

**Submission  
No 108**

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

**Name:** Dr Michelle Hamrosi

**Date Received:** 28 May 2021

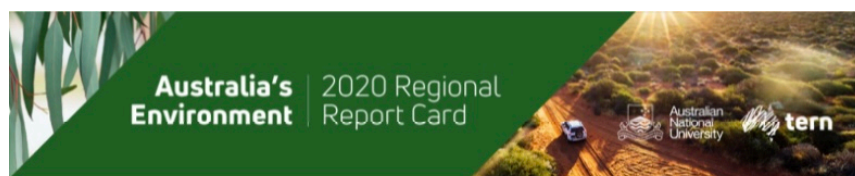
---

**Dear Chair, Deputy Chair and Inquiry Committee members,**

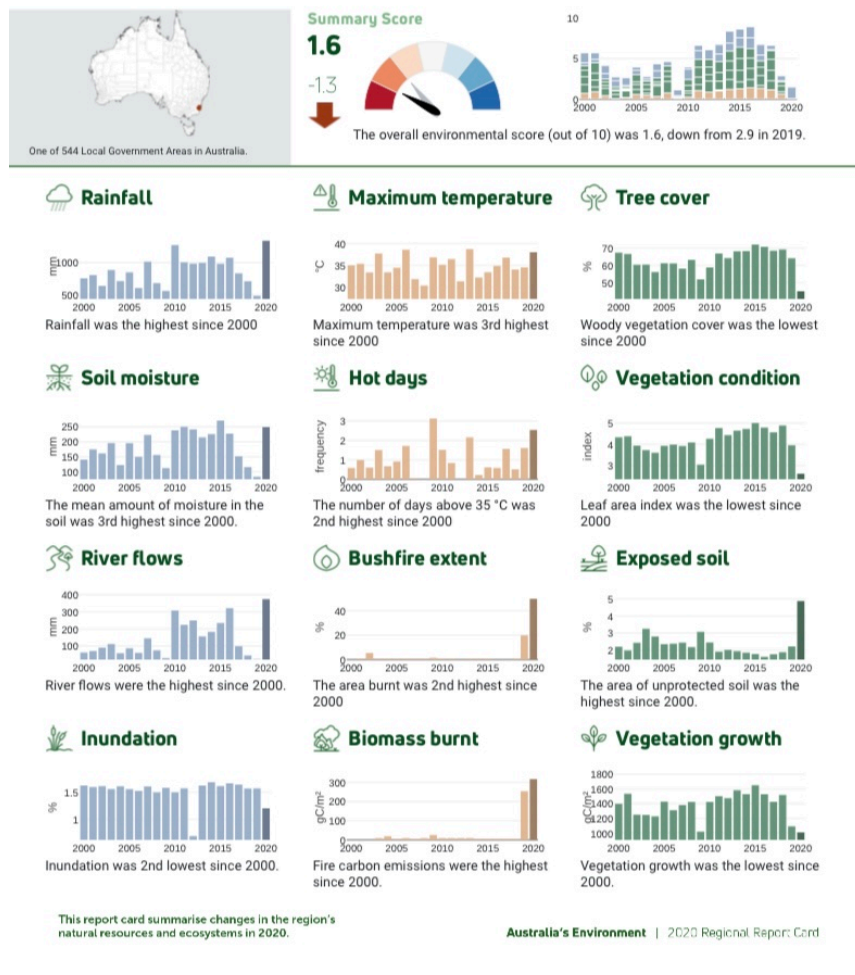
Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission into the long term sustainability and future of the timber and forest products industry in NSW.

I am a Batemans Bay General Practitioner, an active member of Doctors for the Environment and the South Coast Health and Sustainability Alliance.

My family and I moved to the South Coast of NSW because of its pristine environment with ample opportunities to enjoy an active healthy lifestyle. We feel so lucky to be part of this vibrant community: we feel we belong to the wider community of young families here to raise their children in a safe and connected place; of older citizens who have come to the coast with its mild climate to retire; a region rich with indigenous culture both past and present; a thriving local food bowl of regenerative farmers and sustainable seafood industry. There is much to celebrate and love in this little pocket of Australia.



### Eurobodalla [A]



**Our environment is our greatest asset. Our forests are vital to our health, economy and society. But sadly, the current state of our environment is poor.**

The Australian National University Centre for Water and Landscape Dynamics, annually provides a Regional Environmental Report Card for each local government area. It summarises a large number of observations on the trajectory of our natural resources and ecosystems. The bushfires of 2019/20 burnt 90% of our shire's national and state forests. The extent of the bushfires and biomass burnt, along with a massive reduction in tree



Image: The recovering forests of Mogo state forest in the background, with recently logged trees stacked for pick-up.

cover, poor vegetation condition and increase in soil exposure are the main indicators reflecting the current poor score of just 1.6 out of 10 (1).

Despite the bushfires of 2019/20, along with this incredibly depressing report, our state forests are still open to the business of logging. It pains me to sit and write about the impacts of this on my community. It adds to the burden of trauma that has settled densely upon us like a thick blanket of ash. Every day I drive along the blackened tree lined Princes highway and see the tufts of epicormic growth emerging from many, but not all, of the trunks. This regrowth is a beacon of hope. It shows how our forests can regenerate despite the ferocious fires. But they are also a constant reminder of how much we have lost, how much has changed in such a short period of time and how much we are set to lose if we continue on our current trajectory of climate change. We must pause and take stock.

**Nothing short of transformational change is needed to safely re-direct us from the current catastrophic trajectory we are steering towards with regards to climate change. Scientists are warning us that bushfires like those of 2019/20 may become an annual threat, as our planet heats**



**up due to climate change. We must consider the future of logging sustainability within this wider and long-term context (3).**

Native forest logging increases the severity at which forests burn. In a nutshell, logging operations increase the volume of coarse woody debris (much of the tree is left as waste), they open up the forest canopy, cause drying of soils and fuel, and allow stronger wind to affect fires on the forest floor (2).

Logging has been taking place behind the Mogo township for some years now. This is significant, as studies have shown that native forest logging increases the severity at which forests burn compared to unlogged and old growth forests - particularly in the first ten years after logging (2). This tourist township was significantly impacted by the bushfires of 2019/20, with 300 homes being lost in and around that town. One must consider the possibility that the ferociousness of the fires in and around this town, could be related to the past and ongoing logging of the forests in the vicinity directly behind this township. This has also significantly impacted local water quality as well as integrity of local roads being degraded due to erosion and landslides (7).

Numerous members of our community live alongside the boundaries of the Mogo state forests. Many are currently rebuilding their lives following the devastating bushfires. They daily face the grief and trauma of these events but also bear daily witness to the logging occurring around their homes. For many sensitive to the environment around them, it is incredibly triggering, re-traumatising and depressing. Native forestry logging has lost its social licence even before the bushfires. It is no longer acceptable for governments to ignore public opinion and provide tax payer support for a non-viable industry. It just does not stack up.

We need to consider all the facts, when deciding the future of native forest logging. We must rely on science and research - both of which are pointing to the harm far outweighing the benefits. Our forests provide ecosystem services which we all rely on for health and wellbeing. These services are fundamental to our lives, but are often ignored and undervalued. These include:

Trees provide oxygen: it takes about thirty mature trees, on average, to produce the amount of oxygen we each breathe every year. They also absorb carbon dioxide, and hold it in their bodies, vegetation and soil - thereby protecting us against climate change. Trees purify our air, trapping pollutants like nitrogen dioxide and microscopic particles that harm our health. Trees absorb and redistribute water maintaining the water cycle. Trees access water deep in the ground and hold the moisture in their canopies. Trees help to increase rainfall and improve water quality, greatly reducing the cost of expensive water treatment when they are part of healthy intact forests surrounding water catchment areas. Clean drinking water depends on intact forests around catchment areas. Trees and native plants can prevent soil loss and flooding, if left undisturbed (4).

**Without clean water, clean air, a stable climate and rich biodiversity, we have no healthy future and we have no thriving economy.**

All these reasons show that keeping trees in the ground are critical to our health and wellbeing. Land clearing is linked to worsening climate change. And climate change, makes the aforementioned reasons for keeping trees in the ground even more important. With increased extreme weather events - bushfires, flooding, droughts and air pollution are all set to worsen as the earth's temperature increases. Our forests are critical assets requiring the upmost protection. Land clearing is also directly linked to the biodiversity and extinction crisis we are in. It is no secret that Australia is shamefully a species extinction hot spot in the world (5).

**Our shire has a higher state of unemployment than other regions of NSW, so it is important to regional and rural communities to offer a fair transition.**

In the Eurobodalla shire, 322 people (2.8%) are currently employed in the industry sector of agriculture, forestry & fishing (6). Of these, some 100 are employed directly in forestry. It is a very small industry in our region. I personally know a number of forestry NSW employees. They are good people, who want to do a good job. Many see their role within forestry as important - they mark the habitat trees for the bulldozers to avoid. Forestry employees care about their job, their co-workers and their communities. They must be included in the conversation about the future sustainability of their jobs, and be an integral part of the shift to a different range of employment opportunities in new and emerging sectors. This could include ecologically sensitive tourism, state of the art forestry management (working to enhance forest resilience in the face of climate change), biodiversity and rehabilitation projects as well working within sustainable plantation industries. Other options need to be explored that can provide similar products to the forestry industry but from different sources. These urgently need to be investigated, researched and scaled up. We have an enormous problem with waste that needs close examination with solutions in mind. How can we turn waste into useful products such as toilet paper, useful and cost effective building materials etc. Other potential material such as the use of hemp, could be explored and grown sustainably in our region, from which paper and toilet paper could be manufactured.

**Connection to country**

For indigenous Australians, the connection to land and country is integral to their health and well-being. For many it is profoundly spiritual, and provides a connection to their ancestors, provides a sense of identity and validation, access to medicines, traditional ceremonies and fundamentally provides meaning in life. Twenty five percent of the population in Mogo is Indigenous Australian. Country and the forests within the south coast are deeply important to the Walabunga people of Yuin country.

The indigenous community in and around Mogo have experienced high rates of psychological distress following the destructive bushfires of 2019/20. There has



even been a number of suicides in the Mogo indigenous community in the aftermath of the fires. This has added to the communal trauma of these events. We must forge deep and meaningful connections with our indigenous communities, in moving forward on these issues. They need to be respected and heard. We need new ways of integrating forest management, indigenous employment and traditional knowledge. This is an important way we can address social inequities, mental health, and environmental stewardship.

**Once we know better, we should do better. Our history does not need to be part of our future. We must let go of old ways of thinking and embrace new ways.**

### **Doctors for the Environment NSW is calling on:**

1. The permanent protection of all intact ecosystems including old growth, remnant and high conservation value forests as well as the sustainable management of plantation forests. Highly biodiverse regions will need greater protection, such as those providing home to threatened species such as the greater glider and swift parrot. Areas around water catchment also need long-term protection.
2. Cessation of ongoing broad-scale land clearing.
3. A national approach to and regulation of deforestation and land clearing.

### **South Coast Health and Sustainability Alliance is calling on the enquiry to recognise:**

1. That ending native forest logging does not mean job losses.
2. We need to guarantee a suitable job transition for current forestry workers.
3. Increasing tourism in regions with state forests is a huge economic opportunity.
4. NSW undertakes its logging operations at a loss and is propped up by tax payer subsidies.
5. That our forests are a crucial carbon sink – they must be protected to reduce climate pollution.
6. Most of our timber for building already comes from plantations and we do not need to continue logging.



In conclusion, from an economical, social, cultural and environmental point-of-view, the business case for continuation of native forest logging does not stack up. In the context of the changing climate, all focus needs to be on reducing emission, mitigating and adapting to the heating climate, and the increased risk of extreme weather events climate change brings. It is time for a paradigm shift that is supported by science and one that recognises the incredible value in caring for our forests, respecting the home they provide for a multitude of flora and fauna, and the integral part they play in our current and future health and wellbeing.

**Our forests are vital to our health, economy and society.**

**Our environment is our greatest asset. Our children's future depends on our bold decisions today. Please be our beacon of hope.**

Dr Michelle Hamrosi

On behalf of South Coast Health and Sustainability Alliance and Doctors for the Environment NSW



What legacy you leave our future generations?

## References

- 1) [https://storage.googleapis.com/aer-report-cards-2020/LGA\\_2019\\_AUST/Eurobodalla%20\(A\).pdf?fbclid=IwAR1PPLyhbGhk2zcDrp6bnritarHg-EVLnztCd7f7\\_Bg8WKX94IkHKDOl5b8](https://storage.googleapis.com/aer-report-cards-2020/LGA_2019_AUST/Eurobodalla%20(A).pdf?fbclid=IwAR1PPLyhbGhk2zcDrp6bnritarHg-EVLnztCd7f7_Bg8WKX94IkHKDOl5b8)
- 2) [https://www.bushfirefacts.org/uploads/1/3/2/1/132188020/f\\_bushfire\\_science\\_report\\_no.\\_3\\_-\\_bushfires\\_and\\_logging.pdf](https://www.bushfirefacts.org/uploads/1/3/2/1/132188020/f_bushfire_science_report_no._3_-_bushfires_and_logging.pdf)
- 3) <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/dangerous-summer-escalating-bushfire-heat-drought-risk/>
- 4) <https://www.dea.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Forests-and-native-vegetation-fact-sheet-Final-01-19.pdf>
- 5) <https://www.dea.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/DEA-Biodiversity-Policy-11-19.pdf>
- 6) <https://profile.id.com.au/eurobodalla/industries> reports data from 2016
- 7) [https://www.aidr.org.au/media/7694/nyman-and-sheridan-2015\\_erosion-in-burned-catchments\\_afac.pdf](https://www.aidr.org.au/media/7694/nyman-and-sheridan-2015_erosion-in-burned-catchments_afac.pdf)