

# Public submission

SEAN BURKE

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

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To: Forestry Industry Action Panel  
(Online Submission)

From: Sean Burke

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

11 October 2024

Dear Panel,

Thank you for the opportunity to express my opinions on the future of the forestry industry in NSW. I have been involved in examining the practices of the Forestry Commission of NSW, now NSW Forestry Corporation, since 1988 when a logging operation was commenced on the slopes of a very sacred Aboriginal creation place, Gulaga, or Mt Dromedary as she was renamed by Lieutenant James Cook as he sailed up the NSW coast in 1770. There is an analysis of the failures of this operation contained in the report of Dr Deborah Bird Rose commissioned by NSW NPWS and the Forestry Commission of NSW released in 1990 called "Gulaga: A Report on the Significance of Mt Dromedary to Aboriginal People".

Over those last 36 years I have been appalled by the litany of disasters and errors in operations undertaken by the forest industries due to apparent incompetence, ignorance or just bloody mindedness that have ignored the mounting scientific evidence and caused irreparable damage to many of the ecosystems in our native forests.

I noted that the 5 yearly reviews under the Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) were not conducted as required until many years past their due dates and they ignored the input provided to them. I myself compiled an extensive list of breaches of licence conditions and legal actions over the first 10 years of the RFAs from NSW Environment Protection Authority annual reports, presented them to the first review (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> 5 years) and yet the number of breaches and illegal actions within our native forests have continued to this day, and I feel they may actually have increased.

It's definitely time to end the logging of our native forests as the damage done and continuing to be done is totally unacceptable.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

## **SUBMISSION TO THE FOREST INDUSTRY ACTION PLAN PANEL**

### **1. Sustainability of current and future forestry operations in NSW**

I support an immediate end to native forest logging and a future industry based on sustainable plantations. The current logging practices in our native forests are not sustainable and have significant negative impacts on the multiple ecosystems both within and outside of those forests:

- Many threatened and endangered species are heading rapidly towards extinction. This is particularly the case for koalas and gliders due to changes in feed trees and loss of hollows in old trees. There's an urgent need to end the logging of critical koala and glider habitat as soon as possible.
- Opening up the canopy within a native forest increases the intensity and likelihood of wildfire that results in long-term damage to the entire forest structure as was seen in the 2019/20 fires here on the south coast and elsewhere. The long-term impacts of those fires on timber supplies haven't even been assessed yet and Forestry Corp estimates of yields are regularly way out of the ballpark and have been for decades,
- Our native forests are wonderful carbon sinks that hold valuable carbon out of the atmosphere for centuries. Harvesting these forests results in the release of carbon that takes well over 100 years to be replaced by regeneration and with the current logging being driven by the woodchipping industry, much of the carbon is released into the atmosphere very quickly, thus contributing significantly to climate change. There is also no assessment of the impacts of climate change on the sustainability of the industry where increased drought, subsequent wildfires, and also huge rain events can be disastrous for a forest that has been opened up with exposed soil, often on significant slopes, causing unacceptable erosion downstream. Intact forests actually slow down the release of water after a rain event preventing erosion and siltation and helping supply reliable water resources downstream,
- The cost of continuing to log our native forest are prohibitive. For decades the operations of Forestry Corp have been subsidised by the NSW Government and this is definitely not sustainable. They have now combined the reporting of financial performance to hide the fact that the native forest industry incurs huge losses that are subsidised by the plantation industry, yet still the government has to prop them up.

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

- As mentioned in Point 1 above, many threatened and endangered species are heading rapidly towards extinction. Australia has the world record for the

extinction of species and this rate is still increasing. Native forest logging is a major contributor to this extinction and hopefully the operations of Forestry Corp under the RFAs will be brought back withing control of the Federal Government under the EP&BC Act where they should have been all along to arrest this unacceptable extinction rate,

- Our native forests have been an important cultural asset for Aboriginal people for thousands of years. They managed those forests for food, resources and reduced wildfire. Most native forests are littered with cultural artefacts built up over centuries but mostly hidden under ground litter. The survey work conducted to identify sites of significance to Aboriginal people are totally inadequate. They were based on an old survey conducted by Dr Denis Byrne in the Five Forests of NSW that predicted that sites would be located along ridgelines where nomadic people travelled. This has been proven to be a narrow interpretation, particularly by archaeologist Sue Feary, who showed that Aboriginal people also stayed in sites down close to water sources but Forestry Corp still use the inadequate outdated predicative model resulting in the destruction of many Aboriginal sites of significance,
- Pre-logging surveys by Forestry staff are totally inadequate for both threatened and endangered species and Aboriginal sites. I have been led to believe over the years that this inadequacy has been deliberate as they don't want the inconvenience of having to manage these discoveries,
- NSW State Forests are a cultural resource for the public to enjoy in many ways including bushwalking, horse riding, cycling, trailbike riding, rally driving and also just forest bathing. These experiences can be totally ruined by coming into an area of devastation following a logging operation. As mentioned in my cover letter, Gulaga is a very sacred Aboriginal creation place where people go on a pilgrimage trail and is now protected within Gulaga National Park. About 10 years ago a logging operation was conducted in the forest adjoining the park and this actually destroyed the experience of travelling to Gulaga due to the disturbance of the spiritual experience of the pilgrimage.

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

- There is no need to log public native forests to build houses as plantations can adequately supply our high quality and composite timber products. Most of our sawn timber is currently sourced from plantations and better management of our plantation resources can easily take up the small amount being sourced from native forests,
- Significant amounts of the timber harvested from plantations is exported unprocessed as whole logs. Ending this export would make better use of our

plantation resources to take up the small percentage currently supplied from native forests,

- Most of the timber harvested from our native forests is used for low value products such as woodchips, paper pulp, pallets and tomato stakes, hence the growing financial losses experienced by the native forest industry.

#### **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 is in plantations. The plantation industry is far more profitable, employs far more people, generates fewer GHG emissions, and is significantly less fire prone. The science tells us that better management of this resource can easily cover the small amount of building timbers being currently sourced from native forests,
- Some native forests are currently being wrongfully reclassified as plantations. This practice must stop immediately, and native forests must be managed as such.

#### **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**

- Given the history of NSW Forestry Commission and more recently Forestry Corporation of NSW in mismanaging our forests, I don't believe that they should be involved in managing our native forests in any way. I'd like to see them manage public plantations (real ones, not faux native forests) and provide consultancy advice to private plantation owners and managers. I feel that another department should be created to manage the delivery of these outcomes for the community with heavy involvement from Aboriginal people in that management,
- In this way, plantations could be managed by Forest Corp for the growing profits that they can generate, with those profits and some of the resources currently provided by the NSW State Government being fed back into the management of our native forests. There are also opportunities for income to be generated from providing services from this new management body to the wider community, e.g. cultural burning, horticulture etc.

#### **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 logged and regenerated native forests,
- Logging in native forests releases large amounts of carbon, especially when converted into disposable paper products, contributing to global warming,
- Stopping logging allows forests to recover, helping them store more carbon and support climate goals,
- Forests are essential to reducing the impacts of catastrophic climate events like bushfires and drought,
- It is unconscionable to delay an end to native forest logging so carbon and biodiversity markets can be explored. It is also unconscionable to protect publicly owned forests and make a genuine contribution to greenhouse gas reduction, only to see the climate benefits sold by state forest agencies to delay the exit from fossil fuels.
- The biodiversity benefits of intact native forests have been well documented. The best way to maintain the biodiversity values of native forests is to stop logging them, as is happening now in Victoria and Western Australia.