Independent Forestry Panel

Public submission

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

NSW contains native forest stands recognized as Global Biodiversity hotspots whilst simultaneously being recognized as a Global Deforestation hotspot. This is clearly an unsustainable situation.

Native forest logging is occurring in high conservation value forests that support complex biodiversity of flora and fauna. These forests provide habitat for many of our most vulnerable animal species as well an array of plants, many of which we do not fully understand or appreciate the value of.

We have a deplorable species extinction rate, historical logging has already reduced available habitat with the ongoing practice further pushing many species into decline and, sadly, towards extinction.

We have made bold statements of intent to reverse extinction rates and restore populations. This will be impossible to achieve unless we halt native forest logging.....along with continued native vegetation clearing.

Contemporary forestry practice and modern machinery do not, as actually required, harvest useable, valuable timber. They actually destroy the entire forest ecosystem with multiple adverse impacts:

Loss of absolutely vital hollow bearing trees,

The increase of flammability post logging in regrowth forest,

Erosion and loss of water quality,

Weed invasion,

Alteration of forest structure fundamentally affecting biodiversity.

All these issues occurring as a result of native forest logging are clearly unsustainable.

Climate change is altering our fire regimes. With increased fire, the availability of mature timber is almost certainly going to be reduced.

There is becoming a need to increase the rate of growth of trees for timber harvesting. Plantation timber growth will meet this requirement as shown in scientific studies.

Similarly, there is evidence that plantations are less likely to be impacted by fire. This is both the case with old growth and regrowth native forest.

Economically the extent of government subsidy to keep native forestry running is well known, along with the fact that despite this subsidization State Forests even then make a loss. This is economic nonsense and clearly unsustainable.

I suggest that it is not possible to regard any aspect of current native forest practice as sustainable.

The science, the economics, vital considerations of sustainability and mitigating climate change all indicate that the future for forestry in NSW should be to develop plantations for timber growth but absolutely not on land deforested for this purpose.

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

As a Global Biodiversity hotspot many of the native forest of NSW are amongst the most significant on earth. Those that are protected in National Parks are protected for that very reason, they differ in no way from many of the forestry land that abuts them.
The extent of native forest on NSW is already critically reduced with drastic results. Species loss is well recognized, along with currently threatened species being directly impacted by forestry activity. The importance of reducing this loss (forever) cannot be ignored. Healthy native forests are the key to any hope of success in preventing the further extinctions that we are committed to.
This is an ancient biome, species cannot migrate elsewhere, either plant or animal, once the forest goes, so do the associated species.
These forest have immense environmental value that we not only have a duty to protect but in choosing to destroy them we threaten our own future livelihood.
We have destroyed enough of them to understand the dire results including habitat loss, hollow loss, erosion increase, poor water quality outcomes especially for downstream dependents such as coastal settlement use, tourism, river quality, fishery activity and agriculture.
Additionally, regrowth is compromised with weed invasion and modified forest structure affecting the entire ecosystem such that it cannot replicate its original condition for longer than our lifetimes.
This is environmental destruction that will not save our threatened species or provide opportunity for the restoration of its exclusive biodiversity.
Native forests occur in many areas with rich Aboriginal heritage, they are the custodian of high cultural values. Stopping native forest logging is one opportunity to protect Aboriginal heritage, where it remains intact. Far too much has been both wantonly and incidentally destroyed or lost.

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

The native forest industry has moved from its origins of manual selective timber getting to broad scale, highly mechanized entire forest habitat removal. This has resulted in it becoming a high volume, low value operation.
Timber demand can be, and is, increasingly met by plantations and artificial products.
Clearly, the future for timber sourcing must not be through wholesale destruction of native forest ecosystems but through managed plantation production.
Economically, the current state forest operations in native forest timber getting is a failure.
Considerable success, economically, is evident in the production of plantation timber which must be the future source for timber.
In terms of jobs, the highly mechanized nature of forestry now provides significantly less employment than in the past, a job provision that can be replaced through the development of managed plantations.
Future needs can be, and should be, from plantations which is desirable in terms of quality provision, employment, economics and sustainability.

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

Evidence clearly indicates that the production of timber in plantations has many benefits over native forest logging.
Greater profitability, equal or greater employment, faster wood crops, higher value per acreage, less fire prone, greater sustainability.

Plantation timber does not provide value, as compared to native forest, in respect of high biodiversity, complex forest structure, habitat provision (for example hollows) or species permanence.
This is a fundamental reason for plantations to be established on already compromised land and never established on recovering native forest let alone on land that is cleared of native forest for plantation purposes.
I would suggest that the issues concerning forestry on Private land is just as important as those on State land and that the outcome of this enquiry should guide future governance of Private land practices.

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

Clearly there is a substantial role for State Forests to continue to provide timber, as well as using their land for environmental benefit and community use. This has been an integral part of their role historically.
However, continuing to source timber from native forests is no longer acceptable. Future State Forest functions must be undertaken within plantations.
Proposed, and developing proposals, for Aboriginal forest management are in their infancy. It is vitally important that the mistakes of the past are not repeated. Any Aboriginal forest management practices that are developed must not result in environmental degradation, loss of habitat and waste of vital forest ecosystems. Sustainability, in its fullest sense, must be formally managed if any such proposals are to be established and undertaken.

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

I believe that the mitigation of Climate Change must be included as a direct consideration in any government decision making process.
In this instance it is an integral part of establishing policy on timber harvesting.
Scientific studies have shown that healthy native forests store more carbon than logged, regenerating forest.
Stopping logging in native forest will have a significant, immediate positive impact on our 'greenhouse gas emissions' target which we are already struggling to meet. The immediate effect suggests that stopping logging as immediately as we can would be highly desirable.
Climate change is the ultimate challenge of our civilization. Anything that we can do to mitigate CC is worthwhile.
Stopping logging is immediately beneficial in terms of carbon storage, However, stopping logging increasingly reduces fire intensity, promotes the retention of moisture....a well known feature attributable to large old growth forests, maintains soil stability..... all valuable assets in reducing the effects of climate change whether through carbon storage of the reduction of its release.
Additionally, there is also what we do not know. We are still discovering many of the potential benefits of the complex native forest ecosystems. We know that there is much that may be of great value to our survival into the future. We just have to protect all that we have left to realize this potential.