Independent Forestry Panel

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

SUE HIGGINSON MLC

INDEPENDENT FORESTRY PANEL:	MR PETER DUNCAN AM (CHAIR) PROFESSOR MARY O'KANE AC THE HON. MICK VEITCH
INDEPENDENT FORESTRY PANEL SECRETARIAT:	CLARE MILLER CALLUM FIRTH
ATTENDEES	SUE HIGGINSON MLC
LOCATION:	PARLIAMENT OF NSW - ROOM 814; 6 MACQUARIE STREET, SYDNEY NSW 2000
DATE:	WEDNESDAY, 16 OCTOBER 2024

<THE MEETING COMMENCED

MR PETER DUNCAN: Mary's not coming until quarter to two, she's got something else [non-transcribable]. So she was going to try and here but –

MS SUE HIGGINSON: Okay.

MR DUNCAN: But we're doing this all afternoon anyway. Mick's [non-transcribable here. Look, I think the important thing – the message we have today is we want to hear from you to start with, that's the important reason we're here for all the members. Our role is not to do the Forestry Industry Action Plan. Our role is really to facilitate stakeholder engagement and to give the government a report on that engagement process when they consider Forest Industry Action Plan, potentially the Great Koala National Park and [non-transcribable] use around that.

So we are really working – facilitate is one word but also almost a moderator to try and find fact from fiction and I say that not deliberately negatively, there is a lot of discussion and there's polarising debate. Let's find some common ground here in the engagement to see if government can then find a way through the action plan. That probably is as best we can get [non-transcribable]. So that's really our objective. The Independent Planning Commission, Callum Firth and Clare Miller.

MS HIGGINSON: Yes. Hello, IPC folk.

MR DAN REID: Hi people I spoke to.

MS HIGGINSON: Yes, yes.

MR DUNCAN: And the reason they're involved is probably got myself and Mary to blame but when we were asked to do this, we needed somebody that would make [non-transcribable] and they do it all time. And we're using very much their process. So that's sort of us, if you like.

MS HIGGINSON: Yes.

MR DUNCAN: The important thing is we're taking written submissions and as of last Sunday, got 1,650.

MS HIGGINSON: Yes.

MR DUNCAN: We're getting some qualitative stakeholder research that was already [non-transcribable]. So we've had a lot of stakeholder meetings and research on news and media analytics and that's been – we're looking back about five years. We're going with the mainstream ones like Sydney Morning Herald, The Australian and the ABC.

MR REID: Could I ask, just around the qualitative analysis of public opinion, are you using any research that's been produced by polling companies previously for any stakeholder? From [non-transcribable].

MR DUNCAN: Stakeholders are encouraged to give us that and in fact we've got Frontier Economics, for example, there's a big piece of work that Frontier Economics have done for stakeholders in the past, that came in at the weekend. So we've got a lot. So all of that's coming in. It's a good point because we're asking people to validate or to give us some reason why their opinions are – about the [non-transcribable] process. So if there's a bit of research, how is that research quantified, how is it peer reviewed, did you publish it, is it real research or is it just an opinion?

So we're not trying to weight anything, we're not trying to – the words I used before were sort the wheat from the chaff and put some facts on the table and be able to hand that to government and say, "Our research said this. There's a range of issues this wide over here and there's some pieces here that we think people – there's some common ground." And I'll use one example, I'm not saying we're leaning towards that but when I'm looking at the early work, plantations seem to be a bit of common ground if they're done well.

So that's an example and maybe that's a way for the industry in the future. I'm not saying it is but that's what comes through when we talk to people in the process. So anything from Frontier Economics or StollzNow or whoever, it'll all come together in our work. We'll do a report and say, "Here it is."

MR REID: And that'll all be assessed for peer review for style of questions asked, information produced. Like, there will be that analysis of –

MR DUNCAN: We're using external parties, for example, to do some analysis on the media and things like that. We're not doing it all internally. But we're using the sort of established Independent Planning Commission processes. And I probably wanted to say too that most importantly we want to be transparent, so we're erring on the side of publishing everything we're doing rather than not. However, there's always confidentiality – there's always people that will say actually I prefer not to be public in my information. We'll take that into account.

When we went for submissions, for example, we asked people to submit in six particular areas because we thought they were the relevant areas that the government was interested in. So sustainability of current and future forestry operations, environmental cultural values, demand of timber products, future of softwood and hardwood plantations, roles of state forests in delivering a range of services and opportunities to realise carbon and biodiversity benefits. So we're asking for that and look, we've probably had, I don't know, 70% of them would probably be original submissions, which is pretty satisfying, rather than get –

MR REID: Form submissions?

MR DUNCAN: Yes. That's right. That's really not going to help us very much. And I think it's important also to say that we're talking to government agencies, we're talking to researchers, we're talking to people that others have asked us to talk to and I'll give you a list of stakeholders at the moment.

MR REID: Is it possible for us to get a printout of the slides that you're going through just so that –

MR DUNCAN: We'll put that on our site.

MS CLARE MILLER: I can also send it to you.

MR REID: That'd be fantastic. Thank you.

MS HIGGINSON: Yes, great.

MR REID: [non-transcribable] on the website.

MR DUNCAN: So when we talk to the timber industry, we've said to Timber New South Wales, well you come with a few people and tell us what you think. We're talking to the Softwoods Working Group, Australian Forest Products Association, with the environmental stakeholders –

MR REID: Thank you.

MR DUNCAN: – we're saying the same thing, come with a group of people, we're getting New South Wales Forest Alliance, Worldwide Fund for Nature, North Coast Environmental Council and the Conservation Council, Nature Conservation Council. And then Aboriginal stakeholders are our third stream and as you would imagine, that's not straightforward [redacted].

MS HIGGINSON: No.

MR DUNCAN: But maybe we can inform government of a way to do that in the future and how to start an engagement and keep it going. So we've got from Aboriginal Affairs about four different groups we'll talk to and if we can get to them, we'll then put in our report the best way to go about that.

MS HIGGINSON: There's also a lot of traditional custodians who are not associated with any of those groups who are very, very close to their forest environments.

MR DUNCAN: That's right, that's right.

MS HIGGINSON: Particularly the Gumbaynggir people, the Djangadi people, the Bundjalung people. And they won't engage with those larger groups.

MR DUNCAN: No, I know. And look, National Parks have their processes and I know Forest Corp or DPI have their processes but you're quite right. I know exactly

the issue you're talking about. So that's why we're not making any bold predictions about solid engagement there. What we're saying is we'll start a process and suggest a way forward and that's why Aboriginal Affairs is pretty important to us. Shane Hamilton has been giving us some advice on that.

MS HIGGINSON: Great.

MR DUNCAN: And there's a suggestion about Aboriginal forest management and that sort of thing in the future. It's what that means and what it means to them and what it means to government as well and how it's actually engaged. But I'm sure there's something there that can be teased out in the way the employment opportunities, whether that's environmental or economic, I don't know at this stage.

We're also getting some large scale analysis done of peer reviewed academic research and that's both leading domestic and international, so we're trying to get that and trying to find a way to not quantify it but give it some impact into this to say this is what the research is showing. You know, I have to say that the polarisation of the discussion has been going for probably 70 years in my mind or more, 50 years at least and you could start say at Terania Creek in the 60s and 70s and right through. So to filter through all this and find the fact and fiction, it's not easy to get the right answer and that's where I think our challenge will be.

MR REID: Yes.

MR DUNCAN: I also wanted to say too that we're not making any decisions in this. We're simply providing a sort of, if you like, three parties that we feel are independent to government our view of the research and that's our bit of work. And if we get asked to do more, we will. One of the things we're finding is everybody wants to talk to us and we're not going to talk to 1,650 people [redacted]

MR REID: [redacted], is that sort of the timeline expected for the first production of a report?

MR DUNCAN: About [redacted], that's right. And I see that as our initial report in the process and then decision makers will decide whether they want us to do more or want us to look in a different direction.

MR REID: Yes.

MS HIGGINSON: Are you considering any sort of interim kind of views or like, you know, I hear that you're saying you're not making decisions but clearly it's going to be a very influential body of whatever it is you end up doing and there will be, I imagine, findings, recommendations, that sort of thing. Are they likely to be any interim given the reality of what's actually happening on the ground in our forests at the moment?

MR DUNCAN: Whether it's interim or final, we're writing this in such a way what we do to a certain degree will be made public. But that's the government's call, not ours.

MS HIGGINSON: Yes.

MR DUNCAN: So I don't think we'll have any concern about that being public at some stage but it's how and when that happens, that's not our call.

MS HIGGINSON: I mean, one of the things at the moment is – I mean, yes, for the sake of just some background, I've been involved in this for far too long is the truth and I don't mean just involved politically. I've been involved as an expert environmental lawyer over many years, working with science and experts and government and so on prior to becoming whatever it is I am now, an MP, a cross bencher.

MS HIGGINSON: That's what I am. And then –

MR MICK VEITCH: A powerful cross bencher.

MS HIGGINSON: Yes. And then before – alongside all of that, I'm actually a member of a rural regional community and I'm very aware of forest communities, forest environments, worked – and also incredibly, unfortunately, too aware of the condition and the health of many of these forests we're talking about. Over the last 40 years, I have watched the condition of our forests and the health diminish and in the last decade and post fires and in some areas floods, I've witnessed things I wish I had not witnessed.

And the scale of which we are witnessing logging operations and then the recovery of some of these forest environments, the condition that we're leaving our forest environments, the oceans of lantana, the weeds, the invasives that are coming in, it is really, really at a point of it's beyond – it kind of moves from the judgment and the expertise and the objectiveness to this is very, very harmful at many levels. I just want to relay one particular – and sorry, so in terms of the fact finding and some of the things that I have experienced and that I'm seeing many people experience is what seems to be the weighting of what is referred to as sort of forest science material.

This is all generated by industry and by the government agency on behalf of the industry and I think we have seen an enormous kind of overreliance, a slackness around the credibility of some of that work. No disrespect ever to any of the individuals, it's just the nature and the culture around some of the research, the data. I think that it would be very wise to look as hard as you can at volumes, volume assessments, models for volumes, I think there is a lot of inaccuracy out there.

MR DUNCAN: You mean timber volumes?

MS HIGGINSON: Timber volumes and the reliance on volumes and I'm just going to give you this one example. When I was practising as an environmental lawyer and a public interest environmental lawyer, so always working with the mob that want to protect the environment, I got an experience that I hadn't had before.

When I had a bunch of loggers come into my office, sit at my table from western New South Wales, the Baradine Pilliga area, and they said to me, "Sue, we need help. The government and the Forestry Corporation are telling us to keep logging, to get the volumes under our wood supply agreements and we can't do it any longer. We are smashing the joint. We are doing what our grandfathers and our grandfathers' grandfathers would have cried to make us do. Would not let us do. The Forestry Corporation and the government, DPI Forestry are telling us the volumes are there, go in and get them. We're smashing the forest and the volumes are there and the quality of timber."

Now, that was 10 years ago. I don't think that experience is – I think that that is kind of where we're heading no matter what. That is what the trajectory of the so called sustainability ecologically sustainable forest management, that's where we're heading. I accept the tall moist forests are much more productive and the higher the cycles, et cetera, and out west it's harder, but it's all just relative. It's actually relative. The same principles apply.

But what was the most concerning was this argument about the wood supply agreements, the volumes, somebody sitting somewhere saying those volumes are here, the data says so, the metrics are telling us, but on the ground it's not happening. Now, I think that is hellishly reflective of the east coast system as well and I think that there are parallels in terms of the impacts we're actually having on the ground, what we're actually doing and what we're really pulling out of the forest.

We know at the moment The Great Koala National Park, the escalation of logging that's taking place in there, there's some analysis done that will be dropped tomorrow in the media in terms of the escalation and intensification. We know that whether it's political, whatever it is, there is a serious grab for the last logging cycle in that Great Koala National Park area. It's pretty obvious to anyone who's been engaging.

MR MICK VEITCH: And looking at the data.

MS HIGGINSON: And looking at the data, the real data. And the people on the ground and obviously we're connected to all those incredible people who actually live around these forests. They don't work in them, they live around them, they love them, they're connected to them, they identify with them and have done for decades and decades. They're people like me who have had to watch and see.

We've worked in good faith and the reality is and I'm sure you can hear from where I'm coming from, I am firmly of the view, on all of the evidence before us, that we are just extending the pain and the destruction every day that we haven't made the decision to get out of some of those key core areas that are without a doubt the strongholds for some of our most threatened species. Also, obviously the climate

argument. Like, I don't know if – and I can't remember if – I'm sure it'll be one of the submissions, for some reason I didn't lodge a submission and I just don't know what happened.

MR DUNCAN: For this process, you mean?

MS HIGGINSON: Yes.

MR DUNCAN: Well, you're welcome to make a late submission.

MS HIGGINSON: Thank you. I can't tell you how unbelievably strange it is. What I did do was speak to hundreds of people about how they could make a submission and talked to them all about what would be required, how best to make one and then the day fell.

MR DUNCAN: So the form's still online, isn't it?

MS HIGGINSON: Great.

MS MILLER: It's taken down, I will have to look because it was ultimately [non-transcribable].

MR DUNCAN: Well, we'll send you a copy of the form.

MS HIGGINSON: Thank you.

MR DUNCAN: We'll send you an electronic copy.

MS HIGGINSON: We will lodge our submission. Beautiful.

MR DUNCAN: And we've given other people up to another week so if you want to take another week.

MS HIGGINSON: Okay. Fantastic.

MR DUNCAN: And look, it doesn't have to be chapter and verse but you've made some good points there.

MS HIGGINSON: Yes.

MR DUNCAN: And without commenting on it but volumes is certainly an area of contention and I'd go back to the principles that we would have even in this process and it's independence and transparency, you know.

MS HIGGINSON: Yes. On volumes, can I just tell you this though as well, like I get this incredibly privileged position obviously from where I am. I get to hear the earnest voices of the people in this sector [redacted]

[redacted]

MR DUNCAN: You know I've had experience in this area and I too live regionally.

MS HIGGINSON: Yes.

MR DUNCAN: But I'd say the volumes have been under pressure and it's no secret because there's legal cases about it, Boral was one and over the last 20 years and it's this issue again of trying to get balance between economics and environment and it gets forced to fit and I think that goes to this issue of transparency and independence as well.

MS HIGGINSON: And I think when it does come to this very, very small – like, let's be real. It's such a small public forest estate we're talking about. It's less than 1.8 of the entire state of New South Wales and yet it is some of the most significant environmental lands in the whole state in the country. We're talking about forests of global significance now and they are becoming rarer and rarer. We're not logging anymore on what once was this understanding. It's now more like an extractive industry because our forests, their capacity to recover is becoming diminished every cycle.

The cycles are shorter and we're just not getting the recovery and of course where we are now, I mean I know there is not a person in this state that hasn't been impacted by flood and fire, I just happen to be in one of those communities that was on the frontline of both, radically so. And our landscapes are not recovering as easily and as quickly and yet we know we're going to be experiencing these things more frequently and more intensively. The research on fire, obviously people would've brought that to your attention.

MR DUNCAN: Yes.

MS HIGGINSON: We had an incredible event here. I'm the chair of the Parliamentary Friends of Forests and we had a fantastic event here with Professor David Lindenmayer, Dr Stephen Phillips and Dr Phil Zylstra or professor or something and hello, Mary. It's good to see you again.

PROF MARY O'KANE: [non-transcribable].

MS HIGGINSON: Thank you. I know I am just talking very fast and taking up all the oxygen.

MS HIGGINSON: One second.

PROF O'KANE: [non-transcribable].

MS HIGGINSON: No, no, it's fine. In terms of I know it's not relevant to your brief in the sense but I do think – and I think we all know – nothing happens in a political vacuum. We have Parliamentary Friends of Forest, we had this incredible event with Lindenmayer, Zylstra, incredible, Dr Kita Ashman, incredible young scientist who's doing all that work in the tree canopy with greater gliders. Steve Phillips, the koala expert. It was incredible. People came, they listened to these experts and they came away saying, "Sue, we get it. We've got to end logging in the public native forest estate."

These are a lot of people within the government party who are in the background, on the back benches, and they are gunning for an end to this. They are people who have communities, they either have electorates, they're in the upper house, so they're dealing with the whole state, they have their MLC areas and the politics right now is that they believe there is an end and that if we don't deal with it soon and those few very important workers in the industry and we don't transition them, we're literally walking them off a cliff.

MR DUNCAN: And Sue, I have to say that there's an environment for things to change and that's what's actually happening with an industry policy and the work we're doing is sort of really reporting on stakeholder engagement and not writing the policy.

MS HIGGINSON: Yes.

MR DUNCAN: And I would say all areas, all the agencies and central government are sort of having input into this at the moment, all the relevant areas of state government anyway, whether that be DCCEEW or DPI or probably the Forestry Corporation as well.

MS HIGGINSON: Yes.

MR DUNCAN: So the environment's there.

MS HIGGINSON: Yes.

MR DUNCAN: I mean, our role is really, as I said before, sort of sorting through the fact and making sure we sort of represent a very genuine and broad view of the stakeholders.

MS HIGGINSON: Mary, before you were here, I was saying one of the areas of serious contention and real concern is the volumes, the timber volumes. I actually believe and I know there's no evil players in this but there is a massive momentum of culture. It exists. Obviously, it has done, I've been in it far too long. There is

something happening in terms of the overestimation of volumes. It's happened. It's happened in the past. There tends to be a bolstering of volumes.

PROF O'KANE: Is it getting worse?

MS HIGGINSON: I think it possibly is and I think, as we have seen in the past, whenever there is an appetite for change, there's a bolstering of volumes because of course if there is a bailout, then that estimate is always higher. I think there needs to be a really good honest look at that.

PROF O'KANE: Have you got anyone with numbers on that?

MS HIGGINSON: I think – so I'm just going to say this and so the person who is just so credible on everything and has so much integrity and knows this more than anybody, we call him the field marshal, it's Dailan Pugh.

PROF O'KANE: Right.

MS HIGGINSON: Look at his submission. I would urge you to look at his submission.

MR DUNCAN: He's made a submission.

MS HIGGINSON: The detail – and I have no doubt it is far longer than any submission in the universe. He's been an expert witness in court proceedings, he is somebody who honestly I can say hand on heart, his credibility is just – and his integrity is untouchable in that sense. Yes, so I would – and he was on the government's own timber industry harvest advisory panels years ago and been so close to all of it.

PROF O'KANE: And it's been so long.

MR DUNCAN: So Mary, before you came in, without making recommendations, I think this is an area where transparency and independence is really [non-transcribable].

PROF O'KANE: Incredibly important.

MS HIGGINSON: Yes, yes.

MR DUNCAN: Whether it's true or false or whatever but to have transparency and independence in this will give confidence that quantum models and [non-transcribable are accurate.

MS HIGGINSON: Yes, yes. I also really implore all of you to – the idea that wood supply agreements are termed, I would ask you not to be overinfluenced by that. Agreements are agreement, they're contracts and they've also been in the past quite political. It's more important – like, whilst contractual obligations are very important,

we know that governments enter into them, governments pay them out early from time to time. It's not something that I believe the public interest is served well just because we did a thing at a time before we knew certain other things. I think that's really important.

MR DUNCAN: Procurement models have changed too.

MS HIGGINSON: Exactly.

MR DUNCAN: What was right 20 years ago may not be right for today now.

MS HIGGINSON: Exactly. But even those agreements that may have just been renewed in the last five years, we've done it on a basis, as you say, exactly the system that was designed in the late 90s. And as the wonderful Bob Debus said the other night in Parliamentary Friends of Forest here in this building, he stood up and as one of the architects of the current system, he said, "This system has failed. It's no longer fit for purpose. We are not sustainably managing our forests." I will lodge my submission and I'll send a transcript of his speech and all these other wonderful people that have put their hand on heart. Come on in, join us, Jeremy. Dan did have two technical questions.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I had two quick questions. Hopefully they're quick questions. In terms of the review that we hand down [redacted] or any other reports that might be produced, I know that you'll be drawing on peer reviewed evidence from around the world and that's great. Will the final report itself, which will be a government report, actually be peer reviewed itself? Is there a group of peers that you can put that report to?

MR DUNCAN: That's a good question but I think we're relying on the sort of independence of the secretariat –

MS HIGGINSON: Of the IPC.

MR DUNCAN: – and the process to do that and we'll be referencing anything we put forward. So we won't be coming up with new material.

MR REID: I don't think this is going to be a pitch in any of this, I'm just curious whether the evidence itself –

PROF O'KANE: And we're not doing the sort of classic thing that I would've done as chief scientist and engineer of getting in experts. We're just hearing. This is just a listening exercise. So we're just reflecting – bringing forward because we're doing everything transparently, so we're bringing it all – you know, it'll all be out there unless somebody's made a defamatory statement or something.

MR DUNCAN: Yes. You're going to see as much as we can on our website and the things we're publishing, so in a way it's transparency is the answer to that rather than peer review, I think.

PROF O'KANE: Yes, so it won't be – I'm, as you know, very fond of peer review, but it won't be a scientific report. It's a listening report.

MR REID: That's okay. I appreciate it. And the last thing and then [non-transcribable] Jeremy's here and I know that, in terms of the panel actually being constituted, how is it constituted? Well, it's not a statutory panel, it's simply been appointed, I would assume, by the cabinet office?

MR DUNCAN: We've been appointed by the two ministers' offices.

MR REID: Okay.

MS HIGGINSON: Okay.

MR DUNCAN: Well, I mean we're engaged through agencies but we've been appointed by the two ministers' officers to do this review. It's not a review – to do this stakeholder engagement process.

MS HIGGINSON: Yes.

MR REID: Yes.

MS HIGGINSON: Okay. We've been asking a few questions, just trying to understand it. We found there wasn't transparency –

PROF O'KANE: You can tell us.

MS HIGGINSON: Yes, yes. And when I find out, I'll let you know.

MR DUNCAN: But I've been thinking a bit about it actually and it's as a result of different parts of government and different parts of the community being so far apart on something, the government's basically saying, "Well, here are three people. Can you make sure you facilitate a process that is seen to be fair and equitable and gives us a broad view."

MR REID: Because the IPC and the secretariat are absolutely fantastic but they also don't work for the Minister for Environment or Minister for Agriculture.

PROF O'KANE: That's the plus.

MR DUNCAN: They work for the planning minister.

MS HIGGINSON: Yes, exactly.

MR REID: Yes.

MR DUNCAN: They report through to the planning minister.

MR REID: There was a point much earlier on when it was first announced and I was confused and I went looking and I couldn't figure it out, which is why I'm asking now and I appreciate the answer.

MS HIGGINSON: Just in terms of the – you know, it would be remiss if I did not also say that there is a real case for certain things in terms of urgency. There really is. Like, I've got people who I've known all my life who I consider slightly my elders. I'm not young anymore, obviously. I've got my ninth grandkid. But I am –

PROF O'KANE: Congratulations.

MS HIGGINSON: Thank you. I am watching people who are seriously my heroes, I am watching them get arrested, be denied bail, kept in police prison just because they are trying to plead with this government once and for all, of their 45 years of trying to protect forest that we've come to the end of the road, can somebody please listen. And when I say that, there are areas specific that people have said, "I'll put my life on the line for that."

We're back in the days of Terania, we're back in the days of Chaelundi for some of these areas. We are talking about Gondwana, we are talking about World Heritage type of areas and yes, then we're talking about some sicker forests as well, but they're still these refuges of some of our most iconic threatened species, they're our water supplies, our water catchments, they're our climate resilience lands, that's what we're talking about.

PROF O'KANE: Thank you.

MS HIGGINSON: Thank you.

PROF O'KANE: Can I just say with the IPC, that was a bright idea of Peter's because he and I were both on the IPC and we could see when there was a low running case, sometimes it's super busy with its own cases but –

MR DUNCAN: Sometimes it's huge.

PROF O'KANE: – sometimes it's not. So Peter, when he was the Department of Premier and Cabinet office, thought to use them to get a real level of independence because of the independent structure. So that's the background.

MS HIGGINSON: Yes.

MR REID: [non-transcribable] the planning minister said, "Yes, that's fine, you can use your secretariat for the purposes of this."

MR DUNCAN: That's right. But we're not doing this as IPC commissioners, we're doing this separately.

MR REID: No, no, no, I get that.

MR DUNCAN: In our own right.

MS HIGGINSON: Yes, yes. We get it. Thank you.

>THE MEETING CONCLUDED

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JEREMY BUCKINGHAM MLC

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MR MICK VEITCH: I'll be ducking out in about 10 minutes but –

MR JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: I probably won't need that long.

MR VEITCH: Okay.

MR PETER DUNCAN: Okay. You go.

MR BUCKINGHAM: I very much appreciate the opportunity to come and talk to the panel about forestry. My position is that I would – and the position of my political party, the Legalise Cannabis Party, is that we would like to see an end to native forest logging in the public estate and also in the private estate in terms of private native forestry in areas across the board in terms of in the public estate but also in the private estate in terms of those areas that are high value ecological areas where there's especially threatened species. We don't want to see an end – a blanket ban on forestry in the state but of course we'd like to see that primarily based on plantation and regenerative forestry.

My experience with forestry is that I was earlier in my life a forester, a sawmiller, I worked in the forest industries in Tasmania and I saw the selective logging, as it was called, replace the selective logging of the small family based sawmills who were turning a valuable commodity into a valuable resource in terms of construction and furniture timber and the rest. That industry was swallowed by the mass harvesting of the forests for export woodchip.

So we are very concerned that predominantly the industry is producing low value – in New South Wales, low value products, not producing – like supporting regional communities in terms of a lot of jobs and is being subsidised by the government through Forestry Corporation. So we think that forestry has a limited future in the public estate other than plantations and that the wood supply agreements that run out to 2028 are too far away.

I live in Bellingen, I've seen what's happening there and I've taken a balanced view, I've seen protestors protesting logging in plantations, where I've seen that in the Pine Creek State Forest where I live, but I've also seen protestors protesting and I think rightly so the increased and rapid logging that we've seen within the footprint of the proposed Great Koala National Park of incredibly important irreplaceable assets.

And I think that that has to end. I think that the government has to act urgently, it has to bring – it has to act to limit the damage this industry is causing to irreplaceable ecological assets forward and do that – build a framework that brings the community along in terms of a transition because I think that they risk undermining the integrity firstly of The Great Koala National Park but also their own integrity on this key environmental issue. That for me is pretty much it. I was very concerned – we've been giving the government the time to do the work and this is clearly part of it and so we welcome the fact that this is happening but we don't want to see this as a process that

runs into many, many years all the way up to 2028. It really – there needs to be a line in the sand drawn.

As I say, I worked in the forest industries. My son worked in the Bellingen sawmill. I know those jobs intimately. They're not great jobs, they're not producing a high value commodity that's in high demand either, even in that business which is producing tomato stakes and some construction timbers and the like. It's dirty, poorly paid work and it's I think a waste of a resource that we would be better used – better left standing and the emphasis going to plantation and plantation forestry. The other thing that I think that the government should pursue is alternatives in terms of employment. That might be slightly out of your remit.

You were talking about forestry but there is wide – like there is a lot of support for the hemp industry, there's a lot of support for the medicinal cannabis industry, which are booming sectors and especially in those areas where the forestry is occurring, the North Coast, the South Coast, the Far North Coast, in those areas we already have a medicinal cannabis industry set up and it can be – it already is a major employer around Lismore, employing hundreds and with the forecast growth in that industry, it will be an industry that employs thousands and thousands of people.

Medicinal cannabis is completely legal in this country, hemp is legal, the government has initiated the hemp industry taskforce, which is a great move to facilitate the growth of that sector and it could provide a viable alternative to forestry in those areas for very similar products. If you look at the hemp industry as it's developing, especially in France and Canada, absolutely producing building materials in regional areas and the climate and the community is well aligned for the support of that industry.

The hemp industry is probably one that will take – like it's a medium term proposition but one that can be started now. The medicinal cannabis industry already and the cannabis industry in the United States is a $35 billion a year industry. You can start that industry up in a matter of months. It's already completely legal, completely regulated and with some guidance and assistance from government, you could quite easily see that industry take off in areas like the Mid North Coast, the Far North Coast, the South Coast and produce way more jobs, way more economic development than we see out of forestry. And there's a lot of labour involved, processing, machinery operation, these types of things in those industries.

So there are some alternatives. I think the community wants to see leadership in this area and I don't think they want people to say, well we're drawing a line in the sand on the industry and those people in that sector. And I know there's not huge numbers of them but they exist. Where do they go? What do they do? So I think it's incumbent on government to come up with a transition strategy and do that urgently. I've put forward what I'll be arguing should be part of that but essentially I think that the government has to act soon, it has to desist from logging in those high value areas, protect those threatened species.

I mean, the story of the coastal emu and what happened with that is really alarming. The fact that it's one of the rarest – it is the rarest bird on Earth. There's only 50 adults left. They're genetically distinct from all the other emus, it's the last mega fauna on the east coast of Australia part from the cassowary, but certainly in New South Wales, and the practice is to create a buffer around when they find a nest of 100 metres and that's just not adequate if we're really serious about conserving biodiversity. So that's my position and yes.

MR VEITCH: Okay. Can I just ask a question, Jeremy, about private native forests?

MR BUCKINGHAM: Yes.

MR VEITCH: So what's the position on that?

MR BUCKINGHAM: The position is okay I'm with private native forestry but it needs better regulation. So to make sure that high value ecological assets, biodiversity, threatened species are protected.

PROF MARY O'KANE: Any jurisdiction doing it particularly well? Given that you're actually a forester, we don't get many of them coming through.

MR BUCKINGHAM: Yes. Well, Tasmania was –

PROF O'KANE: I thought you were going – yes.

MR BUCKINGHAM: – very, very bad. So Tasmania was –

PROF O'KANE: And current Tasmania, have they improved or not?

MR BUCKINGHAM: No, they're still terrible. They're really terrible. They're really terrible. They just –

PROF O'KANE: This is a [non-transcribable].

MR BUCKINGHAM: Well, they've got their eyes set on the Tarkine because they've basically run out of the rest of the resource. The big eucalypt forests they've really smashed to pieces and that was for export woodchip. That really ramped up in the 80s and 90s and they've got a massive plantation regime down there now, which they sort of don't know what to do with because they've gone with these blue gums. So off the top of my head, like I don't know where the jurisdiction in Australia that's done it really well – see you, mate – without sort of basically pulling up stumps after they've run out of resource.

PROF O'KANE: Literally pulling up stumps.

MR BUCKINGHAM: They're literally pulling up stumps. So sort of like whaling, we stopped whaling because we ran out of whales and it's essentially like that with

forestry – for high value forestry products. Sure we can keep logging them for woodchips and tomato stakes and railway sleepers or whatever it is.

PROF O'KANE: No, it was high value stuff I was [non-transcribable].

MR BUCKINGHAM: Yes, but in actual fact I think it's been a problem everywhere. So yes, no, it's vexed. I think the Finns do it quite well. I think that they have a pretty robust system over there of forestry but they've got very different ecology.

MR DUNCAN: And tree farming. They actually have –

MR BUCKINGHAM: Massive and they –

MR DUNCAN: We had some research, they were top of the lot actually.

MR BUCKINGHAM: Yes. So I think the Finns do it well.

PROF O'KANE: And the Swedes do a lot of genetic work on things.

MR BUCKINGHAM: Exactly. And I think that that's the area in agroforestry and I think that that's really important and but yes, I don't think we've done it well and so much of what is harvested is wasted because of the cost of harvesting, production –

PROF O'KANE: Transport.

MR BUCKINGHAM: – transport, distribution and you're competing in a market where you've got cheap products coming in from British Columbia or Malaysia or Indonesia and all the rest and with softwood plantations. So yes, that's our position and I wish you all the very best with unpicking this issue and making good recommendations. So thank you very much for the work you're doing.

MR DUNCAN: And thanks for coming to the presentation.

MR BUCKINGHAM: No, I really appreciate it. Thank you.

>THE MEETING CONCLUDED

Independent Forestry Panel

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

ROBERT BORSAK MLC, BRIAN BOYLE & MICHAEL KEMP MP

INDEPENDENT FORESTRY PANEL:	MR PETER DUNCAN AM (CHAIR) PROFESSOR MARY O'KANE AC THE HON. MICK VEITCH
INDEPENDENT FORESTRY PANEL SECRETARIAT:	CLARE MILLER CALLUM FIRTH
ATTENDEES	ROBERT BORSAK MLC BRIAN BOYLE MICHAEL KEMP MP
LOCATION:	PARLIAMENT OF NSW - ROOM 814; 6 MACQUARIE STREET, SYDNEY NSW 2000
DATE:	WEDNESDAY, 16 OCTOBER 2024

<THE MEETING COMMENCED

MR ROBERT BORSAK: Our paper talks to the economic benefits and also the ecological benefits of sustainable forestry. There is no case and particularly addressing the issue of The Great Koala National Park, which I think this is trying to address, there's no evidence at all that in these forests koalas are endangered or that anywhere where sustainable harvesting and sustainable forestry practices have been carried out, that koalas are indeed endangered or having problems.

I might note now that the Greens, for example, think that they have The Great Koala National Park under their belt, taking it for granted they're now of course moving across to the greater glider. It's just one animal after another, the icon species approach, which has worked so well for them in the past. They won't be happy until they shut all forestry down. Moving into state forests, these happen to be hardwood state forests but they are also making noises about moving into pine plantations and taking that over as well. These are just not good policy.

It's not just a matter of trying to protect species, you also need to protect communities and the human communities in these areas are by and large only maintained and sustained by the sustainable forestry practices that are done in the – I can only say in the kindest possible way to the forest and they've been doing that – has been doing that for over 150 years.

I'm a person, being a shooter and a hunter that spends time in forests, especially state forests, I was chairman of the Game Council, for example, in the run up to the – was it 2011 election, when we had I think it was three or four forests in the Murray River area down there, the red gum forests were converted in the last moment literally before the election as a preference deal arrangement with the Labor party.

And all the benefits that have been touted for those national parks that are down there and are being touted by the same so called protectionist organisations with the charade in front of us as being conservationists. They're not actually conserving anything, they're protecting. None of those benefits have come to fruition in those four national parks. I think it's the Murray River series of national parks, which were all state forests. Those forests now are simply put a mess and a bushfire hazard. There is no conservation of any of the environmental or ecological values of those forests that were actually being actively managed and properly conserved under the previous arrangements.

And the villages that are all along the Murray there have all disappeared. They're gone. Those communities are finished and of course they were told the same old claptrap about they'll be able to get jobs and there'll be all this tourism occurring and all that sort of stuff. The reality is there is no tourism in those forests and in those parks. They're actually locked up to access. All the timber that used to be harvested is now falling on the ground, red gum forests, falling on the ground, creating fire hazards and potentially just completely changing the very nature of a forest that was managed sustainably even before the white man turned up there.

And if you know any of the history of the explorations of southern New South Wales, you'll know that that was all subject to environmental burning by the Aboriginals for hunting purposes. That's the reason they did it all and they burnt all those forests out, let them regrow, burnt it out, regrow, et cetera, et cetera. So just making these decisions purely for political reasons causes major problems not just for the community but also causes major problems for the bush itself.

If you want to – and we take the view that the South Coast hardwood eucalypt forests that were converted to national parks during the years of the Carr government actually have ended up being one of the primary causes because of unnatural levels of regrowth in those forests, a large part of the reason why we had the major fires in 2019. In other words, as soon as the opportunity is there and it will come, those forests will burn and they'll burn more intensely because of the way that national parks are not managed in New South Wales. They simply lock it up and leave it.

And as I say, that's what we've seen with the Murray River ones. I and a lot of the other Game Council people in those days used to spend a lot of time in those forests and of course now if you go down there, you can't even get in there because whatever tracks were there are blocked, finished, lock it out. Communities buggered, conservation values destroyed.

MR PETER DUNCAN: Robert, something we've come across, there's always a lot of inquiry research upfront before these things happen, you know, to make cases but not often a lot afterwards. Are you aware of anything that's been done to see if some of those benefits have been delivered? To me that's probably a valuable piece of information for us –

MR BORSAK: Peter, that's part of the problem. Once these parks come under National Parks' control, they're locked out and they're managed from the basis of exclusion. So nobody can actually get in there to see what's actually going on. What I'm telling you is what we've been told, having visited the remnants of some of these timber mills and other things that are down there, where they talk to us about what is actually happening in the parks. You can't get in there and when I talk about exclusion, it's a real thing. The only other way in terms of actual study, no, at this stage I'm not aware but I'm happy to have a look around if I can find something.

MR DUNCAN: If there is anything at all, that's [cross-talk] for us.

MR BORSAK: A lot of the anecdotal stuff comes to us from people who fish on the river and actually float through those parks, try to catch Murray cod or yellow belly, whatever they're after. But we'll have a look to see what we can find and if we can find something, we'll get something to you. But there's absolutely no doubt that what I'm saying to you is exactly what's happening. I mean, at one stage it looked like they would be allowed to go into those parks and pick up deadwood on the ground but then they were told not even allowed to do that as well.

MR DUNCAN: We should give Michael an opportunity to –

MR MICHAEL KEMP: Well, actually I think I've read the submission, I think I agree with everything Robert's said. I'd like to draw your attention to a little bit more of the science based scenario of it as well though. Robert talked about the species and the science of it and the actual numbers that the government – I've been calling for, ever since the park was announced, I've been calling for a koala count, a full koala count within the assessment area. Now, that data was released by the government. It was 12,322 give or take a couple when it was purported to be only 3,000 koalas there.

So the whole premise of the park is based on a fallacy and I think that you need to look at – like, the government is saying that it's mandated but I'm going to draw your attention to this is a political stunt. I have been around or in those forests on the North Coast my whole life and I'm well entrenched within the communities up there, being a sixth generation, the same sort of ilk on the same bit of land. So you need to understand that the communities up there, three elections in three different electorates have voted against this park.

So the mandate actually – by supporting the Nationals' policies, so the mandate actually up there is to not have the park. So this is a total steel and concrete jungle mandate. It is absolutely not understanding that when you remove minerals from the ground to build your steel and concrete jungle and build your car and build your mobile phone that the city based politicians have, you cannot replace that. What we do is we harvest a tree that is sequestering carbon, then we store the carbon in the use of the product and then we absolutely re-sequester using that same site. So there is a lot of evidence around if you look at the chief scientist at DPI and I'm sure you've heard of Brad Law –

PROF MARY O'KANE: We had Brad…

MR DUNCAN: We spoke to Brad the other day.

PROF O'KANE: And of course I've obviously worked with Brad over the years in koala numbers.

MR KEMP: Beautiful. Fabiano Ximenes…

PROF O'KANE: Yes, we had a presentation from Fabiano too.

MR KEMP: Beautiful. Fantastic. So as a health professional, I try to be science based and fact and data based. What I'm saying to you is this has been forced on the community up there from a mandate from the city. Make no bones about it. If you walk around in those towns up there and you actually speak to mums and dads that don't want to be political, okay, they will tell you that as long as there's responsible harvesting, and we did not do that in the past, okay, technology improves, our understanding, our studies improve to teach us better ways to harvest.

What you really need to do is listen to silviculture, the professionals that are out there every day and doing it and if you have a look at fire behaviour, there's a very small window that has been proven between seven and 10 years that silviculture can increase

fire. But before seven years and after 10 years, as an RFS and remote firey myself, you understand that managed forests are much easier to get into to access and then to fight off and to quieten a fire and hopefully then allow it to put itself out because none of us put fires out. They put themselves out.

And if you look at the biodiversity and improvements that we can make within silviculture, so I'm not a fan of just seeding blackbutt, as an example, I believe in many and multiple endemic species to be reseeded. So I do have an issue at times with biodiversity of how our forests are harvested. But if you want to fly on a plane, live in the city drive a car, use a computer, then you need to understand that this is the most responsible resource that we have, it's the most renewable resource that we have and I'm sure that's been done to you before.

But I just want you to actually listen to the person on the ground and not the politician, not the 20 year insulated government employee, the mums and dads, the people that are on the ground that live in it and given the actual balanced argument, tell them that the forestry, where they're in a coupe, they actually do at least 12 months, up to four years' worth of pre-harvest plans, they walk, they tag each tree, you have a look at the iPad and you actually understand the science of it and what actually happens on the ground, the reality of it is so much better than what gets portrayed in the media and by the activists I'll say.

MR DUNCAN: Yes. No, I understand your point. I guess and the key point that you make is about making sure that we get a good community view in this process and we'll ask some more questions on this but we are trying to do that, we are trying to be broad and we're not just listening to the political or bureaucratic side, we are going to researchers in the community.

MR KEMP: So the panels didn't – even the community – I know, I get it.

MR DUNCAN: We don't have time, [redacted]

MR KEMP: I get it.

MR DUNCAN: But we probably will –

MR KEMP: Someone needs to step up. This is an opportunity to step up and make this reasonable.

MR DUNCAN: Yes.

MR KEMP: Okay. Someone needs to step up, however it is, whether it's Penny or your panel or whoever, someone needs to make it reasonable and real.

MR DUNCAN: Yes.

MR BORSAK: The other thing to consider too is you can look at this not just as a lock it up and leave it process, it could be a state park rather than just a pure lock it up

national park where activities in the forest, including some harvesting can continue. The idea of The Great Koala National Park at whatever level it was at that time was first slated, as far as I know, by Luke Foley just after or just before the 2015 election.

So this has been a political ploy that's been laying around the table for a long time within the Labor party. There's more than one opportunity to deal with this and I find it hard to understand how if we do accept that there are reasonable numbers of koalas in that area, how, as I said earlier, converting it into a lock it up and forget it national park actually enhances the viability of a long nature of the koala population, not to mention other animals that are in there.

MR DUNCAN: Well, a state forest is a reserve in its own right. 50% of it [cross-talk] harvested.

MR BORSAK: That's right, that's right.

MR DUNCAN: So it's –

MR KEMP: Much more than that but –

MR DUNCAN: – a continuum, isn't it?

MR BORSAK: That's right. And in fact there's in fact a lot more on a rotational basis gets preserved in the longer term and again from a political angle, I've just listened to the Greens over many years because we used to interact again as part of the council and quite a lot with state forests and they used to talk to us about the viability even then going back 15 years of their hardwood timber resources, that the heart, if you like of the older trees that had already been taken out in the reserves and into the national parks.

So when they say well their harvesting cycle is too short, they're harvesting trees that are too young, the reality is that's because the most viable populations of older and better trees that could harvest on a longer cycle have already been pushed into national parks and taken out as part of what the Carr government was doing in all those years.

So state forests are multi-use and that's the other thing and the multi-uses, putting aside timber industry, have no bearing whatsoever on the populations of koalas, for example, or greater gliders or anything. And people go there to recreate in these state forests because it is Crown land, open and available. People go there to hunt, people go there to fish, people go there to bushwalk, people go there to ride their bikes, people go there to picnic. Depending on what state forests, probably not those ones but they go mushrooming, for example, et cetera, et cetera.

There's so many things that contribute to the community but also contribute to the community in that area as people visit, visitation from the city to the bush that will be removed, especially if the [non-transcribable] sides of that park is now as large as what they're talking about, it will be devastating on the local communities. And

locking those up parks, locking those state forests into parks will not enhance in any way, shape or form the environmental benefits of those parks or those forests.

MR DUNCAN: Just on that, how do you both feel about plantations and expansion of a plantation estate? I mean, they're –

MR KEMP: Fantastic. Fantastic.

MR BORSAK: Sorry, plantations?

MR DUNCAN: Plantations, yes. How would a plantation –

MR BORSAK: Are you talking about plantation hardwood or plantation softwood?

MR DUNCAN: Plantation hardwood I'm talking about.

MR BORSAK: Well, I mean we don't think it's a good idea that plantation hardwood should also be suddenly grabbed by someone. I mean, why would anyone invest in plantation hardwood?

MR KEMP: I mean, do you know how long it takes to grow a plantation tree?

MR BORSAK: How long it takes. And then you get to the end of it and you say, "Well, actually now we're actually going to send a signal to the market that says if your trees get to a certainly size, guess what, we're going to take them off you."

MR KEMP: Or we'll get grabbed at and say that that's now a biodiversity area as well.

MR DUNCAN: There needs to be both regulation and planning controls over it but if you look at expansion of either softwood or hardwood but particularly hardwood in this case if there's something excluded, how do you feel about using what I would call probably Crown land that's not being effectively used for plantations or private land for plantations?

MR KEMP: We have that already.

MR DUNCAN: Yes, but –

MR KEMP: We have them in state forest.

MR DUNCAN: Well, it hasn't [cross-talk].

MR KEMP: Why don't we return some of the national park estate that's viable for timber, that's not as sensitive for ecology, why don't we turn some of that estate into state forest and manage the forest in a much better way?

MR DUNCAN: I think that's the problem that we've talked – sort of Robert's got to, once it's locked up, it's hard to bring it back the other way.

MR KEMP: Yes, this is –

MR BORSAK: Well, I mean that's the nature of [cross-talk].

MR KEMP: Sorry, Robert. What are you guys going to be able to do to impact this political agenda? Because let's be really serious, that is the only thing that is coming from this, there is no conservation proof at all. National Parks spends all their money east of the highway and nothing west of the highway except for Dorrigo. So what can your panel do to change the outcome of this, which already seems to be forecast?

MR DUNCAN: Well, it probably goes to your opening remark, how can we accurately portray the broad range of stakeholder views. So rather than just putting one view forward, how can we [non-transcribable] and we're going to have a very wide spectrum here and we're going to be looking for some [cross-talk] –

MR KEMP: And yet in your intro, Peter, you went bang, bang, bang, bang and this is the actual most important one.

MR DUNCAN: But it is buried in that –

MR KEMP: Yes, no, I've got it but your intro here, your answer was bang, bang, everyone but the most important – aren't we here to represent the people?

MR DUNCAN: Yes.

MR KEMP: Don't we actually want to have the result that they expect?

MR DUNCAN: And look, that's why we're here today too at parliament because we're getting your views on –

MR KEMP: No, and although I might seem to be quite fiery over this, this is the first opportunity that I've sort of had to engage with you because I have been encouraging all my constituents to write and to contribute.

PROF O'KANE: We certainly got lots of submissions.

MR KEMP: I'll bet. I'll bet.

MR DUNCAN: 1,650.

MR KEMP: Yes, but how many of them are from a Green template?

PROF O'KANE: We're going through them.

MR DUNCAN: Well, we're actually working through a process –

MR KEMP: Every template should be discarded, including our side.

PROF O'KANE: That we agree with.

MR DUNCAN: We've actually got on our website, if we got 30% of those that are template, that'll probably count as one.

PROF O'KANE: One.

MR BORSAK: Well, that's the normal way to do it. But even then, you know, you've got so many organisations, there's conservation, there's that conservation, National Parks Association, [non-transcribable] I mean there's nobody actually from a lobbyist point of view, apart from the industry that's talking the other language.

PROF O'KANE: There are communities.

MR DUNCAN: Timber New South Wales and those groups are –

PROF O'KANE: There's you.

MR KEMP: They've been doing a bit of work, yes.

MR BORSAK: I'm not talking about communities, communities will always voice up, I'm talking about who's to stand against the National Parks Association?

MR DUNCAN: There used to be a Timber Communities Association but I don't know whether that's –

MR BORSAK: Well, it's because they're extinct because their industry's instinct. They've got no money, they can't put it in there.

MR DUNCAN: But they were very strong in Tasmania, I know.

PROF O'KANE: [non-transcribable].

MR BORSAK: And look what happened to them and look what's happening in Victoria. What they do down there and we don't want to go the same way here is basically create a desert outside of Melbourne. Their situation is worse than we've got here. At least here in New South Wales we're reviewing the process. Down there it's just well cop this and see you later.

MR DUNCAN: Well, I think that's the healthy part here. At least there is some process around it and it's not just a decision.

MR BORSAK: Just before I finish because I've got to go to the house, the other thing that happens of course in National Parks is – and the government cannot and does not control any of this, is that invasive species just take over. So you hear the government

whinging and screaming about deer and all that sort of stuff and pigs and goats and all that sort of stuff, the National Parks Australia and New South Wales, created largely by the Carr government, has created a highway to heaven for invasive species. Those parks are –

PROF O'KANE: Well, they're not going to heaven, they're staying in the park –

MR BORSAK: Sorry?

PROF O'KANE: They're not going to heaven, they're staying in the parks.

MR BORSAK: Well, I've called it a highway to heaven in the sense that –

PROF O'KANE: No, I know what you're saying–

MR BORSAK: Yes, I'm just being – yes, I [cross-talk].

MR KEMP: [cross-talk] growth.

MR BORSAK: What it's done is created a perfect avenue for, especially in good seasons that we're having now, the unlimited, uncontrolled growth in the populations of these animals. It doesn't matter whether it's rusa deer, red deer, fallow deer or – then they're prominent [cross-talk] –

MR KEMP: Lantana, privet –

MR BORSAK: And sambar deer, they're the four prominent species.

PROF O'KANE: What should they do? I mean, it's a bit to the side of our terms of reference.

MR BORSAK: Sorry?

PROF O'KANE: What should they be doing? I mean, what should [non-transcribable] –

MR BORSAK: Well, see, National Parks owns two helicopters. It's basically a spot fire thing. They go around – at the moment they're spot firing shooting horses in Kosciuszko okay. But they cannot control the numbers. They've had over 75 years, nearly 80 years of helicopter shooting deer in New Zealand and there are as many there today as there was when they started 75 years ago. What the parks need to be done is opened up for access for conservation work by recreational conservation hunters. Now, they won't even hear of that.

But what will happen over the next 30 or 40 years and this new area will be exactly the same, the environmental values of these so called parks will be degraded because they will be full of red deer, sambar deer and fallow deer and there's nothing they can do about it. I'm shooting rusa deer on Wallis Lake on 150 acre blocks right now. Since

February I've shot five that come from the national park right behind, right near the lake and those animals are transiting through there and there's nothing National Parks and Wildlife Service can do about it. Nothing. And the population is ever increasing.

MR KEMP: On 150 acre blocks.

MR BORSAK: Yes.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: [non-transcribable].

MR BORSAK: Because there is no mechanism for control of these animals and they transit through the park and come on to all of these, in this case, lakefront properties because there's not a lot of food in the national parks but that's where they go and hide and that's where they live. Anyway –

MR KEMP: I was going to say I've got the answer to that, fund National Parks appropriately. Spend some money west of the highway, okay, rather than caravan parks and that's all they do and tourist attractions like Dorrigo. Actually I live on the – so I border national park and I see not just deer, there are deer up there, but not many, we have pigs galore, we have foxes, we have dingoes, we have lantana –

MR DUNCAN: It's a broader public land management issue, isn't it, to –

MR BORSAK: Absolutely right.

MR KEMP: So take all national parks out, so can national parks, start again.

MR BORSAK: [cross-talk] lock it up and leave it is failing very, very badly.

MR KEMP: That's what I'm getting to.

MR DUNCAN: Understand.

MR KEMP: So take all national parks away –

MR BORSAK: Thanks very much for giving me some time.

PROF O'KANE: Thank you.

MR KEMP: I'll go again because this is the answer. Take all national parks away. Give back a little bit for the lock up and leave and then create a new tenure that says we will manage this land appropriately with [non-transcribable] slow burns as they were before, with the ability to shoot pests, with the ability to actually take out some of the plant based weeds. This is what has to happen because you cannot – you three are in a position to not stick your head in the sand because that's what happens at the moment with anything west of the highway.

MR DUNCAN: Certainly to help government we've got to try and find some common ground and I think that's the issue for us, that's the challenge for us. You know, with diverse views, trying to find that common ground.

MR KEMP: So – yes.

MR DUNCAN: And look, I don't think anybody would have sat in this room today that wouldn't be worried about invasive species, weeds and land tenures and things.

MR KEMP: The question is what is anyone doing about it is the actual question.

MR DUNCAN: Yes, yes. It's a big issue and I live in regional New South Wales, so I get it. I've got –

MR KEMP: Whereabouts?

MR DUNCAN: [redacted]

MR KEMP: Yes.

MR DUNCAN: And I'm born and bred in that area, so I've lived [redacted] and all the other issues I know quite well.

MR KEMP: Yes.

MR DUNCAN: And worked in Forestry and Parks, I've worked on both sides and I do get it.

MR KEMP: So support Parks by giving them more funding to actually do their job or do it – stop doing it for the tourists and do it for the actual land. If you want to be National Parks, because they are the antithesis of moving forward. So if you want to stop them spending all their money on caravan parks, then spend it on land management. Like, unless you've actually gone for a walk in a national park and it sounds that you probably have lately –

MR DUNCAN: Yes.

MR KEMP: – [non-transcribable] but I'd be surprised if many of the people that sit in this place have actually been into a national park and been scratched to the yin yang by lantana and actually looked for a pest. Like, Robert and your team would know exactly what I'm talking about because they're out looking to reduce the pest numbers and they get hit by lantana or lawyer vine or privet or whatever.

So there actually needs to be a full rethink about how we manage our land, I believe, to get something real that actually – you're looking at saving the koala. The best level evidence we have is actually that they don't need saving based on Brad Law and the government's own – so Labor's own commission started using drones in the last three

months, if you've got 12,000 however many and 22, 322 or whatever it was koalas, individual koalas in the assessment area, you don't need to save them.

MR DUNCAN: No, I understand your point. I think it's well made and as I said, there is some common ground here but it's how you approach it and that's what the government's got to – that's the challenge of the industry plan, isn't it?

MR KEMP: Why is it even a challenge? Why aren't we all just doing the same thing?

MR DUNCAN: Well, I think because –

MR KEMP: Politics, politics.

PROF O'KANE: You go and talk to them.

MR DUNCAN: Diverse range of views.

MR KEMP: All right. Thank you for your time.

PROF O'KANE: Thank you.

MR DUNCAN: No, thank you for your –

MR BRIAN BOYLE: [non-transcribable].

MR DUNCAN: Appreciate it.

MR BOYLE: Yes, thank you.

>THE MEETING CONCLUDED

Independent Forestry Panel

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

RICHIE WILLIAMSON MP & TANYA THOMPSON MP

INDEPENDENT FORESTRY PANEL:	MR PETER DUNCAN AM (CHAIR) THE HON. MICK VEITCH
INDEPENDENT FORESTRY PANEL SECRETARIAT:	CLARE MILLER CALLUM FIRTH
ATTENDEES	RICHIE WILLIAMSON MP TANYA THOMPSON MP
LOCATION:	PARLIAMENT OF NSW - ROOM 814; 6 MACQUARIE STREET, SYDNEY NSW 2000
DATE:	WEDNESDAY, 16 OCTOBER 2024

<THE MEETING COMMENCED

MR PETER DUNCAN: Our job is not to do the Forestry Industry Action Plan but to actually, if you like, oversee the stakeholder engagement and make a report to government when it considers the action plan and some of these other issues surrounding that, particularly in the areas of native forestry, what the broader stakeholder things are. And as I said this morning, I think the reason that that's happening, that we are three, if you like, independents in the process rather than it happening within government or within the agencies is there's very polarised views here and these are not new views, these are things that have been around for 50 or 60 years.

MR RICHIE WILLIAMSON: Yes, yes.

MR DUNCAN: You know, you've seen Terania Creek and all the different iterations of it, the 2003 National Parks process. So our report's due to the government [redacted]. We've taken written submissions, we've got 1,650 as of Sunday. We've closed the submissions but we're open to late submissions if people want to put them in, but we've got a sort of fairly tight timeframe. We're getting some qualitative stakeholder research done by an external party called StollzNow Research [non-transcribable] [redacted]. But they've gone to – I'll tell you where they're going to but we're also having a lot of stakeholder meetings within government and external parties. So parties that you would know in the timber industry such as Timber New South Wales –

MR WILLIAMSON: Yes, sure.

MR DUNCAN: – Softwoods Working Group, the Australian Forest Products Association. But we're talking to environmental stakeholders like the Forest Alliance, Worldwide Fund for Nature, North Coast Environmental Council, the Nature Conservation Council. And we're saying to both of those groups if they want to bring others to the meeting, they can. And we're also engaging or reaching out to Aboriginal stakeholders [redacted], we're not going to make a big impact there but we hope to be able to advise the government on how to deal with that group in the future, depending on whether there is time. So we're not trying to push it.

But we're also doing a bit of research, having it done externally on news and media analytics. So going to what the ABC, The Australian and probably The Sydney Morning Herald, so that would be the last five or six years in this area, so to get a bit of an understanding of that view. This is another proxy for sentiment. But with the open for submissions, we had asked for people not just to give us a letter, not just to tell us the old stories but to go through six different levels of issues that are part of this process.

So sustainability of current and future forestry operations, environmental cultural values of forests, demand for timber products, future of softwoods and hardwood plantations, the role of state forests in maximising delivery of environmental and economic benefits and opportunities to realise carbon and biodiversity. So

encouraging that and as we've said, we've got a lot back. We've also said if you give us a form sort of response, we'll probably count that as one, so if there's certain [non-transcribable] form responses, we'll count that as one, so that takes away some of that sort of bias in quantity.

The research itself has gone to three different focus group areas in the community, 20 individual interviews with targeted stakeholders that represent industry, environment, recreation groups, so different. And further eight regional community focus groups have been held in the North Coast, Far North Coast, South Coast, Riverina and Far North West. So there's been some diversity there and again, that's a bit of a proxy for community view as well.

I think the only other major issue to point out is that we're also looking at sort of large scale analysis of peer reviewed academic research in this space, both nationally and internationally and as I said, we'll make a report to government, we won't make recommendations but we'll say this is the stakeholder lens that we look through, this is our view and then it's up to them to deal with it when they do the Forestry Industry Action Plan. So that's the short summary. We'll make this available on our web connection.

MR WILLIAMSON: Yes, sure.

MR DUNCAN: I should've introduced Clare Miller and Callum Firth.

MR WILLIAMSON: No, we met Callum. Yes.

MR DUNCAN: They're the secretariat from the Independent Planning Commission and the three of us are using them because they have good process in this area and dealt with these types of consultations in both mining and development and other areas. So Mary and I were the ones that probably got them involved because we really needed some analytic and sort of really heavy advice and support.

MR WILLIAMSON: Support, yes.

MR DUNCAN: So that's where we're up to.

MR WILLIAMSON: Okay.

MR DUNCAN: And today is really to hear if there's anything that you'd like to think about or focus on and any views you have.

MR WILLIAMSON: [non-transcribable]?

MS TANYA THOMPSON: You fire off first.

MR WILLIAMSON: Well, look, I think – look, you're no stranger to where I come from, neither is Mick. I think they feel that they've been excluded to a large extent in my electorate.

MR DUNCAN: The industry or the electorate?

MR WILLIAMSON: Well, a little bit of both.

MR DUNCAN: Okay.

MR WILLIAMSON: Certainly, I think the industry is more engaged than the electorate. The electorate service the industry, if I can put it in those terms. When I speak to the guys and girls that are supplying, for example, tyres, they have no clue and have been disengaged in what a change in the forestry footprint will mean for their business and when I outline the worst case scenario, Dan said to me, "Well that's nine jobs I'd put off straight away."

MR DUNCAN: Is that right? Yes.

MR WILLIAMSON: Done. Because they're servicing a lot of tyres in the forestry industry.

MR DUNCAN: And Grafton would be a pretty key hub.

MR WILLIAMSON: Yes. Probably is – maybe Casino, but no, Grafton is the forestry hub of the north in my opinion and I'm coming from a biased view. But I think the jobs that are flowing through the Grafton and Casino economy are very, very significant and they feel a bit disconnected from the process. They think that Big Brother's going to make a decision where they're excluded. The forestry industry itself did feel like that but I think that they feel more included now.

MR DUNCAN: That's good.

MR WILLIAMSON: Doesn't mean they feel listened to, they feel included, which a part of my job is to have them included. I can't give them the impression they're feeling listened to but I can give them the avenue to at least be in the conversation. So I think that is important. I think also that the industry accepts that there is going to be change and I think – I can't put words in their mouth but I think they have come up with a plan that they can see there is space for a Great Koala National Park and there's also space for them to continue to operate to provide what I think is a – you know, it's a sovereign risk to the state, not having a timber industry.

MR DUNCAN: We'll be talking to Timber NSW, we'll probably hear more about that.

MR WILLIAMSON: You'll hear a lot more about that.

MR DUNCAN: In about a week's time.

MR WILLIAMSON: Yes. And they have a plan. I've seen it. Mick, you might've too, I think. To me it seems pretty reasonable but at the end of the day this is not my

process, this is the government process and they need to agree that it is reasonable or not and balance what ultimately is competing views of what needs to happen. At the end of the day there will be change and I think if the government can at the very outset say that they support a sustainable native timber industry, it is important to the state and balance their election commitment, which I respect. I would also though make the point the people that are most affected by that didn't vote for it.

MR DUNCAN: No, we've heard a bit of that today.

MR WILLIAMSON: Yes, I reckon you would've but –

MR DUNCAN: And that's where the consultation piece comes into it as well.

MR WILLIAMSON: That's why it's vitally important.

MR DUNCAN: Yes.

MR MICK VEITCH: So Richie, one of the things – the recreational uses of state forests, so up your way there is quite a bit of recreational use?

MR WILLIAMSON: A lot.

MR VEITCH: What's it look like? What sort of activities are you talking about?

MR WILLIAMSON: Passive recreation and mountain biking. So if I can, for example, use the Bom Bom State Forest. They have very recently got a lot of government money to invest in a significant mountain bike activity. There's a bit of four wheel driving, a little bit of motorbiking that happens also in that forest and one would assume that if that's turned into a national park, those activities go. I don't think there's been any discussion with them.

MR VEITCH: Should the government – I'm just posing this as a hypothetical but should the government then, as a part of the exercise, look at ways of maintaining or accommodating the existing recreational use?

MR WILLIAMSON: Yes, absolutely. But that would –

MR VEITCH: But what does that look like?

MR WILLIAMSON: That looks like having a parcel of state forest where logging is not allowed but recreational use is in current form.

MR DUNCAN: Just another type of reserve within the state forest estate.

MR WILLIAMSON: Yes.

MR VEITCH: Yes.

MR WILLIAMSON: But that is not your traditional national park though perhaps. So there needs to be a balance there.

MR DUNCAN: And hardwood plantations and the concept of extending them?

MR WILLIAMSON: Hardwood plantations is a crock.

MR DUNCAN: [non-transcribable].

MR WILLIAMSON: And by the time a hardwood plantation is ready for harvest in my area ranges from thinning at 25 years to full harvest between 35 and 40 years. To mount the argument that there's not the same biodiversity in those plantations as there already is in a native state forest I think is fanciful, to be honest. I don't think – if you want to use a koala or a sugar glider or a glider or a frog, they will make their home in a planation exactly the same as they will in a state forest and look, I always say that our best plantations actually are our state forests. That view is not shared universally, I accept that, I accept that, but I think you either grow timber or you grow protein on a parcel of land and you can't – in my electorate you can't do both. You can't have a functioning cattle farm –

MR DUNCAN: This is the conflict between the two land uses you're getting at?

MR WILLIAMSON: Yes, absolutely. And it's real and it is significant. You can't do both. You can't have a hundred acres of beef cattle and a hundred acres of plantation on the same footprint. It doesn't happen.

MR VEITCH: So down our way, a softwood plantation – Forest Corp have essentially, whenever a good block of land for radiata pine, if a good farm comes up, these days they're bid out at the auction. They just don't have the dollars to [non-transcribable] with the market. Is that the same up your way? Is capacity of the agencies to buy land –

MR WILLIAMSON: Is non-existent. They don't have the capital.

MR DUNCAN: Land values [non-transcribable].

MR WILLIAMSON: Land values are out of touch. Look, and I've got softwood too as you both would know, you know, the pine –

MR VEITCH: Yes. You have, north of Grafton particularly, yes.

MR WILLIAMSON: North of Grafton, through Whiporie is quite significant and even some up on the tablelands through there are places like Ebor and Tyringham –

MR VEITCH: Yes, Ebor. Yes.

MR WILLIAMSON: Yes, there's some, there's more hardwood plantation but the cost of – the capital cost of the land, you won't get a return.

MR VEITCH: Yes, so one of the arguments that we've received in a number of the submissions is that there's been no increase in the plantations for a few years. No one actually explains why but just based on my experience from down our way, I reckon that would be one of the major reasons is they just can't buy into the land to make a plantation.

MR WILLIAMSON: Yes. And I think the other thing is, Mick, they are petrified that they'll get to harvest, the laws will change and they won't be able to harvest and get a return on their 35 year investment.

MR DUNCAN: So this is something we've talked about internally, if you did have an expansion idea, you'd have to have some sort of planning zoning put in place to try and overcome that risk. Otherwise, why invest?

MR WILLIAMSON: Why invest and –

MS THOMPSON: Why invest?

MR WILLIAMSON: – I guess zoning is only a guarantee while it's not changed.

MR VEITCH: Yes. Well, it's a substantial long-term investment.

MR DUNCAN: It is.

MR WILLIAMSON: It is. It sure is. With no guarantee of a return at the end, come fire, if the fire goes through as we've seen in 19, those softwood plantations are rendered useless because they're cooked.

MR VEITCH: Yes, yes.

MR WILLIAMSON: So plantation is risky and there's not too many privateers willing to take the risk.

MR DUNCAN: What about government's role in this, say using maybe Crown land or stock reserves, things like that that are underutilised, what about that?

MR WILLIAMSON: As a plantation or – as a plantation?

MR DUNCAN: Yes, as another land use. Because at the moment I've got a stock reserve. I have to be quite transparent about it. But part of it's lazy, part of it's production for cattle but some of it's not – you know, [non-transcribable] have taken over it in the past.

MR WILLIAMSON: Yes, yes.

MR DUNCAN: If I cleared that or got it cleared, I could put a plantation there. But under the regulations, I can't do it. I can't do it. But well not so much me but say if there was a government incentive scheme, it still can't be done.

MR VEITCH: [non-transcribable].

MR WILLIAMSON: It can't be done under the Act?

MR DUNCAN: Well, yes. I think it can probably under the Act but the regulations –

MR WILLIAMSON: Regs, yes.

MR DUNCAN: – that Local [non-transcribable] Land Service has put around it. So you can only have cattle on a stock reserve.

MR WILLIAMSON: That's right.

MR DUNCAN: So but there are lots of those, particularly further north, around Kyogle, Lismore –

MR WILLIAMSON: Yes, I've got a lot.

MR DUNCAN: Yes. Hundreds.

MR WILLIAMSON: Yes, hundreds, literally. I think they are an underutilised resource, in my opinion. And I don't mean to take up Tanya's

MS THOMPSON: No, no, you keep talking. It's fine. No, no, not at all.

MR WILLIAMSON: I don't want to take your time either. But I think they are an underutilised resource. I think though the risk will be that again you plant, they remain a public asset, regulation can change at the whim of a government, left, right or centre, and then it's locked up for whatever or it's not. A surety is a key to providing the industry with a resource and it's very difficult. It doesn't matter what government you are.

MS THOMPSON: But they haven't had a surety for such a long time, industry, really.

MR WILLIAMSON: No. No. Under either government.

MS THOMPSON: Under either.

MR WILLIAMSON: To be honest.

MR DUNCAN: Yes, it's felt under threat.

MR WILLIAMSON: For a long time.

MS THOMPSON: For a long time.

MR WILLIAMSON: From the 80s, probably from the 1980s, I reckon.

MR DUNCAN: Yes, well that's right. Around the Myall Lakes area, what's your view?

MS THOMPSON: So I've got a mixed – I've got Bulahdelah, which has got [non-transcribable] and Relf & Sons, they recently came to parliament actually to do a presentation to the new government because they are feeling threatened. If that timber mill shuts down, it's a hardwood mill, the town will shut down, that employs that many people locally. So and again, it's the surety there for them that they will continue to have stock to harvest and stock to produce.

But then I've got Kiwarrak, which is being logged at the moment but there's protesters there that are trying to preserve an extra component of that. So you talk about recreation, we have the previous government invested almost half a million into the bike track there a few years ago and they want to expand that reserve, so they're chaining themselves to machinery and all sorts of things at the moment.

MR DUNCAN: So was that Kiwarrak?

MS THOMPSON: Kiwarrak State Forest.

MR DUNCAN: I haven't heard of that.

MS THOMPSON: Yes. To try to stop the logging.

MR VEITCH: So stop logging to save the bike track?

MS THOMPSON: To save – well, the bike track has been preserved but they want to actually lock down an extra portion of the forest as well on top of that. This government has already said no, it's been pencilled in and –

MR DUNCAN: So would that be anywhere near The Great Koala National Park you're talking about?

MS THOMPSON: No.

MR DUNCAN: It's a completely different issue?

MS THOMPSON: It's a completely different issue.

MR DUNCAN: Yes.

MS THOMPSON: And as a local representative, you have to represent all sides and I support the industry wholeheartedly. I spent the day out with local forestry actually

and did a tour of the electorate to see native and hardwood plantation working side by side together. So I actually don't share your view, I think it can work together when done properly and they sort of explained to me how they – I'm no expert, sorry, but it was interesting to see how they actually do make it work with the growth and this grows this long and then they chop that and then with the plantation and it just sort of marries well together and they were really happy to have that,

It was a huge plantation, hardwood plantation there, so very impressive and again it was about fire mitigation, saving that part of the forest through the bushfires as well and making sure that that is all being taken care of too because it's about making sure that we have protection in place to preserve our forests as well from fire. If we want to continue to sustainably harvest it, we have to protect it as well.

MR DUNCAN: So just getting back to the plantations, if there were to be more of it, it has to be with the right regulation and –

MS THOMPSON: Correct.

MR DUNCAN: – right controls and right management about how it's actually managed. [non-transcribable].

MS THOMPSON: Yes.

MR DUNCAN: [cross-talk].

MS THOMPSON: And they were just so excited about it, to hear how they speak about it and yes –

MR DUNCAN: Was this in the same area, Kiwarrak?

MS THOMPSON: Yes, yes. It was around that area. Yes.

MR DUNCAN: Okay.

MS THOMPSON: Then there's also a plantation at Old Bar, so a timber mill there and they're looking at doing the carbon offsets and looking at other ways too because they're nervous about the industry, so they're looking at other avenues to actually make money because there's no sureties for them.

MR VEITCH: And how far advanced are they on the offsets involvement?

MS THOMPSON: They're finding it's hard to get information and to – yes, so not as far as they would like to be and they've done trips overseas to see how it works – you know, New Zealand, they went over there to have a look and yes, so –

MR DUNCAN: Well, it's not a clear area, is it?

MS THOMPSON: No, no.

MR DUNCAN: [non-transcribable] Complex to navigate if you're in a mill or somewhere like that and you haven't had a lot of experience, it's not straightforward.

MS THOMPSON: Yes.

MR VEITCH: That's why I was wondering just how far advanced they were there.

MS THOMPSON: But when you're starting to look outside the box, when it's a generational mill, like that speaks volumes, I think.

MR VEITCH: Yes, yes.

MR DUNCAN: All right.

MR WILLIAMSON: Thanks, guys.

MR DUNCAN: Well, we're happy if you do want to get back to us with anything, but we'd have to have it in the next week or two.

MR WILLIAMSON: Sure.

MR DUNCAN: Because we've got to put something back [redacted].

MR WILLIAMSON: Okay, mate.

MR VEITCH: But that stuff you're talking about, Richie, about sort of the ancillary industries that are impacted in your communities, I think that's –

MR DUNCAN: That hasn't come up –

MR VEITCH: That hasn't come up.

MR DUNCAN: It's an important issue.

MR VEITCH: So if you could get that to us.

MR WILLIAMSON: Yes, look, I'm more than happy to. Yes, for sure.

MR VEITCH: Yes. You don't have to mention names but if you can just give us an example like that because that hasn't been raised.

MR WILLIAMSON: Sure, sure. Yes, yes. More than happy to.

MR DUNCAN: Okay.

MR WILLIAMSON: Thanks, guys.

MS THOMPSON: Thank you.

>THE MEETING CONCLUDED

Independent Forestry Panel

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

DR JOE MCGIRR, MEMBER FOR WAGGA WAGGA

INDEPENDENT FORESTRY PANEL:	MR PETER DUNCAN AM (CHAIR) PROFESSOR MARY O'KANE AC THE HON. MICK VEITCH
INDEPENDENT FORESTRY PANEL SECRETARIAT:	CLARE MILLER CALLUM FIRTH
ATTENDEES	DR JOE MCGIRR MP, MEMBER FOR WAGGA WAGGA PAUL TERRY
LOCATION:	VIA VIDEO CONFERENCE
DATE:	MONDAY, 14 OCTOBER 2024

<THE MEETING COMMENCED

DR JOE MCGIRR: Joe McGirr, how are you?

PROF MARY O'KANE: Nice to see you.

MR PETER DUNCAN: And we think Mick Veitch is joining us but he hasn't come online yet. So we thought given only half an hour, we'd better get started. We've also got the Independent Planning Commission secretariat here as well. That's Clare and Callum online.

DR MCGIRR: Hi Clare, hi Callum. And Paul Terry from my office is here as well.

PROF O'KANE: Hi Paul.

DR MCGIRR: Look, thank you very much for meeting with me. I can't participate next week because of my commitments with a modern slavery workshop overseas and I think you're reporting [redacted], is that right?

MR DUNCAN: We are. The purpose and I just wanted to clarify that, our role is really to lead on the stakeholder engagement and to provide advice to government on the development of the Forest Industry Action Plan. So at some stage [redacted], government will consider some work towards the action plan that the cabinet office and others have been doing. So we're really the interface, if you like, of stakeholder management and making sure that we give the government a balanced and broad view of what industry, other government agencies and the community think. So we've been open – here's Mick. How are you, Mick?

DR MCGIRR: G'day, Mick. How are you?

MR MICK VEITCH: [non-transcribable].

MR DUNCAN: So the idea is just to give a bit of a balanced view about what people think about the forest industry and hopefully you have some input today. I know you've got a fairly large footprint in that sort of plantation area down in your region.

DR MCGIRR: Yes, yes, precisely. Peter, I'm just – so you're doing the stakeholder engagement. So I'm just interested – okay, well how about I just outline a couple of points that I want to make and then perhaps you might come back to me and also perhaps you can come back to me and give me some sense of what the thinking is on this. Okay.

I mean, my concerns are clearly that the softwood industry is a huge part of this electorate, this part of the world. So it's responsible for an enormous amount of economic activity in the Snowy Valleys region, like probably half the economic value when you take into account the industry itself and then the associated support industries, like it's a really big industry in this region.

And can I just say an efficient industry in terms of use of softwood, I think that's what I've been told and actually I think there's some consensus on that because the wood is used at various stages and we have the Visy mill there so that the chippings and pulp is used as well and used without being exported long distances and so on. So it's an important part of the local economy.

It has been replanted since the fires but I'm not aware of new plantations and I'm actually not aware of many new softwood plantations in the state and I think that's a huge issue. It's been identified that that needs to take place but for some reason it's not, where the previous government knew about it, there was an inquiry into it but it remains somehow something that's not happening.

Now, I don't know if it's a question of the government needed to change the settings to encourage investors in that area or whether the Forestry Corp itself needs to be more actively involved but I think it's a huge issue. And connected to that is this emergence, I think, of plantings of forests for carbon credits, right, which are not plantations. So I'm hearing of people planting and establishing forests that are unmanaged basically for carbon credits and clearly there's a market there.

I think the settings have changed recently because there is now a market there for that, particularly with the top polluters and the Commonwealth legislation around the requirements of the top polluters to reduce emissions. And I just can't understand why we can't combine that opportunity of carbon credits with plantation plantings. You know, I mean actually the unmanaged forests present a fire hazard and here we have an opportunity to have managed forests as part of that and I would've thought an income stream as well that would encourage people. So like there's an opportunity there and I just think we need to recognise that.

The other part of the issue that I think – well, I don't think it gets overlooked but it does get overlooked in a way is what happens to people's jobs when you reduce logging of native hardwood forests. And I know there's a huge push on about stopping the logging of native forests and I understand the reasons behind that but the trite remarks that are often made that it'll be fine for workers, they'll get jobs somewhere in tourism or whatever, I think it's pretty trite. If you are going to do this and I accept that there's a considerable political pressure around it, then there needs to be a proper plan around that.

Now, I think in Victoria they've actually mobilised a lot of forest workers to be involved in fire protection around those forests and I think that could be an opportunity but I don't think people understand or respect the considerable work that forests have done over a number of years for that industry and for Australian community and I think there are often remarks that, "Well, it won't be a problem, we'll have koalas to look at and there will be lots of tourist jobs there." My sense is that there isn't really a thought to that.

But look, coming back to my other point, I guess, is whether there's an opportunity with the settings on carbon credits to get some opportunities by managing those forests in a way that sustains the workforce, harvests the credits and again, particularly in

terms of plantation. So I guess they're my thoughts but I'm actually interested to hear your thinking and any other issues you'd like my opinion on.

MR DUNCAN: Yes, look, your thoughts are pretty well spot on with the range of challenges that the industry faces and this is why I think the government wants to do a solid action plan going forward [redacted]. So from a plantations point of view, certainly what we're hearing is maximising the opportunity of the plantations and even expanding. So you're quite right about the – and it has been the lack of expansion, not just the last few years, probably over the last almost two decades now.

DR MCGIRR: Yes.

MR DUNCAN: Early 2000s it was sort of on the agenda and seemed to be going well with managed investment schemes and things. That's not what occurred in recent decades. Secondly to that, I would say that probably the area that you cover would be an area of focus and strength and that's what people see, that it's almost an industrialised forest approach. And the fact that you've got the Visy plant, there's a great cycle working there, so that's certainly a positive. I think the issue of jobs is important. You're quite right, structural adjustments and all those sorts of things but really I think the focus in this is what happens if you create more national parks, say koala national park, what happens to the industry on the coast, the hardwood industry?

DR MCGIRR: Yes.

MR DUNCAN: And that's the one - you quite rightly point out that that's the one that there's a lot of community pressure on for change and that's what also this action plan is going to address. So I think probably to assure you, the things that you're questioning are the very things that should go into this industry action plan in our mind and is, from our point of view, we've only had submissions close over the weekend and I'm not sure, Clare, whether you know the number yet but we've had probably close to a thousand submissions by now.

DR MCGIRR: Wow.

MR DUNCAN: It was up to around 600 last week, I think, the middle of the week. We're expecting 4 to 500 more.

MS CLARE MILLER: Sorry, just in terms of the numbers, we don't have a number but about 800 came in over the weekend, so –

MR DUNCAN: Okay. Yes, well we're probably up to around 1,400 then in that case. It was 600 over on Wednesday. So there was a lot of interest here. We have targeted groups such as going to local members this week and quite rightly you point out that you can't make it but we're very happy to have this discussion. Even though submissions are closed, Joe, we'd be happy if you want to put something in writing formally. But I think this is probably one of the most challenging industries other than water to deal with as a natural resource and we get that as a panel and really want to

see a good outcome here and look, in the next decision making with this stakeholder engagement piece.

DR MCGIRR: Yes. I think the idea that we might get some sort of agreed plan going forward where not everyone's happy but at least there's an agreed direction is really important actually because at the moment it's just a war of attrition and no one's going anywhere. So I welcome that. Can I just make another comment, just in terms of plantations and I'm all for expanding plantations and as you say, nothing's been done for two decades and look, the irony of that is that we continue to therefore import what we need from forests that aren't managed. So I think we have a responsibility to try and support local forestry.

But I do get a lot of feedback from farmers affected by the – and I think your word industrial and I think Mick knows all this, Mick would've heard all this for many more years than me, but because it is quite an industrialised process, look, the management of weeds and pests, particularly blackberries, is a huge issue and I think that we need to recognise landholders around forests feel affected by it and look, I think the reality was that the fires, the unmanaged blackberries were a significant issue at the time. I think, Mary, you must have heard that in the evidence at the time.

PROF O'KANE: Yes, we did.

DR MCGIRR: So I think that's an important consideration that I think needs to come into it. We do need to expand but we do need to address the management of those and the relationships with the neighbours. So if I could just flag that as an important issue but yes, for some reason we just have not planted and I don't know if it's the settings in terms of incentives for investors. And then the last point, I suppose, is the fires and look, I think there was a perception that the firefighting workforce had been allowed to slide or the forestry workforce had been allowed to slide a bit by Forestry Corp up here.

I'm not saying actually in the end it was a significant factor of the fires, I'm not exactly sure. Certainly my community has a bit of a perception that vigilance around fire protection, which is absolutely critical to managing those plantations, just needs to be a higher priority. Which I guess comes back to this issue of mobilising your workforce in alternative ways and I think fire prevention and fire management is, I understand, one way that could be done and I think they've done it in Victoria.

MR DUNCAN: Yes, look, it's interesting, the point you make about managing carbon plantations and things, I've just been overseas and in Germany they're actually talking a lot about this. They have a lot of small private holdings over there and what's happened over time, the productivity is reduced and people haven't been looking after their forests and they've now become a big threat.

So they're trying in their policy to change things the other way around and give people benefit or bonus for looking after things rather than fixing things up or addressing them when they fail and it's a pretty good concept to think through, I think, with carbon plantations or other environmental planning as well. And certainly in my mind,

I haven't talked in depth with Mary or Mick about this but there needs to be some sort of reversal of the incentives, if you know what I mean, an incentive to look after a forest, whether it's for carbon or timber or whatever.

DR MCGIRR: Yes, yes.

MR DUNCAN: Until we reduce the hazard, yes.

DR MCGIRR: Yes. Well, I mean, as I understand it, there are incentives now for carbon emissions and credits and so on to plant, all very good, we want to be nature positive, I get that. But if they're not managed, they'll just be a fire hazard, they'll just be another issue for us and that'll be completely counterproductive. So anyway, just is there any other – I see where you're doing the stakeholder engagement, obviously the government has in mind a plan.

MR DUNCAN: Yes.

DR MCGIRR: I guess it's going to be around management of native forests, logging and the koala park. I've been told that the establishment of the – what is it? The Great Koala National Park –

MR DUNCAN: Yes.

DR MCGIRR: – will almost effectively end actual native hardwood logging in – well, a significant section of the [cross-talk].

MR DUNCAN: Yes, from what we've seen, there's [non-transcribable] group working on this and this is from both sides, from forestry and from the conservation side of [cross-talk].

DR MCGIRR: Yes.

MR DUNCAN: And they've got various options they're still working through. One option may be that but another option may be planting a lot more plantations or doing some things to offset those impacts. [redacted] So that work is still a work in progress from my point of view and that's probably one end of the spectrum, maybe wishing that to happen or worrying that that will happen, put it that way. So I don't think we're there yet in that sort of [cross-talk].

DR MCGIRR: No, no. Okay. All right. No, look, that's good, I just wanted to have the chance to put those views forward and just to emphasise it's just an incredibly economically important resource here and I actually think the model here, from what I have read and it is quite a good one and it's quite an efficient use of all forest products and so on. Do you have any questions for me, either yourself or Mary or Mick?

MR VEITCH: Yes, I do.

MR DUNCAN: Over to you, Mick.

MR VEITCH: Thanks. [non-transcribable] Joe, good to see you. You're looking well.

DR MCGIRR: Thanks, Mick. Good on you. And you are too.

MR VEITCH: You've got two hard weeks ahead of you, I know. Hey, just I've got sort of three really quick things, just to get your views. The first one is I could remember back in 1988 when the softwood plantation industry took off and Terry Sheahan was the local member and they started buying farmland. It was pretty good grazing land at the time. I used to shear at a lot of those – that are now under radiata pine.

This issue about expanding the plantation estate will come with some issues around land use conflict, particularly that good grazing land, for the softwood in particular. So any views you've got around how you think the community would handle that is the first one. The second one, mate, is the hardwood – can you just remind me how many hardwood – if there's any hardwood harvesting up in the mountains? I know there was a little bit but –

DR MCGIRR: There is still a little bit. There is still a little bit. It's not a significant – not a big part of it but there is a little bit, yes.

MR VEITCH: Okay. And last one is just your views around the Indigenous involvement in the management of our forest resource and how we can maximise that, particularly with your views of the local Wiradjuri and Wangal people.

DR MCGIRR: Yes, that's a good point. I mean, expansion will be controversial. There are farmers, as you know, Mick, here that are absolutely adamant. They were happy with the fires and the harvesting because they said the creek started to run again and they started to get proper drainage. And so there's a debate about, as you know, about what the forests do there. Look, it's a land use conflict issue. I've got a land use conflict issue here with solar factories popping up all over the place, now batteries, transmission lines.

But I do think if the panel forms the view that we should be expanding the softwood industry and I think we should, then we're just going to have to manage that and make sure – that's why I think what's critical in that is making sure that the management of the forests is absolutely top and the relationships with neighbours are important. So I mean the blackberry issue is a critical one but also pests, animals and so on.

So yes, look, there isn't an easy answer to that, Mick, and I get it from both sides but it is an economically important industry. I think it's a genuinely renewable energy, I think it's good for carbon and I think if we do it well, we can manage it. I'll have to think about Indigenous involvement, Mick. Yes, that's a good question actually and

are you thinking do they have something to show us or are you more thinking of groups that need to be involved in it?

MR VEITCH: A bit of both, Joe. Like, I just having read some of the submissions now and this is a sort of a space that is – it's actually one of the items we're consulting on is what that would look like if it were to happen. So I guess my question to you is – and I'd appreciate your intellectual capacity on this matter because you do think these things through deeply, I know. So if you want to come back to me at a later stage.

DR MCGIRR: Yes, that's a really good question. It's not something that – I mean, I haven't had Aboriginal groups approach me with a deep concern about it, I have to say. I think a lot of people get jobs in the industry here. Yes, it's a good question, Mick.

MR DUNCAN: One thing to think through, Mick, National Parks have a lot of joint management agreements with Aboriginal groups and I think that's where some of this thinking is derived from. So I don't know whether you have any of that in your area but that's the concept, where they might have some sort of joint management agreement.

DR MCGIRR: Yes, that's a very good question actually. Thanks, Mick. I'm sorry, what I can tell you is that it's not an issue that's been raised with me by local Aboriginal people in particular. Can I just say that?

MR VEITCH: Yes.

DR MCGIRR: It hasn't been an issue and I'm not particularly aware of particular expertise. I know there's a lot of discussion about cultural burning, which might have a small part in terms of fire management, but okay, I need to think about that. Thanks, Mick.

MR VEITCH: Okay. That's me.

MR DUNCAN: Okay. Mary, is there anything from you?

PROF O'KANE: No, they've been very good points raised. It's covered what I wanted.

MR DUNCAN: Absolutely. I think, Joe, the sorts of points you raised and the points that we're thinking through as a panel as well, so rest assured we'll be giving advice on all of those sorts of things when we're asked.

DR MCGIRR: Yes, I appreciate that. Okay. We'll come back to you with some – I'll have a little bit of a think about those issues you've raised with us actually. But I appreciate your time this morning. Thank you for making that time. I know it's early on a Monday morning but – and I do appreciate it because I won't be able to participate in the panel because I'll be at this workshop.

MR DUNCAN: No problem at all.

DR MCGIRR: So I do appreciate the opportunity to do it. Thank you very much.

MR DUNCAN: It's an interesting area you're getting involved in there too by the sound of it, so thanks again for your time.

DR MCGIRR: Modern slavery, yes, that's right.

MR DUNCAN: Yes. Thanks, Joe and thanks, Paul.

DR MCGIRR: Thanks, Peter. Thanks, Mary. And thanks, Mick. And thanks for the work you're doing. Great. Thank you very much.

MR DUNCAN: Yes, we might stay on the line. Thank you very much.

DR MCGIRR: Cheers, we'll leave. Thank you.

MR DUNCAN: Thank you.

PROF O'KANE: Thank you.

>THE MEETING CONCLUDED