Independent Forestry Panel

Public submission

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

I am a wildlife ecologist with a particular interest in the biology of native rodents. For 30 years I have studied the ecology of the threatened rodent species Pseudomys oralis Hastings River Mouse. Currently the CIFOA requires a buffer prescription around known P. oralis records. However, this relies on surveys being done to detect the species. Previously IFOA prescriptions required surveys. Now when logging is proposed, if FCNSW (or any other body) doesn't carry out surveys, no records are entered and P. oralis habitat will be destroyed wioth no legal requirement for any mitigation.

Not only is habitat lost but logging operations directly cause death of this species and many other animals.

Habitat of this species is fragmented and most of the richest higher-altitude country has been converted to agricultural lands. This leaves islands of habitat without connectivity. Native rodents have low reproductive rates compared to other rodent species and many small mammal species are extinct in Australia since European colonisation. Additional downward pressure from habitat removal, death during forestry operations and other pressures such as inappropriate fire regimes and feral predators are likely to exceed natural ability to re-populate.

In my opinion, current forestry practices and prescriptions are not able to mitigate general population decline of this species or of many others. Thus, forestry practices are exacerbating and hastening the decline of this and other species.

Forest harvesting causes direct deaths of native animals. For a number of years I worked as a contract ecologist for large projects such as the Pacific Highway upgrade. During this time, I supervised clearing of individual trees. Protocols were to identify trees with any habitat value on the form of hollows or fissures and the like. During this process, hundreds and hundreds of animals were discovered and mostly removed from immediate harm. By comparison, forestry activities require no such inspection and it is certain fact that huge numbers of native animals, including threatened species, are killed in the process. Small ground mammals such as Hastings River Mouse would be crushed by heavy plant and equipment. Numerous of the very many species of fauna dependent on tree hollows are directly killed by falling of trees and subsequent sawing. Further species still are killed by loss of food resources and hollow resources. Why is it that we have very specific rules about the way cows, pigs, chickens, digs and cats may be killed but native animals, including the most threatened species, can be killed by crushing, sawing, chipping, starving with legal impunity? If the NSW government places real value on our wildlife, how are they allowed to be killed in these ways?

Large numbers of species are dependent on tree hollows. These may be almost invisible cracks (for bats and frogs) ranging through to large visible hollows such as those requires by gliding possums or owls. Current prescriptions are woefully inadequate and have no basis in science. How is it proven that retention of 8 or 10 hollow-bearing trees per hectare can sustain the 70+ species, many of whom require multiple hollows?

Iconic species such as Koalas are being driven to extinction by current forestry practices. The idea that 10 feed trees per hectare can sustain a population is ludicrous and again has no basis in science. The idea that a single tree, arbitrarily chosen, per 10,000 square metres in a landscape of obliteration, could meaningfully contribute to Koala conservation ought to be a source of shame to the NSW government.
The loss of hollow-bearing trees is contributing to the inexorable decline of numerous species and current forestry prescriptions do not encourage or provide for recruitment in a way that is mathematically or scientifically demonstrably capable of providing sufficient growth cycles to be even slightly realistic. It may take hundreds of years for individual trees to reach late maturity and forestry operations are running on shorter and shorter logging cycles, leading rapidly to a shrinking supply of habitat trees with no allowance for population growth.

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

Forest products have been woefully undervalued for decades and sold for lowest value and use such as woodchips, pallet timbers, stakes, etc.

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

Softwood plantations should be better resources and expanded. Hardwood plantations need to be expanded, but true plantations, not just re-mapped areas of areas that are mixed species hardwood forest re-mapped due to having some silivicultural treatment in the 1960s or 70s. Post harvest management needs to be properly resourced. Current methods of clearfelling then using aerial herbicide bombing to stop weeds is an environmentally irresponsible practices leading to toxic loading of ground and waterways.

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

Wood Supply Agreements have been show by IPART in some cases to produce low or even negative monetary outcomes since their rigidity, long contract terms and ridiculous distance and subsequent transport costs in some cases make loads not viable for mill operators. And therefore would have been economically and environmentally better off left in the ground.

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

Removal of biomass and its replacement by smaller and smaller trees and weeds is accelerating climate risk.