

**Submission  
No 107**

## **SUSTAINABILITY OF ENERGY SUPPLY AND RESOURCES IN NSW**

**Name:** Mr Tom Ferrier

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## Submission to the inquiry into the sustainability of energy supply and resources in NSW

My name is Tom Ferrier. I have a Masters in Environmental Management and have spent most of my professional life teaching Environmental Science and Natural Resource Management at Secondary and Tertiary level. When I started teaching in Victoria in the late '70s, climate change and solutions to combat it were part of the curriculum.

Ten years ago I moved to the Lorne Valley on the mid-north coast. Unfortunately the rampant intensive logging in the forests surrounding me detracts from an otherwise high quality of life. When a group of locals became aware that the DPI and the Forestry Corporation were about to further intensify logging based on non-sawlogs for the emerging wood pellet industry, we formed a group of concerned citizens No Electricity From Forests.

In the last couple of years, IPCC scientists have emphasised two urgent imperatives. To combat global warming, we must decarbonise our energy supply and cease vegetation clearing, allowing existing forests to return to a mature state and simultaneously afforesting cleared land. Any decisions on the future of resource use worldwide must adhere to these imperatives.

In a recent report, Eastern Australia is listed as the only developed nation 'hot spot' for vegetation clearing. Not only is NSW exacerbating global warming through coal mining and exports, but it has recently made retrograde changes to vegetation clearing and forestry regulations. In other words, NSW is currently defying the IPCC's imperatives in its current management of energy and forest resources.

It does not have to be this way. There are win-win opportunities for NSW if it adopts a more enlightened approach to resource management.

As demonstrated in numerous examples such as the Latrobe Valley in Victoria and Port Augusta and Whyalla in South Australia, there are positive economic opportunities in transitioning away from coal fired energy supply to renewable energy for both the domestic and export market. Plans for mining unconventional gas or CSG should not be part of this transition as it is simply another carbon fuel.

A highly concerning emerging trend is the market for wood pellets. The burning of wood for electricity is considered 'carbon neutral' and attracts Renewable Energy Credits/subsidies in the EU, Australia and the USA. This is despite 800 climate scientists and ecologists writing to international agencies including the EU disputing this carbon neutrality. Apart from the lag time of decades in recapturing the carbon, the fossil fuel use in harvesting, transporting and processing trees into pellets results in the emissions being worse than coal per unit of electricity produced.

With an eye on this emerging market, the Department of Primary Industries has identified hundreds of thousands of tonnes of wood per annum that could be accessed from private and State forests for wood pellet production. For instance, under the new IFOA's the volume of non-saw logs to be harvested in State Forests between Taree and Grafton has been doubled.

Under the new IFOAs, there is an intensification of logging – greater areas that can be clear felled and encroachment on previously protected old-growth forests. The overall result is a conversion of multi-aged, mixed species forests to young, monoculture regrowth forests of limited habitat value. This is especially the case for hollow dependent species such as gliders and owls.

Apart from the intrinsic value in conserving threatened species, there is the opportunity for regional communities to capitalise on nature-based eco-tourism. Recent research has shown that mature eucalypt forests have a very high capacity to store carbon, improve water quantity and quality in catchments and lower fire risk.

Government support for decentralised, genuinely renewable energy initiatives will stimulate local industries and employment. For instance the current solar/wind /pumped hydro scheme near Walcha will employ 1400.

With progressive policies, NSW could capitalise on the opportunities offered by the development of a genuine renewable energy industry. A healthy economy, biodiversity and our future climate depend on NSW pursuing this path rather than continuing on its present destructive mode.