

**Submission
No 420**

**INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LAND IN
NEW SOUTH WALES**

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Dear Committee Members

Having read a number of submissions to this inquiry I feel it necessary to forward a relatively more rounded point of view. I am an accountant living and working on the mid north coast. I was brought up initially in the city of Sydney. We came to this area when I was a teenager – it was a dream come true. My love and admiration for this area and all it has to offer is well known among my family, friends and colleagues. Within thirty minutes we can travel from some of the most beautiful beaches in Australia to some of the most spectacular bush and mountain scenery in Australia. I consider myself extremely lucky.

While my family was growing we would spend many hours almost every week exploring the environs that surround us. Ten minutes and we were at the beach, twenty minutes in the other direction and we would be in dense forest. We have within easy reach the breathtaking Lansdowne Escarpments, Ellenborough Falls which is one of the longest single drop waterfalls in New South Wales, and the Grandis which is one of the tallest trees in New South Wales. We would often go bush walking in our local state forests when I would teach my four children about the myriad of flora and fauna, topography, the history of the forests, and the effects of man on our environment (as much as my small amount of knowledge would permit anyway). We would also photograph and sometimes sketch and paint on our trips into the forests. So much was gained from these family excursions.

From my late teens and into my early twenties I was an avid 'greenie', arguing vehemently for the complete banning of logging, particularly with my brother in law who hand felled trees for a living. However, I later came to think of that idea as a childish whimsy. My continued acquisition and use of timber products in my daily life forced me to more critically consider this business of logging and timber production, not just as it affected Australia but also the rest of the world.

Should we not be taking a global view? Is it not selfish to want our forests locked to harvesting for eternity only to ravage those of the rest of the world? What of the equatorial rain forests of Africa, Indonesia or South America? What of the boreal and taiga forests of the northern Americas, northern Europe and Russia? Would not a reduction in Australian native forestry be likely to increase imports from countries with weaker environmental regulation, including those where forests are logged unsustainably and illegally?

Timber is our most environmentally sustainable resource; we must put it to its fullest use. Other materials such as metal, oil, rock and plastic can act as replacement for many of the uses to which timber has been put, but they usually require more energy to produce. For example, it generally requires two mega joules per kilogram (MJ/kg) to create a product from kiln dried hardwood, compared to 38MJ/kg for galvanised mild steel, 90 MJ/kg for standard plastics and 170 MJ/kg for aluminium.¹ Further, wood framed houses typically provide net storage of 7.5 tonnes of carbon, while a similar steel framed house will be a net emitter of 2.9 tonnes of carbon dioxide.² Further, none of these alternatives are sustainable. We have a duty to the planet, to our future generations, to be as sustainable as possible.

Australia has 147 million hectares of native forests and 1.8 million hectares of plantation forests. NSW alone has some 26.2 million hectares of native forests (approximately 33% of the total land area of the state) and 345,000 hectares of plantation forests.³ Of those native forests 2.4 million hectares are available for logging. In 2010 the total native forest area harvested was 37,784 hectares or 0.15% of total native forests.⁴ From 1995 to 2010 almost 1.7 million hectares of NSW land was

¹ Victorian Association of Forest Industries and Australian Forest Products Association, 2011, *The Benefits of Naturally Grown Australian Forest and Wood Products*, viewed 31 August 2012

² *Ibid* 1

³ ABARES, *Type and Extent of Australia's Forests*, <http://adl.brs.gov.au/forestsaustralia/facts/type.html>, retrieved 20 August 2012

⁴ Forests NSW, *Forests NSW Annual Report 2009-10*, http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0009/366750/forests-nsw-annual-report-200910-complete.pdf, retrieved 20 August 2012

converted to national parks or reserves of some sort. Since June 2010 another 171,000 hectares of forests have been legislated to preservation.⁵

As at June 2010, The Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (DECCW) managed a network of 800 parks and reserves consisting of over 6.76 million hectares of land (over 8.4 per cent of the state or 15.2 million football fields as ‘conservationists’ often measure in). This is more than half that held for conservation for the whole of Australia. The Department’s aim is one of “protecting the natural and cultural heritage values of the NSW landscape and providing opportunities for education and public enjoyment of our environment”.⁶ They are said to be “an important part of achieving natural and cultural conservation objectives, and bring a range of benefits to local communities”.⁷ Too often however there are limited or no educational or public enjoyment opportunities actively offered to the public, while the effects of conversion for some local communities would not be said by them to be ‘benefits’. Rather they mean loss of jobs and decline in the population of local communities that can and does have a devastating social and economic impact.

Having worked closely with some members of the timber industry for a number of years I have seen firsthand the effects of conversion on the remaining resources and what that entails for local communities. Surely with such impacts occurring across Australia a true concern for the environment could not be the primary impetus for conversion. From my point of view it seems often not the environment but political agenda that is foremost in the minds of policy seekers. Rather than acquiescing to a relatively small but loud proportion of the public we should be educating the public on the benefits of sustainable logging and forestry management. Planet Ark believes so strongly in the benefits of using wood that they are educating the public by featuring Forests & Wood Products

⁵ DECCW, *Management of the NSW Parks Systems*, <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/sop10/index.htm>, retrieved 20 August 2012

⁶ *Ibid* 5

⁷ *Ibid* 5

Australia's 'Wood, Naturally Better' on their Environmental Edge website. This is just one example of an environmental organisation with a belief in the many benefits of timber and a hope for future sustainable forestry management, including the methods and means used for conversion of land to conservation.

Political commitment must be strengthened and aligned with effectively sustainable management of all forest types. We should enhance the contribution of forests to our environmental, social and economic well being. These factors, environmental, social and economic, must coexist in a finite world (while the forests themselves are renewable the land upon which they grow is not). Thus, forests management must be achieved using a balanced approach, for if one factor were to get fat the others would starve. This should not be a once off task – it is given by our ever changing environment that we must continuously evaluate our effect and course for the future. As our environment changes so must we adapt.

While I have expressed my opinions with some facts and figures thrown in, I have had experience of the effects of State Forest conversion, I have heard members of the timber industry speak of the mismanagement of the forests caused by such conversion and the strain it puts on remaining resources, the effect this has on their livelihoods, their families, their employees and their communities now and into the future. It saddens and scares me immensely to know that with all our modern techniques and forward thinking we still can't get this right – this 'business' that really could be beautifully handled with even a degree of common sense and genuine care.

We must try to get it right this time. Please.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Aitken