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

What is sustainability? The most simple definition is 'the ability to be maintained at a certain rate or level' (Oxford Dictionary) although the UN definition is 'meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.' By either definition current forestry operations are not sustainable. From the most basic metrics of log size and volume, the industry has been in steady decline for decades. It's heyday was the massive oldgrowth trees, one or two to a truck. Now they are mostly gone. Current logging focuses on removing the mature trees (see most current harvest plans for products to be removed). But in forests such as Yarratt and Kiwarra and other of the coastal forests that have been picked over for decades, there is scarcely a mature tree left, and hollow-bearing trees are non-existent. The trees are getting smaller and smaller. And so too is the available habitat for many of our unique wildlife.

The policy of the 1960's and 1970s known as 'Timber Stand Improvement' saw most of the big old hollow trees removed to make way for young trees, because the hollow bearing trees were considered worthless, and casting too much shade. This has meant that the hollow-dependent fauna, and there are 174 species of hollow dependent fauna in NSW, have no home in those forests and are thus absent. The large arboreal mammals such as the Yellow-bellied Glider and the Greater Glider, and the large forest owls: Sooty, Powerful, Masked and Barking Owl are now absent. So forestry is clearly not sustaining biodiversity.

Forests, attract rain, and release molecules that help rain drops coalesce. When the forest is old enough, 80 years or more, it stores much of the rain in the soil. The wet sclerophyll forests of the east coast in their oldgrowth state, hold and release enough water to keep the mighty rivers flowing from the Great Dividing Range to the ocean. However the volume of water released by the forest decreases as more of the forest is made up of younger thirsty trees. Having a declining water yield is not sustainable in a drying climate.

Logging in north east NSW, with which I am most familiar, leaves about 60% of the tree in the forest (roots, stump, branches, offcuts). Of the 40% that is taken as logs, 50% goes as salvage. Of the 20% that goes to a sawmill to make a higher value product, 60% comes out as waste. (ABARES 2017 Wood Processing Report) So for your average tree only 8% ends up as sawn product. The wood left in the forest is burnt. The salvage goes into products like pallets and tomato stakes that have a short life span, and the sawmill waste goes to landscaping supplies. More than 90% of the carbon embodied in the logged tree is released back into the atmosphere in a few years. That is also not sustainable.

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

Forests are some of the most intact landscapes used by the first peoples of this land. They walked the ridge lines for tens of thousands of years for ceremony and trade. These are important cultural heritage sites in their entirety. It is offensive that only sites where there are tool scatters or scar trees are considered important. This country was colonised and the inhabitants

dispossessed, humiliated and brutalised. It is a tribute to the strength of their connection to country that so much of their culture has survived and is being revived.

Last week I was present when a senior Biripi custodian asked the regional FCNSW managers who had done the cultural heritage surveys for Biripi country currently being logged, Bulga and Kiwarrak. The response was someone completely unknown to this elder who has spent the last 40 years working in Biripi organisations in the Manning valley.

Earlier in the year I talked to the program manager of a mainly Indigenous youth program. He told me how tragic it was to take the young people to see some of their special places, connect them to country and then drive home through Yarratt State Forest and see it being trashed. One of the kids was in tears.

Current forestry practices do not respect aboriginal culture or heritage.

However the option being put forward that aboriginal people be given management of State Forests is disingenuous at best. The NSW Government has a policy of joint management of national parks with aboriginal people, although only 30% of the estate is currently managed as such. There is clearly no capacity in aboriginal organisations to manage the public forest estate. It would be more appropriate for the Government to invest in housing, education and training so that more indigenous people can take management positions. But mostly the management is tokenistic. And when it comes to forest management, this proposal is a stalking horse for logging companies to sidestep government and deal directly with aboriginal corporations that are desperate for money and see logging revenue as one of the few options to generate income. This is the case in Victoria, and the new ascendancy of the 'forest gardening' concept that has been scientifically refuted by Professor David Lindenmayer in his latest book 'The Forest Wars'. The forests look nothing like what they did 200 years ago, when they were dominated by large trees, holding more moisture and much more fire resistant. This needs to be considered when trying to apply practices from the past.

Cultural burning only occurred in selected parts of the landscape. It didn't occur in the tall wet forests. It didn't burn the leaves on the trees (according to Uncle Dave Wandin, cultural burning practitioner in Victoria).

Every year new species and ecological communities are added to the threatened species list for both NSW and Australia. Species already on the list as Vulnerable such as the Koala and the Greater Glider were recently uplisted to Endangered. And yet this triggered no change to the NSW logging rules. One would have thought that with the uplisting would come recognition of the need to protect the individuals, for this one needs to look for them. Since 2018 and the revision of the Integrated Forestry Operation Approvals, there has no requirement to look for Koalas prior to logging (or most other threatened fauna). Koala high use trees are no longer identified and protected. Trees marked for retention can be as small as 20cm diameter at breast height (DBH). Despite work by Koala experts such as Dr Steve Phillips that Koalas prefer trees 30-80cm DBH. While pro-forestry scientist Dr Brad Law says Koalas aren't impacted by logging and this is parroted by organisations such as the Natural Resources Council, other scientists, for example Dr Andrew Smith and Dr Steve Phillips have disputed this. Law's work is based on song meters which pick up the bellows of male koalas. Not surprisingly this tells us nothing about female koalas, whether they are breeding or not, where they are living etc. It only tells us there are males moving through the forest looking for females. As a female I am incredulous that any scientist would draw conclusions for a population, that excludes all the females but then again I'm not surprised. It's more than 30 years since the principles of inter-generational equity and the precautionary principle were adopted at the Rio Earth Summit and yet in NSW forestry, they are non-existent. You can't have intergenerational equity when the size of trees for the next 100 years will be unable to sustain the full suite of forest life. Similarly, the precautionary principle demands that if

logging might be destroying our catchments and future water supply, running down carbon stores, driving species towards extinction then it shouldn't be happening.

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

The overwhelming volumes of timber used in NSW and in Australia for housing come from plantation pine. The modern house has no hardwood. There are now wonderful products to replace hardwood flooring, such as solid bamboo. Bamboo is actually harder and more durable than eucalypt hardwood and grows in a matter of months rather than decades. Composite wood products, cross laminated timbers, are now stronger and more reliable in their strength ratings than hardwood beams, which are impossible to get in the sizes that cross laminated beams can be produced. Eucalypt plantations that are overwhelmingly grown for pulp are capable of producing timber for pallets, if other products are unsatisfactory. But destroying native forests for pallets is immoral. Most mines no longer use pit props, and again, there are now other products that can adequately replace hardwood for that purpose.

The real shortage of timber is in the plantation softwoods. Australia imports pine from NZ. Clearly there are opportunities for the expansion of the pine plantation estate, close to the mills and manufacturing centres that utilise it.

A future forestry industry will be based around better planning, siting and utilisation of pine plantations.

The future for eucalypt pulp is likely to become uncompetitive as the enormous eucalypt plantations in Asia and South America and Southern Africa are closer to trading partners and can produce greater volumes of reliable quality than what comes from NSW.

While the figures are opaque, it seems that much of the biomass of eucalypt plantation in NSW is burnt for electricity generation. Hardly an argument for supporting such plantations when this fuel source pollutes at a level worse than a coal fired power station.

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

There is clearly a future in plantation softwood. It is the division of the Forestry Corporation that actually makes a profit. This is because it can be managed intensively and is grown close to where it is utilised.

The hardwood plantations scattered through the native forests, which was native forest until they were converted to plantations, should be converted back to native forests. In some cases this might involve some genuinely selective logging of the non endemic species. But native forests should not be pockmarked with clearfells.

The Forestry Corporation (previously Commission) is renown for its history of appalling silviculture experiments. There was the Timber Stand Improvement process, that cut out all the habitat trees, Gaps and Clusters, Australian Group Selection etc that all have failed. There is no evidence that if you are growing a plantation for sawlogs, the best management technique is clearfelling. While this works for pine, eucalypts grown for sawlogs need longer. It's highly possible that if the desired end product is a sawlog, then selectively logged wood lots are likely to yield better results than clearfells.

Private Native Forestry needs to be better regulated, and landholders offered incentives to retain the forest for conservation purposes that make it competitive in the long run with logging that in the end usually leaves a degraded landscape with a one off payment. At a forum in Wauchope a few years ago, two people both shared stories of having some of their forest logged by private contractors and how angry and disappointed they were by the outcomes.

If native species are to survive we must build connectivity into the landscape, which means we must find economically viable ways to encourage landholders to not degrade forests where it is part of a wildlife corridor.

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

State Forests under Forestry Corporation management are trashing aboriginal heritage, environmental values, running at a loss and are an economic basket case and have no social licence.

The NPWS Act allows for a range of reserve tenures that include recreation. There is little point creating another bureaucracy, but clearly the NPWS needs to be much better funded and reorganised to allow for a more comprehensive land estate, which is planned to maintain and enhance environmental values, better accommodate the growing recreational needs of the community, plans for increasing aboriginal co-management, effectively deals with invasive species and provides education and training facilities for students of all ages to develop their nature connection and resilience and lessen their dependencies.

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

The best way to realise carbon and biodiversity benefits in fact rather than on paper, is to stop the degradation resulting from logging.

Degraded forests are at much greater risk of catastrophic fire damage than unlogged older forests.