

**Submission
No 51**

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

Name: Dr Nola Firth

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Submission regarding the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry: Long term sustainability and future of the timber and forest products industry

By Nola Firth

I am making a submission regarding the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry: Long term sustainability and future of the timber and forest products industry. I am a member of the NSW community and making this submission because I have the deepest concern about the current state of the environment in New South Wales. I believe, in this time of bushfires, mass biodiversity loss and climate change that native trees must be seen as valuable assets which must be retained in situ and that all forestry industry must be plantation based. Further removing trees for woodchips and biofuel from native forests is unconscionable as it wastes a valuable asset and creates more carbon emissions than coal does.

According to the Adelaide Botanical Gardens, we are losing species at a rate of two per day and this rate is likely to dramatically increase unless there is immediate action. Further, according to the major and highly respected *Living Planet Report* 60% of native animals, fish and birds have been wiped out since 1970 and loss or fragmentation of habitat and weed spread is being found to be the key cause¹.

In the last 200 years Australia has had one of the worst extinction records and one of the highest rates of land clearing in the world. Since the federal Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act was established in 1999, 7.7 million hectares of threatened species habitat has been destroyed. National parks and other reserves are not sufficient to counter the current threat to Australia's biodiversity. Even before the recent bushfires 59 mammal or bird species had been lost and the number listed as threatened was increasing. The Federal Government's report, *The Australia State of the Environment 2016*, concluded that "The outlook for Australian biodiversity is generally poor, given the current overall poor status, deteriorating

¹ https://www.wwf.org.au/knowledge-centre/living-planet-report?gclid=CjwKCAjw5Ij2BRBdEiwA0Fre9ZoedJz3s0NAoNQTf13z1dDtNlxc8xXoqmNVA6pQ9coSwtx30ev-ahoC_E8QAvD_BwE#gs.6anzi8, accessed 19/5/20.

trends and increasing pressures. Our current investments in biodiversity management are not keeping pace with the scale and magnitude of current pressures. Resources for managing biodiversity and for limiting the impact of key pressures mostly appear inadequate to arrest the declining status of many species."²

This assessment however was before the horrendous destruction of over a billion animals in the recent bushfires, to say nothing of the billions of insects and flora destroyed. Over a third of NSW's national park land was burnt including 80 per cent of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area and more than half the Gondwana Rainforests. These unprecedented fires burnt more than 50% of the state's heathlands, 41% of wet sclerophyll forests and more than 33% of NSW's rainforests. Even saline wetlands burned. 5.128 million hectares of NSW, including 2.539 million hectares, 34.5 %, of national park was burnt - about two-thirds of the 251 the National Parks were at least half burnt and 55 at least 99% affected. Hundreds of threatened flora and fauna, already at serious risk, had their habitat further diminished. For example the long-footed potoroo, Hastings River mouse and the brush-tailed rock-wallaby had their entire habitat burnt and koalas lost a quarter of theirs³.

In the light of this situation it is not defensible to be allowing or encouraging the further removal of native forest especially using what, including on private land, is now frequently a self assessment system with little or no expert ecological investigation, accurate mapping, compliance or transparent, publically accessible record of the logging and its local and regional effects. The record for compliance with environmental protection requirements under the previous more stringent legislation was already very poor. Furthermore, the recent Samuel's report into the EPBA clearly states that significant protection of native habitat must urgently be undertaken if we are to save our many threatened species.⁴

There also needs to be urgent clarification of the intent regarding biomass burning to create electricity. In 2017 The Department of Primary Industry in New South Wales identified more than a million tonnes of wood from private and State Forests for burning. Growing wood for fuel definitely must not be undertaken. Studies have shown that burning wood creates more carbon than burning coal. This is because much more wood than coal has to be burned to create equivalent heat and also because of higher water content in wood⁵. Further, the idea that wood is renewable takes little account of the time involved for trees to grow or the urgency with which we need trees for carbon capture and native habitat.

Additionally it is becoming clear that native forestry is no longer financially viable. FCNSW's revenue is set to decline \$100 million, or 25 per cent, from next financial year, with predicted losses of about \$15 million a year from 2022 to 2024⁶. FCNSW is a

² <https://soe.environment.gov.au/>

³ <https://www.smh.com.au/environment/conservation/revealed-widespread-species-devastation-following-unprecedented-fires-20200117-p53siy.html>

⁴ <https://epbcactreview.environment.gov.au/resources/final-report>

⁵ Laganière, J., Paré, D., Thiffault, E. & Bernier, P. Y. Range and uncertainties in estimating delays in greenhouse gas mitigation potential of forest bioenergy sourced from Canadian forests. *GCB Bioenergy* 9, 358–369 (2017).

⁶ <https://www.smh.com.au/environment/sustainability/forestry-corp-facing-massive-revenue-drop-after-record-bushfire-season-20210121-p56vx>

government owned corporation, so the NSW Government is ultimately liable for keeping it afloat. This means taxpayers are subsidising the destruction of our native forests and paying to drive species to extinction. This is absurd.

What is needed is a completely different emphasis. Instead of such a damaging industry as native forestry, measures are needed to indicate that trees in the ground are highly valuable. Native forests are resources that provide habitat, cool the planet, reduce carbon emissions, attract rainfall, purify and moderate the flow of water, support microscopic soil communities, and give people spiritual and recreational refreshment (eco tourism is a rapidly growing industry⁷). Unlogged areas of bushland are known to resist fire better than logged areas.⁸ Native forests need to be presented to landholders as a precious resource in their own right and no longer as a disposable commodity. Native forest landholders need to be able to have their land assessed for its biodiversity value, earn carbon credits for native forest and receive financial support for so doing.

Thank you for considering this submission.

Regards

Nola Firth

⁷ <https://www.newcastleherald.com.au/story/7108978/plan-to-create-australias-first-national-koala-park>

⁸ <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/factsheet-setting-record-straight-on-hazard-reduction/>