

Submission
No 169

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

Name: Name suppressed
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Partially
Confidential

Submission to the NSW Legislative Council public enquiry into the long-term sustainability and future of the timber and forest products industry.

Preface:

My comments below relate only to the hardwood logging conducted in the NSW State Forests. Softwood and hardwood plantations are, I believe, the only way forward for the timber industry.

Introduction:

The conflict between industrial activity and environmental concerns has been raging for decades. This is not an easy problem, and most environment-based issues are not easily resolved. Be it forests or water, the source of the problem is, I believe, relatively straightforward.

We have simply been exploiting the environment for far too long and now we are paying the price.

Be it the lack of water, salinisation, desertification of landscapes or impacts of climate change, the planet is saying “enough is enough”.

However, there is a solution and I see the way that all governments in Australia, Federal and State, and all political parties handled the COVID crisis as a way forward.

What they did was straightforward:

- They determined the facts of the situation by consulting with, and listening to, experts and scientists.
- They determined the best methods of combating the pandemic by taking into account the what was best for the population as a whole, and not giving unwarranted weight to the opinions of minority groups and special interest parties (e.g. anti-vaxers).
- They implemented the plan, and fully communicated the actions, so everybody was aware of what was happening. They took a leadership role and brought the public with them on the journey to recovery.
- People who were negatively impacted (and there will always be some) were looked after by subsidies, grants etc.
- They did not begin the discussion with emotive comments about jobs losses.

I believe this approach would work with this current problem.

Pre 2019/20 Fires:

What follows is not a string of facts, but my experiences over that last 2 or 3 years as my wife and I lived through the worst fires in our State’s history, and came to realise that we have to change what we’re doing in order to leave our grandchildren a planet that will sustain human life.

In 2013 we purchased a 16ha property on the Clyde River at Mogood, with the intention of moving there permanently on my retirement. In 2015 I retired, and in 2016 moved permanently into our new home.

We always knew that we lived within a State Forest, and that State Forests were seen primarily as a timber resource.

In hindsight we were probably a bit naïve, and took Forestry's claim of "sustainable activities" at face value. In part, because the first few years we were here forestry activities were conducted down forest roads that branched off the main roads out of the forest. Their activities were not open to the public gaze. In about 2018 they commenced logging on the Old Highway just north of East Lynne. We were shocked at the extent of the logging, and the fact that it was on very steep slopes. There were numerous comments in the local community about the activities and whether it was legal but nothing progressed.

Future logging was confined to the side roads, unfortunately "out of sight out of mind".

Post-Fire Logging

Things really came to a head following the "Black Summer" fires of 2019/20.

Our property was impacted about 5 days after the Currowan fire started and we were lucky, as the weather conditions were much less severe compared to New Year's Eve and later. We suffered minimal damage to our infrastructure, however all the bush (over half of the property) was impacted. Moderately by an RFS backburn, then later, severely by the wild fire on the other side of the property.

The forests in this area were decimated. We have a 15 minute drive along mainly forestry roads before we reach the highway. In every direction there was substantial damage - there were many areas where the canopy was completely destroyed. There were only a few isolated patches of unburnt forest.

Over 80% of the forests in the South Coast were severely impacted by these fires.

My understanding was that the EPA and Forestry Corp agreed that, as a result of this unprecedented destruction, logging activities could recommence but under special post-fire environmental conditions.

These conditions were intended to protect the already severely damaged environment, so that the forests could actually recover.

Forestry recommenced logging in the South Brooman State Forest not long after the fires. The area they were logging was near the beginning of The Sheeptrack. This is probably the main route into our area and is certainly the quickest. This time they commenced logging right alongside the road. Can you imagine locals, and visitors, going in and out along this road having to contend with miles upon miles of badly burnt forest, only to have what's still standing flattened? It was here that the so-called sustainable logging practices were in plain sight. Basically, they cut down as many trees as they think they can get away with. All the rubbish (branches and smaller logs) are piled up in rows, some very rudimentary drainage works to try and stop run-off (because all the soil has been ripped up by the machinery) and then they leave. They do virtually nothing to try to help nature restore what they have destroyed.

Needless to say, after everything we'd been through in the previous few months, this galvanised people into action. It was locals researching what the forestry rules were and going out into the bush and checking on what they were doing. I believe this had not happened before in this area.

Almost immediately instances were found which proved Forestry had failed to comply with the additional environment conditions. The Environmental Protection Authority took legal action and

Forestry were fined for a number of breaches. These were not insignificant breaches, they included destruction of numerous hollow bearing trees. With so much destruction in the area the trees left standing (with hollows) are critical to allow the remaining wildlife to breed.

They continued to log the forests, and they also continued to blatantly violate the conditions agreed to with the EPA. Legal action was taken again and this time the court suspended their activities for 6 months.

Now Forestry have indicated that they intend to continue logging, but without any additional protections as outlined by the EPA for fire-affected forest. What kind of industry can just say that it refuses to comply with EPA regulations? During my 30-year career in Finance with Boral Cement, I never witnessed anything like this. Certainly, we had environmental issues, but they were taken extremely seriously and action was always implemented to rectify any issues or perceived issues.

Forestry, for whatever reason, are simply unwilling or unable to control what happens on the ground. The fines and actions against Forestry are not restricted to just the South Coast, so obviously it is a systemic problem, which has been ingrained for years:

Justice R.A. Pepper of the NSW Land and Environment Court stated that in her view “the number of convictions suggests either a pattern of continuing disobedience in respect of environmental laws generally or, at the very least, a cavalier attitude to compliance with such laws” and “given the number of offences the Forestry Commission has been convicted of and in light of the additional enforcement notices issued against it, I find that the Forestry Commission’s conduct does manifest a reckless attitude towards compliance with its environmental obligations.”

If a tree falls: Compliance failures in the public forests of New South Wales. 2011.
http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/edonsw/pages/284/attachments/original/1380667654/110728when_a_tree_falls.pdf?1380667654

Sustainability of Forestry

I always understood that a “sustainable forestry industry” meant that we can produce wood products for generations into the future AND that the forests themselves continue to be a thriving ecosystem.

Forests are not just lots of trees together, they are complete ecosystems that need to be nurtured and cared for.

The way that the forests are being mismanaged, the living forests will be destroyed.

These are our forests - the people of NSW - and we have the right to have some say in their management. Has anybody actually asked the people what their thoughts are about native forest harvesting primarily for woodchips?

Well actually they have:

The FWPA commissioned a national study on the social license of the forestry industry by academics from the University of Canberra. Social license across all sectors of the timber industry was examined using data from the 2016 Regional Wellbeing survey collected from over 13,000 urban, rural and regional Australians.

The report stated:

“To be perceived as a positive contributor to local communities, ideally the industry should be perceived as contributing positively to local employment, environmental health, landscape amenity,

friendliness and to reducing bushfire risk; while not having negative impacts on land prices, cost of living, human health, or traffic and road quality."

Some of the key findings from the report (relative to native forest logging) were that:

- *Native forest logging was considered unacceptable by a strong majority in every Australian state and territory (65% in NSW);*
- *Views were very strong about unacceptability of native forest harvesting, and with most that considered it unacceptable considered it very unacceptable;*
- *On the NSW South Coast and Southern Inland 68% considered native forest logging unacceptable and 18% acceptable;*

Community perceptions of Australia's forest, wood and paper industries: implications for social license to operate.
Jacki Schirmer, Lain Dare, Mel Mylek August 2018

And what is all this destruction for? 85% of the trees taken end up as wood chips or firewood. There is enough science out there to show how important forests, trees and biodiversity etc are to how this planet works.

And we're chopping it down to send overseas to make toilet paper.

Hardwood forestry makes virtually no money, but its bad practices are driven by the need to "feed the machine": the chip mills.

If we forget about wood chips and just concentrate on "proper" wood products, the demand should be able to be met by hardwood plantations (maybe there will be a need to expand these?)

We need to value the wood we are producing, you don't destroy a 30 or 40 year old tree to make match sticks, it must be high value uses.

And don't listen to the National Party and their spiel that logging must start straight way so the reconstruction from the fires can move forward. Virtually no hardwood is used in the framing of the vast majority of homes, hardwood is usually only used for external uses.

So now what happens to the forests?

There are numerous examples (including in Australia) where forests have been saved from logging and used as a "carbon sink" - because 70% of the carbon storage potential in a tree is realised in the last half of its life. In logged forests that can never happen.

In our local area we have two "giant" trees: Big Spotty and Old Blotchy. Only two. There used to be many more than that, but they have all been cut down and new ones never get the chance to grow old. Again, there is abundant science to show how important old trees, and old trees with hollows, are to the wildlife. With no big trees, we have forests that are full of young 20 or 30 year old trees very closely packed together.

A friend of mine (who actually worked in the timber industry in his youth) relayed a story about the old timers in the 19th Century driving a horse and cart from Braidwood to Termeil, not on a premade road, but through the forests. Back then there were massive trees with vast canopies that restricted smaller trees from growing, and indigenous people of the area managed the forests through cultural burning.

And who manages the forests? Well for the last 200 years nobody has actually managed the forests in this country; We have exploited the resources we found, and as a result we have changed the landscape. In any other industry, companies with consistent environmental breaches like this would be held accountable. What happens with Forestry? Who is ultimately responsible for this total lack of corporate conscience?

Transition out of logging

If we conserve our native forests, as well as providing a carbon sink, they could be managed for tourism and recreational activities. There are far more jobs in tourism than hardwood forestry. There are approximately 300 people directly involved in hardwood forestry in the South Coast. That is really quite insignificant on a regional basis - but every job equates to a person and a family that's why a transition process is so important.

If we are to maintain our forests for biodiversity and recreation, there would be employment opportunities for current forestry workers. Forests would need to be managed, and current forestry workers would have transferrable skills.

Let the Aboriginal local land councils be responsible for the management of the state forests. We could even have the discussion about bringing the forests back to the condition they were in 200 years ago. That's probably for a later discussion, although I strongly recommend watching the YouTube series presented by Treading Lightly Inc: Cultural Burning webcast- particularly Part 3.

Conclusion

I really struggle to understand why Forestry are behaving the way they are, surely the people there have kids and grandkids, surely they're aware of what's happening with our climate, I'm sure they were impacted by the worst fires in the State's history, so why do they keep flaunting the EPA rules and seemly not caring about them? One of the operators reportedly said that the only way they can make money is by breaking the rules. Now I don't know if that is true, but if it is, it explains the actions of so many people. And it's understandable, they have kids, mortgages etc. but that does not justify what's being done. Any Industry that says it can only make money by breaking EPA rules is not an industry we want. If these people had a clear transition plan and assurance that retraining and support would be provided, we could finish this discussion now.

We simply don't need to be cutting down hardwood forests, let's transition to planation, and highlight the recreational activities that we could encouraging in our forests.