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

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Australia, the 7th most forested country globally, presents a curious paradox, a nation rich in forests yet facing a \$4 billion trade deficit due to the importation of timber and paper products. This dichotomy underscores the pressing need for sustainable forest management in New South Wales (NSW) and across Australia.

Australia is on the brink of a timber supply crisis, a situation exacerbated by increasing population pressures and lagging investments in plantation growth. By 2035, Australia's population is projected to reach at least 30 million, intensifying the demand for timber, particularly in housing construction and other wood products. Without a significant expansion in domestic timber production, Australia risks becoming heavily reliant on imports, introducing several challenges: Price Volatility and Competition: Imported timber is susceptible to fluctuating international prices, especially from emerging economies like China and Southeast Asia. This could lead to potential price hikes and supply disruptions.

Lower Standards of Imported Timber: Many imported timber products originate from regions with lower environmental and sustainability standards, heightening the risk of unsustainable practices.

Carbon Costs of Importation: The transportation of imported timber carries a significant carbon footprint, conflicting with Australia's goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Under current policies, domestic timber supply is expected to remain stagnant over the next decade, especially in softwood. Meanwhile, the domestic hardwood supply continues to decline as native forests are progressively removed from commercial production. This is particularly evident in state-owned forests, which previously supplied a significant portion of hardwood for various industries. Those jurisdictions are now increasingly importing their timber from State and overseas, with the associated increased costs and lower environmental standards than our own. The most alarming aspect is the lack of growth in plantation areas. Sawn timber from hardwood plantations typically takes at least 40-60 years to mature. Decisions made today will not yield tangible timber supplies for decades, necessitating immediate action to expand plantation areas, particularly those producing sawlogs, to meet future demands.

Sustainable forest management transcends timber production, balancing ecological, economic, and social values. Well-managed forests, such as those in NSW, play a critical role in mitigating climate change. Timber, a renewable resource, provides an environmentally friendly alternative to construction materials like concrete and steel, which have higher carbon footprints.

Additionally, sustainably managed forests contribute to biodiversity by providing habitats for various species, ensuring that forests remain a viable resource for future generations.

To avert the looming timber crisis and ensure the sustainability of NSW forestry, several steps must be taken:

Expand Conservation Where Needed: Focus on adding forests to the conservation reserve system that are underrepresented, rather than continuing to remove timber production forests already well-represented in conservation areas. This balanced approach allows for continued timber production without compromising biodiversity conservation.

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**Increase Planted Forests:** Urgent investment is required to expand the area of planted forests, especially for sawlog production. This necessitates government incentives, private investment, and land availability.

**Promote World-Class Forestry Practices:** While Australia already leads in sustainable forestry practices, continuous improvement is essential. Meeting or exceeding global best practices ensures that Australian forestry remains competitive and sustainable in the long run.

**Embrace Active Forest Management:** Changing the narrative around forest management to one of active and adaptive strategies is crucial. Implementing practices that address current challenges, including pests, diseases, and climate change, ensures that forests remain resilient, productive, and diverse.

Technological advancements are pivotal in making forestry operations more efficient, sustainable, and responsive to ecological needs. The potential for growth in Australia's forest industries, driven by innovation, is enormous. Cutting-edge technologies already in use include:

**Drones and Lasers:** These technologies assist in mapping, monitoring forest health, and improving resource allocation.

**Infrared Sensors and 3D Imaging:** These provide critical data on forest biomass, guiding managers in making informed decisions.

**Advanced Tree Breeding:** Innovations in tree breeding are enhancing forest productivity, enabling trees to grow faster and stronger in varied environmental conditions.

Additionally, DNA timber profiling now allows for tracing timber products back to their forest of origin, combating illegal logging and ensuring supply chain transparency. These technologies help minimise the environmental impact of forestry while improving sustainability by maximising wood resources and protecting ecosystems.

For NSW forestry to thrive, investment in the people managing these technologies and forests is crucial. Degree programs in forest science, environmental management, and biodiversity conservation are vital in training the next generation of forest managers, scientists, and policymakers. Ensuring a well-trained workforce is key to maintaining and enhancing sustainable forest management practices.

Sustainable forest management in NSW is not just possible; it is essential for Australia's future.

With a growing population and increasing timber demand, proactive steps must be taken to expand plantations, advance technologies, and invest in skilled workers. Australia has the opportunity to set a global standard in forestry, but immediate action is necessary to prevent a future timber supply crisis.

With the right policies, investments, and innovations, NSW forestry can continue to provide essential timber for housing and other needs while protecting biodiversity and contributing to climate change mitigation. The time to act is now to ensure that forests remain a sustainable resource for generations to come.

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

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NSW's native forests house a vast array of endangered species, dependent on the forests for existence. The CAR conservation reserve network is instrumental in protecting these species. However, safeguarding biodiversity is not limited to simply designating land as reserves. Actively managing these forests is critical to deflect threats such as wildfires, invasive species, and climate change, which can jeopardize biodiversity even in protected zones.

Sustainable timber harvesting and biodiversity conservation can coexist when conducted following scientific standards and adaptive silviculture. Modern forest management takes a comprehensive approach, concentrating on long-term results that balance production and preservation of biodiversity values. For example, adaptive silviculture can stimulate the growth of

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old-growth forest features faster than natural regeneration, enhancing habitat for species reliant on these aspects.

Although timber harvesting can have localized effects, rigorous forest management practices can alleviate these impacts, enhancing the overall resilience of forest ecosystems. Significantly, excluding timber production from native forests does not secure biodiversity protection. In the absence of active management, forests stay susceptible to threats such as wildfires and invasive species, thereby affecting conservation initiatives.

NSW's forests, endowed with invaluable environmental and cultural values, can sustain through sustainable management as precious ecosystems that harmonize production with conservation. Incorporating traditional Indigenous fire management practices with contemporary forest management techniques promises to enhance both ecological results and the preservation of cultural heritage. Amid challenges like climate change and evolving land use priorities, a comprehensive, adaptive approach to forest management is pivotal, privileging both the environment and the communities dependent on it.

In carefully regulated frameworks, sustainable timber output can co-exist alongside environmental preservation. Responsible Wood/PEFC and the Forest Stewardship Council have designed certification systems to guarantee the sustainable handling of forests. These systems ascertain forestry activities, inclusive of timber output, are carried out with negligible damage to biodiversity and acute attention to environmental sustainability.

However, aligning the production and conservation uses of native forests presents continuing dilemmas. The conversion of vast portions of native forests into reserves has induced uncertainty about future timber stocks. Despite these hurdles, proactive forest management can aid in warding off damaging wildfires and managing invasive species and feral animals.

Indigenous Australians hold a profound connection to the land, and their understanding of forest ecosystems has been fundamental to the sustainable administration of these locales for millennia. A major part of this cultural wisdom is the custom of traditional fire management, or "cultural burning," recognized as an effective approach for sustaining ecosystem health and curbing wildfire risks.

Traditional cultural burning has acquired recognition for its role in preventing bushfires, post the disastrous bushfire season of 2019-20. Cultural burning in southeastern Australia, a region with high population density, mixed-use landscapes, and complex topographies, is challenging. Here, it requires close evaluation of property risks and fuel loads, best suited to specific forest types, working in concert with the state's existing prescribed burning programs.

Incorporating Indigenous fire management strategies also leads to the rejuvenation of Indigenous cultural heritage, making a crucial contribution. Inviting Indigenous rangers and heritage officers to participate in forest management provides a vehicle for Indigenous societies to reclaim their traditional wisdom and perpetuate the cultural practices that have nourished Australia's forests for ages.

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

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The demand for timber products across a variety of sectors in NSW is at an unprecedented high, fuelled by the ever-growing needs of the housing, construction, mining, transport, and retail industries. As a crucial resource for the building industry, the current timber shortage poses a significant challenge due to Australia's history of underinvestment in softwood plantations and a reduction in log supply from native forests. This shortage is further exacerbated by our dependence on imported timber, given constraints on the global supply, logistical issues, and an increased domestic demand, particularly in the new housing boom.

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This situation is made even more critical with the recent bushfires that devastated softwood and hardwood plantations, making it essential for us to focus on replanting these areas while also expanding our plantation estates around existing timber industries. Without this concerted effort, our dependency on imported timber will only increase, posing both economic and environmental risks due to unpredictable supply, price spikes, and the carbon emissions from shipping. To alleviate this situation, we must increase domestic timber production through expansion of our plantations, potentially funded by institutional superannuation funds. This is further supported by the recent interest from US companies in forestry as a sustainable revenue stream. The adoption of engineered wood for mid-rise construction presents an exciting opportunity not only to address the timber shortage, but also as a means to mitigate climate change. These engineered wood products, while offering a faster construction time and cost savings, also reduce the carbon footprint of construction projects compared to traditional materials and offer health benefits associated with improved air quality and a more natural aesthetic. However, to fully realise the potential of engineered wood, we need to increase our manufacturing capabilities for products like CLT, LVL, and Glulam. Current limitations mean we have to depend on imports for these, so research and development into improving production methods for domestic wood species is crucial. In addition, timber continues to play a crucial role in infrastructure projects, and innovations like engineered LVL beams and plywood bridge decking present sustainable alternatives that meet the needs of transport and infrastructure sectors. Facing a critical junction in meeting the increasing demand for timber products, the need for urgent action is clear. The expansion of our plantation estates and development of domestic manufacturing capacity will position us as leaders in sustainable construction, reduce our dependence on imports, ensure our housing and infrastructure needs are met, and foster innovation in sustainable building materials.

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

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Amidst a looming timber supply crunch in Australia, the importance of softwood and hardwood plantations is prime for addressing the expanding timber need. The country's burgeoning population, fuelling development in construction, infrastructure and other timber-reliant sectors, is stretching the availability of both types of wood.

Softwood Plantations forms Australia's timber supply backbone, fulfilling the housing and construction sectors' needs. These plantations are vital for structural timber production, a primary necessity for home building. As housing demand spikes, especially in NSW, the role of softwood plantations in delivering affordable and sustainable building materials increases. However, Australia's softwood plantation estate hasn't matched the escalating timber demand. Limited expansion over the last two decades has resulted in a supply deficit, a concern considering the rising structural timber call in the housing sector. The bushfires of 2019/2020 caused considerable damage to NSW's softwood plantations.

Restoring these areas and expanding around existing hubs is pivotal to a stable domestic timber supply in the future. Without an urgent boost in softwood plantation expansion, Australia runs the risk of overdependence on timber imports, bringing economic and environmental perils, like price instability and carbon footprint from international shipping. The solution lies in expanding softwood plantations for meeting escalating usage in domestic housing, construction, and other wood-dependent sectors.

Though not as sizeable as softwood, hardwood plantations carry weight in NSW's timber industry. These plantations, however, aren't as established, mainly focusing on woodchips production instead of structural timber. Species like *Eucalyptus dunnii* were primarily grown for pulp, with

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scarce structural timber usage. Expansion of hardwood plantations for structural timber is challenged by hardwood species' long growth cycle. Unlike softwoods, hardwoods often take longer to mature, causing a delay in the market availability. Any expansion now will only begin to satisfy demand in several decades. Despite these hurdles, hardwood plantations hold significant future potential. R&D investment is essential to enhancing hardwood species' viability for engineered wood products like Cross-Laminated Timber (CLT) and Laminated Veneer Lumber (LVL).

PNF should not be seen as the solution for Government's seeking to appease voters by exiting public native timber harvesting. There is already another sector of the timber industry in NSW that currently relies, often exclusively, on the PNF resource for its timber. Seeking to move current contractual obligations with industry from the public estate to private property will only increase the pressure on those forests.

However, investment does need to be made in reinvigorating PP forests to a healthy growing state where they have been high-graded in the past through lack of market access to markets for low-value residues, etc. To maximise PNF's potential, greater support for landowners in training, market access, and incentives for sustainable forest management is needed. Governments and industry stakeholders should collectively develop policies that motivate landowners to invest in PNF and adopt best forest management practices. This includes financial incentives for replanting, enhancing access to certification programmes like PEFC/Responsible Wood and FSC, and ensuring environmental compliance by PNF operations. Similarly, the regulatory duplication of dual consent by local Government for PNF needs to be removed.

#### **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**

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State forests play an instrumental role in offering a plethora of environmental, economic, and social advantages, managed under various dynamic strategies. These tactics incorporate Aboriginal forest management models, gaining recognition for their effectiveness in sustainable land management. By adaptively managing state forests, we not only ensure sustained timber production but also promote biodiversity, manage fire risks, facilitate cultural pursuits, and contribute to wider social and economic benefits for local communities.

State forests are paramount in maintaining the ecological equilibrium, promoting biodiversity, and contributing pivotal ecosystem services. By managing forests actively, including selective timber harvesting, we intensify structural diversity across forest landscapes, fostering habitats for a multitude of plant and animal species. Active forest management and thinning also reduce risks tied to dense vegetation, thereby nurturing biodiversity and curtailing fire risks.

State forests have always been a fundamental element of regional economies, promoting not only timber production but also a broad spectrum of socio-economic activities. State-managed forestry operations play a key role in fire management, offering a significant workforce and expertise for wildfire prevention and control. This is crucial in a country like Australia with an increasing frequency and intensity of wildfires. By locally managing timber production, we can decrease our dependency on imported timber and support our own economy, all while adhering to our broader environmental objectives.

State forest management excels in lowering the risk of devastating wildfires. Employing active forest management strategies like controlled burns helps maintain biodiversity and mitigate fire hazards. Utilising Aboriginal forest management models, especially cultural burning techniques, are integral in current fire management strategies, reducing fuel loads, maintaining ecological balance, and providing employment and cultural rehabilitation opportunities.

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State forests provide a variety of social benefits, including eco-tourism, education, hiking, and camping opportunities. Incorporating Aboriginal forest management models into state forest governance structures provide substantial social and cultural advantages, fostering cultural heritage, reconciliation efforts, and employment opportunities.

State forests are managed adaptively and dynamically, catering to the evolving challenges of climate change, fire risks, and biodiversity conservation. Incorporating Aboriginal management models allows for a holistic approach using traditional ecological knowledge and modern scientific principles.

State forests are an invaluable asset providing a host of environmental, economic, and social outcomes. The active, adaptable, and inclusive management of state forests is key in securing their long-term survival and maximizing the benefits they provide for all Australians.

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**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**

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As recognised by the UN, actively and sustainably managed forests, which generate carbon-storing timber products, is our best tool in the fight against climate change.

The Regional Forest Agreements were agreed to in the late 90's/early 2000's "to find a balance between ecologically sustainable forest management, a sustainable timber industry (and regional economies) and a comprehensive, adequate and representative conservation reserve system. Neither side was happy (the timber industry was halved overnight) but both declared that the forest wars were over (e.g. Dailan Pugh and Bob Debus). Now 20 years later, when the RFA's were to be renewed, those same people who declared the forest wars over from the conservation movement want the rest.

In regard to forestry and the timber industry on the NSW north coast:

- 3 million hectares of public forest on the north coast
- 88% is already managed for conservation and only 12% is available for timber harvesting, and those operations are spread both spatially and through time.
- On average, just 6 trees in 10,000 are harvested each year and then regenerated (a condition of the Coastal IFOA). However, even within the areas to be harvested, extensive seasonal surveys are undertaken to determine what flora and fauna species are present or likely to occur and operations are planned to minimise any impacts on those species. Species conservation requires management at the landscape scale, not at the micro or individual scale. BioDIVERSITY by its very definition requires a variety of species compositions, structural variations, etc. The more diverse the environment from old growth to young regenerating trees, the greater the benefits for the widest range of plant and animal species. Timber harvesting by its very nature provides that biodiversity by creating a mosaic of stand structures, age classes and feed sources whilst maintaining tree species composition.
- The north coast timber industry employs 5,700 people in forest management, timber harvesting, transport and processing and creates \$1.8 Billion in economic activity each year.
- NSW North Coast currently supply ¼ of the State's hardwood

In regard to forestry, koalas and the proposed Great Koala National Park on the NSW north coast:

- NSW DPI Forest Science has identified more than 1.5 Million hectares of moderate to high quality koala habitat across the NSW north coast. Only 17% of this area burnt in severe wildfire in 2019/20.

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- 83% of the best koala habitat on NSW public forest is already in reserves and the remaining 17% on state forest is critical to timber supply.
  - More than half (54%) of the best koala habitat is on private or council lands.
  - Extensive field studies by DPI Forest Science Unit found NO significant difference in Koala occupancy between logged or unlogged areas and even State forests or National Parks ([https://urldefense.com/v3/\\_\\_https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/forestry/science/koala-research\\_\\_;!!LBk0ZmAmG\\_H4m2o!qWN7EXF-85WbCp66lkCmCowQ0Ru7j\\_MDks5Y9jTFV6G9WxpsQZRev3YBBs6BoKNBP\\_-XmXnmlxqqdwl-z7bISQ\\$](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/forestry/science/koala-research__;!!LBk0ZmAmG_H4m2o!qWN7EXF-85WbCp66lkCmCowQ0Ru7j_MDks5Y9jTFV6G9WxpsQZRev3YBBs6BoKNBP_-XmXnmlxqqdwl-z7bISQ$)).
  - If Koala hubs only make up 5% of the proposed GKNP, why lock up the other 95%, which will cost 5,700 jobs and \$1.8 billion in economic activity each year?<https://nenswforestryhub.com.au/news-reports/reports/report/6-economic-contribution-of-the-nsw-hardwood-timber-industry>.