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

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Plantation timber is the only viable path toward a sustainable timber industry. Logging in native forests whether in state-owned areas or through private native forestry agreements is fundamentally unsustainable. Given the escalating threats to our environment, including more frequent extreme weather events and rampant land clearing, it is crucial to safeguard the remaining patches of biodiversity. As highlighted in the Foreword to the Independent Review into the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 by Ken Henry, "Biodiversity is not being conserved at bioregional or state scale. The diversity and quality of ecosystems are not being maintained, nor is their capacity to adapt to change and meet the needs of future generations being enhanced.. Similarly, Professor Samuel's Independent Review into the EPBC Act echoes these concerns, noting that "Australia's natural environment and iconic places are in an overall state of decline and are under increasing threat. The current environmental trajectory is unsustainable." The overwhelming feedback from the review emphasises that Australians deeply value their unique environment and iconic landscapes, highlighting the imperative to protect and conserve these resources for current and future generations. The evidence presented is compelling: Australia's natural ecosystems are deteriorating, facing significant pressures from land-use changes, habitat loss and degradation, as well as the impact of invasive species. Climate change further exacerbates these challenges, diminishing the resilience of our environment to withstand ongoing threats. Therefore, the removal of any native forests only serves to accelerate this decline and cannot be justified as sustainable.

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

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Native forests are not only vital for their ecological functions but are also woven deeply into the social fabric of our communities. These natural landscapes offer a wide range of physical and mental health benefits, providing people with opportunities for recreation, relaxation, and emotional renewal. They serve as spaces for personal reflection, artistic inspiration, and creative expression, contributing to the cultural richness of the regions surrounding them. Native forests foster social interaction and community bonding through activities such as bushwalking, cycling, and horse riding, which in turn generate economic opportunities when promoted as eco-tourism destinations. In addition to recreation, forests can also play an educational role, with interpretative signage offering insights into their biodiversity, cultural heritage, and historical significance. Forests preserve not only our environmental heritage but also Aboriginal cultural sites and other important landmarks that embody the areas history and connection to the land. From an ecological perspective, forests are critical habitats for a wide variety of plant and animal species, many of which are threatened or endangered. These ecosystems play an essential role in maintaining the delicate balance of biodiversity, but this balance is increasingly at risk due to logging, land clearing, and the escalating effects of climate change, such as more frequent and intense bushfires. The devastating 2019-2020 bushfire season, as documented in the NSW Fire and the Environment Summary (DPIE, 2020), underscored the scale of this threat, with 42% of

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state forests affected by fires. These fires impacted 202 threatened animal species and 398 threatened plant species, highlighting the fragility of these ecosystems. Equally important are the cultural values forests hold, especially for Indigenous communities, where forests serve as sacred spaces that carry deep spiritual and historical significance. These forests often contain Aboriginal heritage sites, offering tangible connections to traditional knowledge and land management practices passed down through generations. Protecting these areas ensures that cultural practices and stories are preserved for future generations. Maintaining and expanding our native forests, therefore, is not only essential for biodiversity and climate resilience but also for honouring and protecting these cultural legacies.

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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 NSW timber industry is at a pivotal moment as it makes the shift to plantation timber, the only viable path towards a sustainable timber industry. It's time for the industry to embrace the principles of the circular economy (CE) as a future-forward economic model designed to be restorative and regenerative. The CE approach maintains the value of products, materials, and resources within the economy for as long as possible, significantly reducing reliance on the traditional linear model of "take-make-use-dispose."

This shift is not only critical for minimising waste but also for capitalising on the economic opportunities that arise from rethinking resource use. In the context of the timber industry, CE means prioritising prevention, reduction, recycling, and reuse. It challenges the practice of burning wood chips for electricity generation, as such an approach is neither sustainable nor resource efficient. Instead, the focus must shift toward extending the lifecycle of timber products through recycling and reusing materials that would otherwise be discarded.

There is a strong case for the timber industry to explore how increasing demand for recycled timber can be fostered. By developing innovative strategies to reuse and repurpose wood, the industry can reduce its environmental footprint while meeting the needs of various sectors. By embracing CE, the NSW timber industry can position itself as a leader in sustainable practices, create new markets for recycled timber, and enhance long-term economic, environmental, and social benefits across the state.

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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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The future of a sustainable timber industry relies solely on plantation timber. Private Native Forestry (PNF) is not a viable long-term option, especially in areas like Kyogle LGA, where conflicting priorities threaten both ecological and economic goals.

The Local Strategic Planning Statement (LSPS) highlights this tension. Priority A4 aiming to create conditions that support forestry development clashes directly with Priority D1, which prioritises environmental protection and biodiversity enhancement. Priority D1's action statements make it clear that protecting ecosystems, particularly through steps such as preparing biodiversity overlays (D1.1) and strengthening koala habitat protection (D1.3), are key objectives. Yet, the current push for PNF in our LGA undermines these commitments.

Support for PNF will inevitably lead to habitat fragmentation, loss of biodiversity, and conflict with efforts to safeguard high-value environments. Accurate biodiversity mapping, which Kyogle Council acknowledges as critical for protecting vulnerable habitats, is still in progress and has been delayed due to the ongoing Private Native Forestry Planning Proposal. This delay in environmental assessment jeopardises meaningful conservation efforts and exposes critical habitats to avoidable degradation.

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The example of the PNF operation near Border Ranges National Park in 2023 demonstrates the inadequacies in PNF management and regulation. Despite the penalties and warnings issued, violations such as the felling of trees across unmapped drainage lines and within riparian exclusion zones suggest that current oversight is insufficient. This lack of compliance ensures that environmental protections remain secondary to economic interests. Plantation timber provides a path forward, offering a controlled, renewable, and sustainable timber supply without the ecological damage linked to PNF. The future of timber supply must lie in forestry practices that align with long-term environmental and community interests, rather than exploitative short-term economic gains.

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**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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Intact state forests are essential for delivering a wide range of environmental, social, and economic benefits. Ecologically, they serve as critical habitats for numerous species, many of which are threatened or endangered. Given that as of August this year, 2118 species of our native species and 103 ecological communities were listed as threatened under national environmental law it is imperative that we protect our existing forests. They play a vital role in supporting biodiversity, yet their delicate ecosystems face increasing pressure from deforestation, logging, and the impacts of climate change.

Further the forestry industry is heavily reliant on government subsidies to remain viable. Redirecting these funds towards the protection and regeneration of state forests would not only yield greater social benefits but also open opportunities for exploring more sustainable and innovative economic models for managing our precious natural resources.

Culturally, state forests hold deep importance for Indigenous communities. These forests often contain sacred sites and are places of spiritual and historical meaning, linked to traditional knowledge and practices. Protecting these areas helps preserve Indigenous cultural heritage while also supporting sustainable land management practices. Aboriginal forest management models offer diverse approaches that integrate cultural values with environmental stewardship, emphasising the importance of preserving these forests for future generations.

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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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Opportunities to realise carbon and biodiversity benefits and support carbon and biodiversity markets, as well as to mitigate and adapt to climate change risks, are substantial when forests are left intact. Native forests, when preserved and allowed to naturally regenerate, provide a critical solution to both climate and biodiversity challenges. Protecting these ecosystems contributes to meeting emissions targets through natural carbon sequestration while safeguarding habitats for a wide range of species. The 2019-2020 bushfires highlighted the vulnerability of our forests to extreme weather events, with 42% of our state forests impacted. This devastation underscores the urgent need to protect these ecosystems, especially considering the 202 threatened animal species and 398 threatened plant species that were sited in these state forests and rely on these forests for survival.

By halting logging and allowing forests to regenerate, we enhance their ability to absorb greenhouse gases, store carbon, and buffer against the increasing severity of climate change. Forest ecosystems, in their natural state, offer greater resilience to extreme weather patterns, compared to areas that have been disturbed or degraded by logging and other human activities.

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They not only sequester carbon but also provide critical services such as water filtration, erosion control, and flood mitigation, all of which will become increasingly important in adapting to future climate risks. Protecting forests offers an opportunity to participate in emerging carbon and biodiversity markets, creating economic incentives for conservation efforts that align with both local environmental protection and broader global climate goals.

Given the significant biodiversity loss already observed, it is imperative that we prioritise the preservation and regeneration of these areas to ensure the survival of threatened species and mitigate the long-term impacts of climate change on our ecosystems.