire severity, as seen during recent major bushfires (Taylor et al. 2020, 2021).

The practice of "Forest Gardening," a new name for conventional logging on First Nations land, also lacks evidence of benefiting forest ecosystems and is viewed by some as harmful to cultural heritage (Murray et al. 2024). Claims that pre-colonial forests were more open due to Indigenous practices are not supported by historical and ecological evidence (Lindenmayer et al. 2024). The best way to protect the cultural and environmental values of native forests is to stop logging altogether.

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

Intact native forests store significantly more carbon than those that have been logged and regenerated (Keith et al. 2014). Logging contributes substantial greenhouse gas emissions, and a crucial strategy for Australia to meet its 2030 GHG reduction targets is to halt native forest logging altogether (Canberra Times, 2023). A notable reduction in logging in Tasmania has led to significant improvements in the state's carbon accounts (Mackey et al. 2022).

Preserving carbon in intact forests can contribute to both state and national carbon accounts without the need for trading, thus avoiding the complexities and pitfalls often associated with carbon trading in Australia (Macintosh et al. 2024). The biodiversity benefits of undisturbed native forests are well-documented (Mackey et al. 2015; Watson et al. 2018), and the most effective way to protect these biodiversity values is to cease logging in native forests, including those in NSW (Ward et al. 2024).

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