

# Public submission

ROGER SWEETMAN

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**Organisation:** *N/A*

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**Location:** *New South Wales*

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**Supporting materials uploaded:** *Attached overleaf*

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# Submission

## RA SWEETMAN & SONS NATIVE TIMBER GROWING AND MILLING

One hundred and three years ago my grandfather started our family timber milling business in 1921.

My father is 92 and his whole life has been about timber. He still lives for it, Dad loves timber, the forests and the people and I feel the same. As far as I know this was the first mill with a forest supply agreement, and we've been involved continuously ever since. Our family has made a living all that time and the grandchildren coming along are the 4<sup>th</sup> generation.

The family recently bought back the original sawmill site which was briefly under different ownership. The mill is not back in operation at this stage.

We'd like to get the mill operational again and be in the position to employ local people again. Previously we had 30 employees. Every business and every job counts in our region. There's all sorts of jobs in forests and mills. In NSW the whole hardwood sector employs 9,000 people, from just the small area harvested and processed.

### Demand

Customers coming to us straight up want to buy Australian timber. The phone calls are constant from people wanting timber. We cannot supply them.

People ask where the timber was grown and how far did it have to come on a truck. They know carbon emissions are higher the further away it comes from. They want as local as possible and sustainable. The same things are asked by local people as well as the Sydney callers.

Cessnock Council wants timber girders for bridge repairs. There is nowhere near enough supply to go around. It feels bad when we can't help council.

There is strong demand for sawmill by-products. Delivering that from the mill involves transport companies and the jobs that go with that. Our sawdust went to the chicken industry for flooring. I hear with the harvest stoppages to do with the koala national park, chicken farms are having to turn back to heating of concrete floors. They can't get the good quality sawdust they prefer for chickens to stand on. Shavings go to the horse industry; it is very good for stables; some mix it with sawdust. I have heard pine sawdust is too dusty and hardwood is the best. Mill off-cuts go for firewood for locals. Biochar is on the horizon – it suits mills to use biomass leftovers from a mill. Biochar puts carbon in soil and helps grow food.

The government is pushing for more housing which means we need more timber. The housing shortages aren't just in Sydney. There will be more demand. But where the amounts of timbers come from? Timber's the best environmental material. Just using more plastic, concrete and steel is worse for the environment. Imagine the effect on building costs if more State Forest was locked up. Builders are going broke now. There will only be more pain if NSW switches to depend on ships to bring our hardwood in from far away and then have to clear customs through a congested port. It makes no sense to turn off our supply of excellent homegrown timber to timber cut from foreign forests that's milled in another country and takes away NSW jobs.

### Infrastructure

Our family supplied hundreds and hundreds of turpentine piles used to fix the **Darling Harbour wharves** many years ago. That was a big thing to get that all supplied. Turpentine is amazing for wharves as it's so long lasting in the water.

We still supply the **Tasmanian marinas** with turpentine piles and have done for decades. Now we only sell what we can harvest off our own property PNF. We haven't got anywhere near enough supply to keep up with demand. The durable timber needed for wharves and marinas heavily depends on our NSW industry.

### Supply

NSW will always need a reliable supply of different kinds of timbers. The current supply doesn't go anywhere near meeting demand. It is important to keep what harvest area is there now.

## Submission

In our side of industry we need that mix of private native forestry and State Forests. It is all regulated and forests are still home to all the wildlife. That is the right way to go. The younger generation has good ideas for our family business. We want them to succeed. But I am not confident about future supply because of all the politics.

Private native forestry is good - but isn't anywhere near enough. Plantation areas are much bigger for pine but it's a really small area for hardwood. Who'd spend a fortune on prime land then wait 40 years or so to harvest a return?

Different timbers are matched for different uses. Softwood pine is a big need for house framing but our business is all about native forest timber. The industry has always had different facets and it is quite diverse. One timber doesn't serve all uses.

We have **private native forestry** or PNF, which we enjoy doing on the rural land we own. We're proud to keep supplying a few long standing customers from there. We find it works well. Everything's got to be regulated and we have no problem with that at all. Local Land Services are really good to deal with. There's potential for more supply from PNF if people get trained about what is involved in managing the forest so it keeps improving. Actually it all makes you feel satisfied to select a tree, harvest it, take that log to the mill and process it into valuable timber that someone can use right away.

My sons are keen to value-add more and produce the most valuable product out of every harvested log. That is the plan. It all depends on having a reliable hardwood supply. One son is making large hardwood tables and demand is there. People are prepared to pay for a good table and it will virtually last forever and half the weight is all the carbon stored in it.

### Scale

The State Forestry area harvested for native timber (30,000 ha. out of the whole 2 million ha), is much smaller than it ever was. After harvest it all grows back and things like clear felling stopped years ago. The activists are going on about things from the past, they haven't kept up. For example, science recently proved what bush people could see, that koalas do well in State Forests.

### Koalas

A famous koala science researcher does a lot and we all have much better information on it now. Dr Brad Law did the biggest research project in the world. He discovered koalas are not going extinct in NSW plus koalas live and feed in harvested areas of State Forests ( <https://woodcentral.com.au/koalas-can-thrive-in-nsw-state-forests-amid-new-park-push/>)

It didn't surprise me because I've always seen koalas in the bush. I still see them and I love that. They're awesome little creatures. We have our own trucks to cart logs and being in the forests all my life, I have seen and observed a lot, like my Dad. Not once have I seen a koala killed by a harvest machine or run over and I don't know anyone else who has. We'd always do our utmost to look after and preserve them. They pick and choose where to feed. Koalas seem to like fresh leaves and come back in to the harvested areas fairly quickly. I have seen that myself plenty of times.

With Dr Law's scientific studies, the Great Koala National Park now ought to be thought about in a new way. It makes more sense to declare a 'great koala region' with incentives that encourage everyone in the region, including families, councils, housing developers to make extra efforts to make life safer for koalas. An example is how Forest Corp grows young koala habitat trees to give to community groups for planting.

### Sustainable future

All the forest growers and mills pay research levies (<https://fwpa.com.au/research-hub/>) to keep improving the industry. The industry is terrific and always improving. Forest Corp has a heap of information for the public on forest practices <https://www.forestrycorporation.com.au/sustainability> .

If State forestry harvest was to end the resulting timber shortages will punish the whole of NSW. PNF will never be enough to fill the hardwood demand.

State Forest is owned by us all and we all need timber for construction, which is better for the environment than concrete and steel. We can protect the environment and keep up this valuable harvest for timber.

Thank you to the Panel for taking the time to read this submission. I would be happy to meet at any time .

Roger Sweetman  
11<sup>th</sup> October 2024