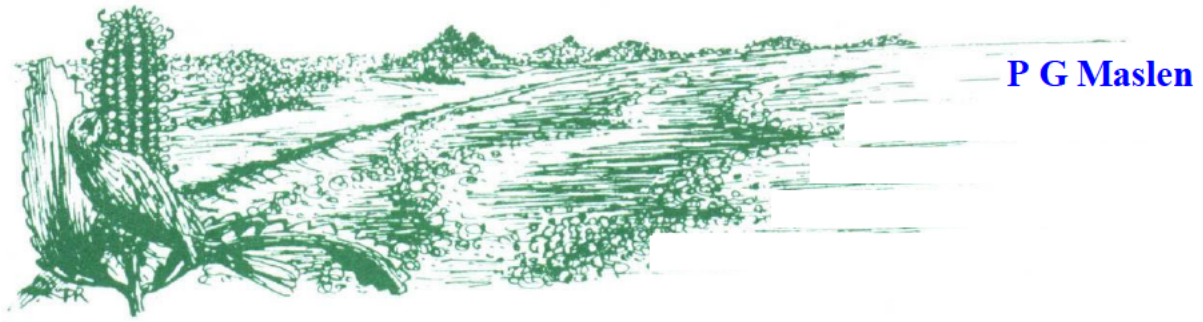


**Submission
No 170**

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

Name: Mr Peter Maslen

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**The Chairman
PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 4 – INDUSTRY**

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

The operation of the forestry industry has not been sustainable for as long as I can remember dating back to the 1960s. My forefathers were some of those that cleared the Big Scrub in the mid-1800s. My great uncle ran the forestry nursery in Whian State Forest until that forest ceased to be viable due to lack of accessible resource. My uncles logged Terania Creek valley in the 1940s and had the first chain saw on the north coast. I grew up in a small north coast town with its own sawmill employing a significant number of its residents. This was closed in the 70s when timber resources started to be depleted and rights to the timber of the region were consolidated by larger operations which needed the resource to survive. With my father and a few others, we started to campaign for the protection of New South Wales rainforests when we started attempting to protect the forests of the Border Ranges in 1971. I was a member of the Environmental Protection Agency board that implemented the first forestry management agreements. My point in this history is that I have been involved in attempts to make the forestry industry more viable and responsible for over 50 years regrettably without success. The industry is still not sustainable and continues to push into more marginal areas and negatively impacting on the quality of our waterways and further reducing the value of our natural heritage while not ensuring that the resource is grown at a rate that is sustainable.

In the 1990s logging coupes in native forests had been reduced in size and located in a mosaic which assisted in preventing high runoff rates during rainfall events and permitted wildlife to disperse into adjacent areas. It also permitted seed transfer from the adjacent unlogged forests assisting with the practice of natural regeneration as the management did not plant trees in native forests. It appears that this practice does not occur any more with coupe sizes being larger resulting in excessive clear felled areas with the resulting negative environmental impacts. Similarly, logging was not permitted over waterways with riparian zones being intact assisting with maintenance of reasonable water quality. Logging on steep slopes was prohibited. These practices resulted in reduced environmental impacts. These management practices appear to have been scrapped with the corresponding degradation of the environmental values of our forests and an increase in the pollution of waterways. This must change as part of responsible reform of forestry management.

As a result of fires of 2019 and 2020 the damage to our forest was significant resulting in a reduction in the available timber resource. The corollary of this is that increased logging of the remaining resource and penetration into more marginal areas. This is a short term solution caused not only by the effects of climate change but also poor past management that did not ensure the production of forest development with a sustainable resource of an adequate size. By eking out every corner of a forest to obtain even the smallest timber return the industry is destroying its future and environment with all the facets of nature. A moratorium must be implemented on significant areas of unburnt forest to permit

rehabilitation of our forests naturally. If this is not done both the forestry industry, its associated industries and the environment will suffer. This is the normal short term approach of the timber industry having resulted in the ongoing lack of sustainability of the industry.

The forestry industry has almost a law of its own with a general lack of control and no repercussions for its inability to abide with regulated environmental constraints and a general short term approach to forestry management and the sustainable production of timber resulting from native forest areas. The community, while witnessing this poor performance has had limited mechanisms to be able to enforce compliance with environmental laws and implementation of sound forestry practices. The community needs strong legal rights to address these short falls in performance.

The forest industry and its government sector has attempted to manage native forests by permitting natural regeneration but have not permitted nature the time to implement the regeneration process before the next logging cycle resulting in progressively smaller logs and an unsustainable industry with many state forests being transferred to national parks as they had become unviable. The positive result of this is many ecosystems that would have been lost with the individual species with them have been protected. However, the forestry industry has seen a progressive decline because of this poor management.

The current approach to forest management appears to have regressed this century reverting to the environmentally unsustainable methods. The larger coupes do not permit fauna to transfer to adjacent forest within their individual territories and leave excessive gaps in the forest which prevent re-establishment of territories once the forest starts to regrow. One would assume this is because the timber yields are significantly lower than could be the case if trees were permitted to reach a larger size when smaller coupes would yield a more commercially viable outcome. The Forestry Operations Approvals and Private Forestry Code must be strengthened to ensure that natural heritage attributes of the forests are maintained and even enhanced given the poor management of these features in recent decades. With an adoption of practices with a more sympathetic approach to natural systems integrated with sustainable timber production forest management could achieve the protection of the stated diverse ecosystems and unique biodiversity as well as ensuring the aesthetic value and recreational opportunities are maintained.

The first board of the NSW Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of which I was a member attempted to set management licences to improve the environmental performance of NSW forests. This was a reasonable start in the early 90s. However, those standards appear to have been lost and the environmental performance of forest operations reverted to those of early last century. The EPA needs to have a stronger legal capacity to enforce environmentally sound logging operations and a government prepared to permit the enforcement of those standards.

Like too many government operations which are supposed to be carried out as servants of the community, much of the practice and operations of forestry management are not publicly available and hence public scrutiny which is sadly required to ensure appropriate compliance with policies, laws and regulations, cannot occur. More of transparency and reporting is required in general and in particular regarding the environmental performance on the impact of native forest logging on threatened species such as koalas and greater gliders.

Where forestry management has resulted in unsustainable operations, commonly due to exceeding the capacity of the forest to supply timber, an exit plane for the effected community needs to be developed. With timber communities and wood supply chains moving towards FSC-certified forestry by 2030, plans need to develop to ensure a smooth transition.

The concept that the forests of NSW should support some type of export industry is flawed when there is a need to import wood products because of our inability to supply the full local market. Industry must become more diverse to supply the Australian market and ensure that our forests are managed in such a manner that the appropriate timbers are grown for our home market. With our apparent, inability to supply that market the industry must become more targeted and sustainable to ensure this will occur.

In summary, it is essential there must be a significant change in the way NSW forests are managed to ensure a sustainable timber industry, that the natural heritage is protected and pollution of our waterways is reduced. I commend the above for serious consideration in ensuring the long term sustainability and future of the timber and forest products industry in an environmentally responsible manner.

Yours faithfully,

Peter G Maslen