

**Submission  
No 64**

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

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## SUBMISSION

To: Inquiry into the Long-Term sustainability and Future of the Timber and Forest Products Industry

Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Industry

I have been associated with NSW State Forests since 1970. I have worked managing protected nature conservation areas adjacent to state Forest. I have been involved in bushfire planning, mitigation and implementation with State Forest personnel.

In the 1970's the Forestry Commission of NSW was a NSW government agency with the legislative mandate for the care, management and use of State Forests.

The Forestry Commission held all the required expertise for managing native forest timber. This expertise included the scientific research and experience that reached an understanding of what the true rotational period was required for native timber species subject to harvesting. The primary aim of this government agency was to establish and maintain sustainable native forest timber harvesting for the present and future generations.

The Forestry Commission through their management of sustainable native forests developed and implemented forest floor fuel management including the application of prescribed fire as well as developing a world class bushfire fighting organisation that assisted and trained the then, fledgling NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service that became a world class bushfire fighting organisation.

When sustainable native forest management impacted the desired outcomes of government decisions on supply of native forest timber to domestic and overseas markets, the NSW Forestry Commission realised that sustainable forest management was unlikely to be the main priority.

Understanding the need for better representation of native vegetation in protected areas during this time, the NSW Government expanded protected areas which by agreement included areas of State Forest being annexed into or declared National Parks.

Coincidental to this was a wider community awakening of the increasing overharvesting of native timber from public land and mostly State Forests.

On the North Coast of NSW this led to massive community protests to save what remained of the once world-renowned Big Scrub Rainforests and the sub-tropical rainforests.

It was the community that forced the NSW Government over a tumultuous eleven years (1977-1988) of what was known as the Terania Creek Battle to focus on the need to protect native forests.

In behind the public protests was a field of former NSW Forestry Commission expertise that became part of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service through direct transfer or by job application that had the experience, knowledge, and factual data to prove that native timber harvesting was not only unsustainable but also a major cause of native animal species decline.

A Commission of Inquiry was established to consider the future of these publicly owned native forests. The Inquiry resulted in the declaration of protected status and World Heritage Listing by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). Tourism and its associated benefits to employment and need for goods and services remains sustainable and successful to this day.

It was the provision of information by the experienced and knowledgeable timber-getters together with scientists, foresters and the will of the community that convinced the need for the protection of these public forests.

Marketing forces prevailed and the NSW Forestry Commission was gradually disbanded, and the management of native forest timber evolved into what is today, the NSW Government Forestry Corporation. It appears to me that little importance by the government decision makers was placed on the bushfire fighting expertise and resources of the NSW Forestry Commission when making decisions on the future of publicly owned native forests.

A Government Corporation has the mandate to be self-funding and is therefore more easily manipulated by their Ministerial masters than a government agency entrusted on behalf of present and future generations to provide fearless independent, timely and objective advice to government decision makers. The result is growing scientific and community concerns regarding the future of publicly owned native forests managed by this Corporation.

Recently in the Senate Estimates Hearings it was revealed under close questioning that there is alleged that a minimum of twelve or more outstanding breaches by the NSW Forestry Corporation of their legal mandate. The outcome of these alleged breaches appears not to have reached the community implying that transparency may not be a priority of the Corporation. However, in the interests of accountable management of the publicly owned native forests, this information and, the outcome of investigations into alleged breaches should be easily and readily available to the wider community.

Further proof that native forests are being unsustainable logged is evidenced by the fact that private property owners are being approached by timber extraction companies for the purpose of purchasing their privately owned timber suitable for extraction. This practice is also further depleting native habitat so necessary for native animal species including many species categorised and 'endangered'.

The 2019/20 bushfires were the worst in recorded history. In the isolation of any serious government policy to address Climate Change, the community is left with managing lands with increased and more severe weather events.

Fortunately, a focus by community minded organisations, universities and scientists are taking the lead to inform future decision making.

Recently, The Conversation published an article (20 May 2021) by imminent scientists entitled *“Native forest logging makes bushfires worse-and to say otherwise ignores the facts”*.

Their research has provided overwhelming evidence of the need to review native forest logging.

To allow logging of severely burnt native forests that require a long time to recover from such a catastrophic event demonstrates to me, the unsustainability of current native logging operations.

Continued logging of publicly owned native forests reviewed in the context of changing weather patterns, demand for native timber (real or created) outstripping supply, habitat for the survival of native plant and animal species, and the future educational and recreational potential of publicly owned native forests, raises the issue of the need or desirability of continuing to log native forests.

The future requires time for native forests to recover and a cessation of logging will assist that recovery. Timber workers and their families have been at the mercy of market demand outstripping supply which will inevitably result in job losses.

It is time to look seriously at the considerable expertise that timber getters possess and how best to transition these people away from logging of native forest to give them and their families the best opportunity for longer term employment. There are past examples of ‘positive discriminative employment’ targeting timber workers and sand miners which utilised their expertise for sustainable tourism and lengthened their employment.

Timber on private lands is playing a far more significant role in the conservation of native species and it would be detrimental to allow these remnants to disappear. Incentives are needed for private property owners to retain native vegetation.

I have attached a briefing note which puts forward the view to *‘Revaluing our native Vegetation’* for consideration of this Inquiry in addition to the foregoing comments.

I thank the Inquiry for the opportunity to compile and submit my thoughts.

Ross McKinney

## **Revaluing Native Vegetation on Private Lands**

### **Issue:**

#### **Developing Policy that Revalues Native Vegetation**

### **Background:**

COVID19 is a world 'game changer'. It has shown that Australia (and many other countries) were ill prepared for this pandemic.

There is evidence that Australia may be moving out from under strict lockdown and face the future – whatever that brings, or whatever we wish to make of it.

What is becoming clearer every day is that the current federal government has chosen an extraction recovery path as what they believe to be the fastest way to an economic recovery.

As unfortunate as this dinosaur thinking is, the federal government seems uninterested in a recovery path based on renewable resources as the most productive and beneficial future for our country and future generations.

Climate change appears absent in the determined path. Indeed, it would appear as if COVID19 has provided a welcome excuse for distraction from climate change.

The webinar held on 'The End of Certainty – Scott Morrison and Pandemic Politics' featured the author of this essay, Katherine Murphy who has worked in the Parliamentary Gallery for 15 years. The webinar provided an excellent insight into Prime Minister Scott Morrison and how he continues to manipulate his way to become the favoured leader of Australia into the next term.

During public question time, Katherine Murphy was asked what role climate change played in the post COVID recovery world of Scott Morrison. Her answer was to "throw an idea out there for people to think about". The idea was that with "an almost complete focus by the Prime Minister on economic recovery, climate change would be unlikely to gain any real prominence under his leadership".

### **Current Situation:**

This reality is further evidenced by the recent 10-year review of the Federal EPBC Act resulting in a watering down of the protection for native plants and animals.

In the absence of any real innovative leadership, there is a greater emphasis on communities to adapt and create ways to retain or enhance native habitat for the benefit of future generations, science, and medicine.

There is overwhelming scientific evidence that the wider community will be subject to more frequent and violent weather events, longer droughts which in all likelihood will lead to more devastating bushfires resulting in an increased burden on the wider community to bear the cost of the damage and the recovery.

Current political policy direction is resulting in the removal of native vegetation at clearing rates never experienced which is escalating native species extinction. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- the alteration of the native vegetation act,
- the mounting pressure to degazette protected areas for timber extraction,
- major highway upgrades like the Pacific Highway have resulted in the removal of high-quality habitat in particular koala habitat,
- the push by energy companies like Origin Energy who are proposing fracking which has a proven record of habitat destruction,
- the push for expansion or establishment of more coal mines increasing climate change,
- expansion of urbanisation resulting in habitat removal,
- green space in cities is being considered for sacrifice to allow expansion of urban sprawl and,
- the continued unsustainable harvesting of native forests resulting in increased interest from Forest Corporation NSW to purchase timber for harvesting on private lands.

Nine percentage (9%) of NSW is under protected area status such as National Parks, Nature Reserves, State Recreation Areas or similar.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has determined that a minimum of 17% of natural biodiversity must be protected if our current native species have any chance of long-term survival.

Farmers are increasing intensive agricultural practices and continue to have the greatest influence on the loss of native vegetation.

This group is followed by Forest Corporation NSW continued unsustainable native timber harvesting including what remains of old growth native forests.

Evidence of current farming practices would strongly suggest that many farmers believe that there is little reason or incentive to retain native vegetation.

Native vegetation (or even a single tree) is regarded as an impediment to the use of ever larger agriculture machinery.

Indeed, the current practice is to clear more native vegetation so there is more land for traditional agricultural activities to cover increasing costs. Retention of native vegetation is seen as creating little benefit to agricultural activities even to the extent that 'the bush' is rarely needed for the supply of fence posts or timber to construct yards for livestock.

There is currently a research project on a Qld cattle farm that is assessing the impact of cattle on koalas moving from one food tree to the ground and traversing across the paddock to access another food tree after reports of cattle chasing koalas when they have descended to the ground to move to another food tree.

Local Government are continually under pressure to increase their revenue base to cover increasing costs by approving development applications that involve the removal of native vegetation.

### **Policy Considerations**

The adversarial circumstances associated with the current management of native vegetation provides an opportunity for considering giving land managers incentives to manage native vegetation at the same level of importance and attention that they manage their current agricultural activities.

How does native vegetation or habitat retention become seen as 'valuable'?

It becomes 'valuable' if it is considered an 'asset' that would contribute to the benefit of the owner and most importantly if the 'asset' adds economic value. The following scenarios demonstrate several ways in which this could happen.

#### **Scenario 1.**

An area of native vegetation (habitat) on private land being managed to produce beef or sheep is identified by qualified expertise as being desirable for retention for the benefit of native plants, and animals. It may be identified as being required as a corridor for safer passage of native wildlife or as core habitat of a species.

What incentive currently exists for the livestock producer to retain or enhance this area of native vegetation? Currently there is little incentive that attracts landowner attention.

However, the area of native vegetation could be assessed as having the equivalent of an average carrying capacity of say, five head of livestock and the land owner could be offered monetary value to the equivalent to that livestock per year for retaining and managing the area of native vegetation in an ongoing healthy state.

The attitude of the owner to this piece of native vegetation would change because of two incentives.

- 1) The first incentive would be the yearly sum equivalent to five head of livestock and
- 2) The second incentive to the landowner would be the saving of staff or personal input into managing the livestock.

The area of native vegetation now takes on a whole new meaning as an 'asset' to the landowner.

The result is that the landowner receives an ongoing financial incentive to keep the native vegetation in place and the natural biodiversity is retained or enhanced.

#### **Scenario 2.**

A local government Council or Shire has an area of natural vegetation that is identified by qualified expertise as being desirable for retention for the benefit of native plants or animals, public enjoyment, educational values are attached to this area. The area is subject to a development application for residential housing.

The current incentive for the Council or Shire is to grant the development application so that the residential lots will be subject to the payment of rates to meet increasing costs of local government.

However, if the Council or Shire were offered the yearly monetary equivalent of the rates to retain and manage the area of native vegetation, it is likely that the area of native vegetation would take on a whole new meaning to the Council or the Shire.

The developer could be offered to locate the proposed development on land devoid of natural vegetation.

The attitude of the Local Government to this piece of native vegetation would change because of four incentives.

1. The first incentive to the Council or Shire would be the yearly sum equivalent to the residential rates of the proposed residential development.
2. The second incentive would be the saving in staff input of the need to manage water, sewage, and waste that would be required if the natural area were developed into a residential park.
3. The third incentive for the Council or Shire would be to negate the current incentive for the landowner to enter into a Conservation Agreement with the NSW NPWS. Currently, Council or Shire are not paid rates on land subject to a Conservation Agreement.
4. The fourth incentive would be that the increased finance provided to Council or Shire provides an employment incentive for the management of the natural vegetation.

The result is that the Council or the Shire receives ongoing financial incentive to keep the native vegetation in place and the natural biodiversity is retained or enhanced.

In both scenarios, if the native vegetation is degraded then the financial payment incentive is withdrawn or removed.

#### Scenario 2.1

##### Rate Relief for Conservation Agreement over Natural Vegetation on Private Lands

Landowners who value native vegetation on their land may have their native vegetation component assessed and if suitable by entering into a Conservation Agreement are entitled to Local Government Rate Relief on lands covered by that agreement.

Recently the Minister for Local Government the Hon. Shelley Hancock MP, foreshadowed the possibility that private lands under Conservation Agreements should be removed from Local Government Rate Relief to assist with gaining more revenue for local councils.

Should this become reality, private landowners will likely view their current agreement as worthless and consider selling their timbered lands to logging companies for the value of their timber.

This would have a further decimating effect on native plants and animal.

However, if the property owner was to receive a yearly remuneration equivalent to beasts or bushels of crop per hectare or logging value of the timber, most property owners welcome the opportunity to retain their natural vegetation which would be highly advantageous to native plants and animals.

Some property owners may even enhance the hectareage of their native vegetation to increase their remuneration per year.



### **Developing a Policy Model**

No policy model gains acceptance or momentum without support. This comes from involvement and ownership of the policy model by the major stakeholders.

Discussing the merits of establishing and implementing a policy model with stakeholders that have a direct association with natural vegetation greatly enhances ownership and acceptance.

A political party must take the lead role in the creating and adopting a policy that would cater for the development, implementation, and management of the Policy Model.

### **Funding the Policy Model**

Funding will be made available if the political will and the acceptance from landowners and other major stakeholders is demonstrated that the Policy Model will deliver economic, social, and environmental outcomes for the wider community.

### **Conclusion**

I seek your response to this proposal.

I would appreciate your views in support and merit of this approach.

Ross McKinney

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