

SUZANNE WALKER

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

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I fully support the end to native forest logging and a future based on sustainable plantations. Current and future forestry operations are unsustainable. I am qualified with a Bachelor of Science (Sydney University) and 35 years employed on NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) (recently retired). My extensive experience in forestry sustainability is demonstrated in my role as NPWS Manager in a diverse range of disciplines such as Aboriginal joint management - Indigenous Land Use Agreements, business plans, protected areas plans of management, state of the parks reports, weed and habitat restoration plans, fire management strategies, biodiversity assessments, threatened species recovery plans and forestry harvesting plan reviews and licensing. As Senior Naturalist and Threatened Species Manager, I managed the North East Forest Biodiversity Study, the first systematic regional flora and fauna survey and species modelling in NSW. The outcome formed the basis in the identification of a reserve system in north east NSW in the State and Commonwealth Government's Comprehensive Regional Assessment and Regional Forest Agreement. I also managed the NPWS forest assessment team reviewing Forestry Corporation's Harvesting Plans and scientific licences. Each harvesting plan was reviewed by this NPWS independent team for threatened species, habitat values and Aboriginal cultural heritage. Areas with high scientific and Aboriginal values were excluded for logging and site specific conditions were incorporated into the logging licence. Now, forestry undertake its own broad area searches to identify areas for protection. This has been proven to be ineffective. NPWS or DECCW must be immediately reinstated to provide the independent review of all logging schedules and harvesting plans with a dedicated team of scientists to undertake site specific surveys and assessments and provide protection areas and robust conditions to ensure sustainability of our forests.

Since my involvement with Government in managing forests assessments the sustainability of forestry operations has become dire with increased logging intensity, increased threatened species listings and increased climate change outcomes such as 2019/20 fires. Governments must immediately stop logging public native forests, it is causing extinctions, is unsustainable leading to permanent damage of our forests and costing taxpayers a fortune. We need to protect native forests for wildlife, recreation and our wellbeing, water yields, improving fire management, Aboriginal cultural heritage and connection and to take up our carbon emissions. We can meet our timber needs from existing plantations.

Forestry Corporation's estimates of sustained yields have been proven to be gross over-estimates, since 2010 yields from state forests have declined by 40% from 1.3 million tonnes down to 0.8 million tonnes in 2023, and are currently only 61% of claimed sustained yields, with the massive loss of resources in the 2019/20 fires yet to be factored in. It is a tree mining operation, that has only been able to be maintained by removing protections for most mature trees and increasing logging intensity in 2018. Logging of native forests is not sustainable as it reduces biomass and carbon storage, removes mature trees and their abundance of nectar and browse essential for many species, depletes oldgrowth trees and the hollows that 174 of NSW's species depend upon

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for dens and nests, increases fire threat and intensity, reduces stream flows, promotes weeds and dieback, and increases erosion and stream pollution.

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

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Forests provide habitat for many threatened species, if we want to save NSW's 269 nationally listed threatened forest species, including the endangered Koala and Greater Glider, it is essential that we stop logging their habitat. Species continue to be listed as threatened and increasingly more species are Endangered, the current system isn't working to protect environmental and cultural values. Urgent action is needed to end native forest logging now, as forests provide essential habitat for species, recreation with improved health outcomes for people and regional economies and the best opportunity to protect Aboriginal cultural heritage values to improve connection to country.

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

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Native hardwoods comprised 2.4 million (9%) of Australia's log production of 25 million cubic metres in 2023, with half this exported as woodchips. Saw and veneer logs comprised just 8% of the 8.5 million cubic metres of logs obtained from hardwood plantations, with 87% exported as woodchips. There is no longer any need to log public native forests to build houses. With a change in emphasis we can satisfy our hardwood needs with sawn timber and composite timber products from existing plantations. As a homeowner it has been easy and cost effective to source composite timber products for flooring and decking.

## **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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Hardwood and softwood plantations already provide 91% of Australia's log production. The proportion of saw and veneer logs obtained from hardwood plantations needs to be increased, rather than being exported as woodchips. Without competition from subsidised public forests there will be an increased incentive for selective logging of speciality purpose hardwoods from private forests.

## **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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There are 2 million hectares of State Forests in NSW that provide water for numerous town reservoirs, have the potential to contribute to increased tourism, and take-up and store carbon. All these real economic benefits will improve if logging is stopped. In 2023 Forestry Corporation lost \$15 million on their hardwood operations, that's a cost of \$1,281 for each hectare logged. This is despite being paid \$31 million for their community service obligations that year, and obtaining tens of millions in regular equity injections. We should not be paying to degrade forests and log the homes of threatened species. Public forests are of greater economic benefit for water yields, tourism and carbon storage than they are for logging. It is in the best interest of taxpayers to stop logging of public native forests. Aboriginal Ranger Programs have been hugely successful at managing the recovery and health of native forests. Programs like the Arakwal National Park and Githabul Rangers have shown how Aboriginal knowledge and management can restore the natural and critical function of forests in the landscape. Arakwal National Park Indigenous Land Use Agreement has been recognised internationally by the IUCN Green Listing. The Green List Sustainability Standard that provides a global benchmark for how to meet the environmental

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challenges of the 21st century. To address the mounting challenges to nature, and achieve a positive foundation for meeting the Sustainable Development Goals, we need to protect our forests and end native forest logging now.

**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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Native forest logging in NSW releases 3.6 million tonnes of carbon (CO<sub>2</sub>e) per year, which is equivalent to the annual emissions of 840,000 cars. The volume of carbon stored in logged forests has been more than halved. Stopping logging will enable forests to regain their lost carbon and make a significant contribution to meeting our climate targets. As shown by the 2019/20 wildfires, increasing droughts and fires due to climate heating are already having a significant impact on trees, forest species and rainforests. It is essential that logging stop to allow forests to reduce the impacts of climate heating by removing CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere, and recover their integrity to better withstand future disasters.