

Submission
No 45

**INQUIRY INTO LONG TERM SUSTAINABILITY AND
FUTURE OF THE TIMBER AND FOREST PRODUCTS
INDUSTRY**

Organisation: Clarence Environment Centre

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Submission
to
Inquiry into the
Sustainability of Native
Forest Logging

Compiled by John Edwards
Honorary Secretary

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Introduction

The Clarence Environment Centre (CEC) has maintained a shop-front in Grafton for over 30 years, and has a proud history of environmental advocacy. The conservation of the Australia's natural environment, both terrestrial and marine, has always been a priority for our members, and we believe the maintenance of healthy ecosystems and biodiversity is of paramount importance.

Our organisation has been closely involved in forestry issue for the entire period of our existence, providing input and writing submissions for decades. We have undertaken dozens of independent surveys of logging operations in our area, and reported on the widespread non-compliance with the Integrated Forests Operations Approval (IFOA) and Threatened Species Licence that we uncovered. Those reports have resulted in numerous official warnings and penalty infringement notices from the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA), but little else, and the breaches continue unabated.

Over recent years, regulatory changes have seen extensive erosion of protection for threatened species and biodiversity generally, and recent changes that allow clear felling, and reduced buffer zones along drainage features and creeks are just some examples.

In short, the current situation in state forests cannot be allowed to continue.

Summary

Is native forest logging sustainable? The answer is an emphatic NO.

The industry, specifically Forests Corporation, has barely turned a profit ever since the Forests Agreements were signed in 2000, and in many financial years, managed to show multi-million-dollar losses. Those financial losses are subsidised by the NSW tax-payer, but the ecological losses are borne by everyone through loss of visual amenity, and the eco-services forests provide to us all free of charge.

The tragic side of this is that since the former Forestry Commission was corporatized, and the fiscal bottom line became all important, Forests Corporation, and the former Forests NSW, have only ever achieved a profit by cutting expenses, i.e., forest maintenance. Weed eradication has ceased, as has pest animal control, while many silvicultural practices such as thinning no longer occur.

Native forests are a major source of biodiversity which, as stated in the Northern Rivers Biodiversity Management Plan, *“is vital in supporting human life on Earth and provides many benefits, including all our food, many medicines and industrial products. It also supplies clean air and water, and fertile soils”*.

Anyone who has spent any time in logged forests, can see ancient tree stumps up to 2m diameter, which have progressively reduced in size until today, logs as small as 40cm are common.

The smaller the log, the smaller the percentage of ‘salvage’, i.e., only a very small percentage of a small log provides actual timber, less than 30%. That means 70% is wasted. The bigger the log, the less waste, but big logs are no longer available, or scarce, which is why the timber industry has successfully lobbied to be allowed to log closer to creek lines where some bigger trees had previously been protected. That is also why the timber industry continually presses to be able to “sustainably log” national parks, even making the absurd suggestion that some state forests could be exchanged with national parks.

All forestry management plans push messages, persuading us that, *“The sustainability of our business is founded on the sustainable management of our forests”* and then, through multiple references to “ecologically sustainable management” of our hardwood forests, set out to persuade readers that native forest logging in NSW is ecologically sustainable.

Unfortunately, particularly in respect to the sustainable supply of timber, this is far from the case, and there is endless supporting evidence available, The following statements from a range of reputable sources back that up:

1. **The Institute of Foresters of Australia – Letter to Rob Oakeshott, 2009:**
“In NSW the adopted forest strategy is to unsustainably cut the available public native forest through to 2023 at which point hardwood plantations are proposed to be available to make up the very significant shortfall in logs. Unfortunately, the species mix and rate of plantation development in NSW post 2000 makes this unachievable”.
2. **Dailan Pugh OAM, North East Forest Alliance and RFA negotiator, July 2011.**
*“Timber volumes were intentionally committed above the estimated sustainable yields in north-east NSW by both the FAs and RFA (Forest Agreements and Regional Forest Agreements).
The fact that Forests NSW has drastically overestimated the available timber volumes, is simply compounding the problems now being faced.*
3. **The Environmental Defenders Office – Executive Summary, of its report - “COMPLIANCE FAILURES IN THE PUBLIC FORESTS OF NEW SOUTH WALES”, July 2011.**
“It is clear that native forests are not being managed in a way that complies with the principles of Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management (ESFM) and the conservation of biodiversity.”
4. **The Victorian Department of Primary Industries - “Economic Policy Settings in the Forest and Timber Industry – An inter-jurisdictional comparison”, May 2008.**
“There is concern that Forests NSW will not be able to meet commitments in Wood Supply Agreements with the current forest areas allocated for commercial forest production. This is evidenced through the fact that Forests NSW is purchasing private native forest resources to meet current commitments.”
5. **The NSW Auditor General - “2009 Performance Audit”:**
 - a) *To meet wood supply commitments, the native forest managed by Forests NSW on the north coast is being cut faster than it is growing back.*
 - b) *The North Coast region has been unable to meet its species commitment since 2004 for blackbutt (the North Coast's most logged species, 24% of total cut).*
 - c) *current yield from native forests in the north coast is not sustainable in the long term.*

We appreciate this opportunity to comment, and sincerely hope our input will assist in ultimately shutting down the native forest industry, and allowing those forests to function naturally to help stop biodiversity decline and assist in absorbing greenhouse carbon emissions.

John Edwards
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