

**Submission
No 181**

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

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Submission - Long term sustainability and future of the timber and forest products industry

The Black Summer fires hit NSW hard and particularly state forests, impacting many of our valuable wildlife species, particularly koalas, biodiversity, and also the supply of timber.

I find it disturbing that Forestry Corporation NSW (FCNSW) continues to log precious native forests including remaining areas of forests that were severely impacted by the fires. This cannot possibly be called sustainable and is certainly contributing to species extinction and in particular to our iconic koala who is only being pushed more quickly to extinction in NSW thanks to the lack of protection to their habitat by the NSW Government. It is also disturbing that FCNSW have also been found to be breaching environmental conditions.

Prior to the fires in the north-east of NSW an estimated 50% of our koala population had died due mainly to habitat loss and associated threats such as disease related to stress, and many continue to die from car strike. With the tragic Black Summer fires in NSW it has been estimated that approximately 80% of our koalas were killed. Large areas of their forests, which provide habitat, protection and also their diminishing food source has been destroyed. But logging of their forests continues with logging of both burnt and unburnt areas of koala habitat.

After these fires I myself witnessed logging trucks leaving state forests with "salvage logs" from the burnt forest whilst trees were still smouldering yet at the same time wildlife carers were not allowed into the forest to look for injured koalas to assist them. The reason given was that it was not safe to enter the forest, yet it was supposedly deemed safe for loggers and their machinery to carry on as usual with no regard for koalas and other wildlife survivors impacted by the fires and in their greatest time of need. The government has done nothing to stop the relentless continuation of this logging. It is reported that up to 3 billion animals could have been killed and displaced in the fires, this is not the time for Forestry Corp to be continuing with business as usual.

The recent fires and failure to consider the future reality of climate change must change plans for future forestry. We now face the certain extinction of hundreds of species in our country. Past estimates do not count anymore. We know that koalas will be significantly impacted by Climate Change and protecting their refugia and its connectivity is more important than ever.

Koala ecologist Steve Phillips had estimated that one of the strongest local koala populations in NSW in Port Macquarie was likely to be locally extinct within 50 years. But there was an estimated loss of 350 koalas from the Lake Innes area during the bushfires and The Port Macquarie Koala Hospital were already receiving fewer juveniles before the fires, so this trajectory is likely to be a lot worse. Koala habitat is continuing to be logged in these areas and the NSW Government has so far largely ignored the recommendations of it's own bi-partisan Inquiry into Koala populations and Habitat. One of the 43 recommendations being to consider the creation of a Great Koala National Park, but the Government cannot even give consideration to this idea which is beyond staggering and it is evident that the reason for this is that the Government is beholden to the Forestry Industry and their demands to continue logging this area. Our forests cannot sustain this onslaught, and this is all without taking into account the effects of climate change which we know from the recent drought and bushfire season will be significant. This is simply not sustainable or ethical and does not have a social license The NSW Government must curb its intensive logging regime to stave off

the extinction of koalas and to help combat the effects of the climate crisis. The unscrupulous logging of unburnt habitat and of recovering habitat ((salvage logging) must stop. And there should have been a moratorium on any logging after the fires. To continue the destruction of our native forests after the fires when so much of our wildlife was struggling to survive is unconscionable.

The NSW koala vulnerable, threatened and endangered status has never been more pressing, following the devastating 2019/2020 Black Summer bushfires which resulted in the estimated death of more than 8,000 koalas and more than 24% of all koala habitats in eastern NSW impacted within fire-affected areas.

The 50% koala population decline in north-east NSW over the last 20 years is an alarming estimate, with habitat loss as a primary cause. Further, in this same region, the recent bushfires burnt one third of koala habitat, with koala losses of 80-90% discovered including many of the most viable surviving koala colonies. In spite of the above loggers continue to log in un-burnt habitat and take 'salvage' from burnt forests with government impunity.

Our state forests have been over-logged for years by an industry that depends on subsidies from the NSW Government to stay financially viable. To consider logging forests of viable food trees with an offset of seedlings or saplings is indefensible. Recent advertising from Forestry Industry showing the "Ultimate Renewable" forest industry with hundreds of seedlings ready for transplanting to replace forests 50 to 100 years old completely ignores the science and is nothing but forestry propaganda.

The principle threat to most endangered species is habitat loss and it is largely ignored by every level of Government, it is critical that habitat loss be halted and habitat expanded and connectivity improved. This is particularly important with the climate change crisis, where wildlife of all species will need to move across the landscape. Protecting the forests that are still standing is absolutely critical to slowing down the extinction of species, just as it is vital to being able to drawdown enough carbon-dioxide to provide a bridge to a low-carbon fossil free future and combat the effects of climate change. Connectivity between forests is essential to allow species to move about the landscape and retreat to new areas and seek refuge. Riparian zones must be retained for habitat, quality of water and as connectivity in the landscape. This is just as important on private land as it is on public land. The recent tragic bushfires has only shown how vulnerable our native forests are to a changing climate, and mores species and in particular our iconic koala, who is affected by having their forest homes logged, have just been catapulted closer to extinction. For these reasons I personally believe that all logging of native forests on both public and private land should cease. But to date these requests seem to be continually ignored by Government, as it seems previous submissions regarding forestry have been also.

Current regulations just allow the desecration of our landscape, destroy vital habitat and erode and pollute our waterways which will no doubt lead to more species extinction. As a rural landholder I have seen this happen first-hand and been impacted by this on more than one occasion with Private Native Forestry. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) did absolutely nothing to help the environment despite many breaches of the then Private Native Forestry (PNF) Code of Practice (COP). Landowners must be held accountable for logging undertaken on private land as I have seen first hand how quickly forests, habitat, ecosystems, and our water catchments can be destroyed by private landholders undertaking logging.

For our koalas who are in crisis here in NSW, will you be able to sleep at night if you continue to allow the relentless carnage to their forest homes, and these majestic and iconic animals, loved around the world can no longer be seen in the wild. They ask for nothing from us but to retain their habitat to merely exist. Yet the forest industry are actively targeting the same tree species that koalas need to survive in the wild. Our threatened wildlife and we human inhabitants threatened by the climate crisis must be placed above all commercial interests and should be given priority.

There should have been a moratorium put in place on all logging of native forests due to the recent devastating bushfires until a comprehensive assessment was done on the impacts of the fires and to allow all species and particularly threatened species including koalas and their habitat time to recover.

Logging in our native forests is only drying them out causing a greater fire risk and opening up the forests for weeds and Bell Minor Associated Dieback. Areas badly affected by weeds and dieback must be identified and regenerated and this could provide jobs in the industry.

Logging our forests for woodchips, for burning for biomass and for commercial firewood should not be allowed. None of these practices are sustainable or environmental in any way.

Koala populations have declined by 50 % during the past 20 years, and a third of the survivors were lost during the 2019/2020 Black Summer bushfires. Government's lack of immediate, decisive and meaningful action has placed koalas on a trajectory to extinction. To still be including koala habitat in Biodiversity Offset Schemes is unforgivable. The Government's current agenda is not about protecting wildlife but about protecting the wealth of harmful and unsustainable industries such as the Forestry Industry at the expense of the rest of the NSW community and our precious and iconic wildlife.

Currently across NSW almost 1,000 animal and plant species are at risk of extinction. NSW koalas are predicted to disappear from the landscape altogether in NSW in 29 years, and may well be sooner, yet protections for koala habitat (the main risk factor) is being regressed at every move by the NSW Govt. The most urgent and pressing threat to fauna and flora is the destruction of habitat and the Government is not only failing to act, but regressively winding back and weakening environmental protections which will only result in further fauna and flora extinctions. Our iconic wildlife is loved the world over and the NSW Government is not only missing the ecotourism benefits but ignoring the will of the NSW people and indeed people worldwide who are genuinely and deeply concerned for our koalas, platypus, kangaroos and other iconic wildlife as well as our unique flora and our precious water catchments. At this current trajectory it is not a matter of if but when our koalas go extinct in NSW and when that happens it will be because of the current NSW Government policy and a big part of that is logging their habitat. I do not for one minute believe the propaganda that koalas can live alongside logging of their habitat as I have experienced private native forestry happening on an adjoining property to mine and another in close proximity and on both occasions I had koalas fleeing onto my property to escape the incredibly loud noise and disturbance of chainsaws, logging machinery, trees crashing down and being dragged off. And then the forest is left in a complete mess adding to the fire danger, opening the forest up to more sun, weeds and lack of water.

We have the frankly embarrassing title of the country with the worlds most mammal extinctions yet we are still selling our wildlife out at every Government level. Without biodiversity our wildlife and indeed we ourselves will find it hard to survive. There is no such thing as an economy on a

dead planet so let's start thinking about the planet instead. Jobs in the native forestry sector, which we know is only a small part of the existing timber industry need to be transitioned to 100% plantation forestry.

From my own personal perspective I have protected 90% of my 84 hectare property in northern NSW with a covenant with Nature Conservation Trust NSW because of its significant environmental values, threatened species, vulnerable forest ecosystem, having mapped key habitat and being part of a significant regional wildlife corridor between National Parks. It also lies within a regional wildlife corridor identified by the Department of Environment and Climate Change for a 'northern escarpment assemblage' of fauna species. I have spent 30 years doing manual work and at great personal expense to enhance the conservation values of my property, retain and increase habitat. All these efforts by myself and other conservation minded landholders are not for financial gain, but to contribute to the biodiversity and heritage of our natural world and to help our beleaguered wildlife. There is no more an important time to do this with the climate crisis already threatening life as we know it. For the timber and forest product industry to carry on as usual and decimate native forests, without any consideration for their long-term future or that of their inhabitants is reckless, deplorable and a smack in the face for wildlife rescuers and carers and conservationists alike. When the science tells us that forests are so important as a carbon sink and in their role in combatting the climate crisis it is nothing short of ecocide to continue logging them.

We are so lucky to have such unique wildlife in our country and particularly that right here in our homestate of NSW we have koalas living in their forest homes, one of the most gentle, harmless, defenceless, unique and adorable creatures treasured and revered the world over. They ask absolutely nothing of us other than to leave them alone in their trees that they need to survive. Yet the native forestry industry is targeting the exact same species (and many that have taken up to a hundred years to grow), that Koalas need to survive into the future. On this basis alone all native forestry should cease. We simply cannot have a NSW without koalas.

Logging native forests only increases fire risk, reduces carbon storage, damages water resources, undermines eco-tourism opportunities, harms biodiversity and is causing species extinction. There must be an end to native forest logging. Communities in timber regions must have certainty for the future, and that does not include unsustainable native forest logging. Forest workers can easily transition to harvesting plantation timber and more plantations need to be planted on existing cleared land to cater for this. Other industries that are also not sustainable and also deforest our landscape such as animal agriculture could also be assisted to transform to more sustainable plantation forestry. The industry must transition to 100% plantation based. The industry must put in place transition plans for communities impacted by a transition out of native forest logging. The most ecologically significant state forests and particularly those offering koala refugia need to be transferred to the National Parks Estate. Emphasis should be placed on creating the Great Koala National Park and also the Sandy Creek National Park in the states north. These areas would serve the community as well as the wildlife better as protected reserves. Ending native forest logging and expanding the conservation estate will only benefit the local community by offering more green space, peace and quiet, and opportunity for healthy exercise, sports and recreation. This is known to improve both the physical and the emotional state of well-being. Adding to the conservation estate will also offer more eco-tourism opportunities and benefit the local economy as well as improving local water catchments and quality of water. Another benefit would be the removal of large, loud logging trucks from our rural roads also increasing safety on our roads.

A sustainable future of only Plantation timber still meets the needs of the community and the industry. My local community and indeed that of all NSW will greatly benefit from a sustainable

forestry industry, with no native forest logging where other sustainable and eco-friendly industries such as eco-tourism can flourish. Ending native forest logging will protect ecosystems and threatened species, which are under immense pressure after the bushfires.

Rules that regulate FCNSW logging operations, the Coastal Integrated Forestry Operations Approvals (CIFOAs), were not developed to account for the scale or the severity of the fires experienced during the Black Summer bushfires. Following the fires, the EPA developed amended rules for logging to provide additional protections but FCNSW has abandoned these additional protections and returned to logging under the previous rules. This is a disastrous and totally unsustainable decision for our forests and for our wildlife. The surviving patches of unburnt forest are critical refuges for our wildlife. On top of the logging the dispersal of the extremely toxic poison 1080 is also being relentlessly undertaken, also killing non-target species including wildlife. Our wildlife simply do not stand a chance of surviving this onslaught.

An EPA review released in September 2020 found that "Fauna populations surviving in fire refuges in state forests are at risk of elimination by timber harvesting under the normal CIFOA which could prevent recovery, and cause catastrophic population decline in species such as the Koala, Greater Glider and Yellow-bellied Glider."

1.8 million hectares of habitat and feed trees were destroyed during the fires. It is imperative that the forest which remains must be protected. Logging our native forests just makes no economic sense.

The native forestry division of FCNSW operates at a loss financially. The high cost, low return of hardwood harvesting is only offset by FCNSW's softwood plantations, which generate most of the corporation's annual earnings. FCNSW's revenue is set to decline 25% by \$100 million, from next financial year, with predicted losses of about \$15 million a year from 2022 to 2024. Again it makes no economic or environmental sense to continue with native forest logging. As FCNSW is a government owned corporation, this means that taxpayers are subsidising the destruction of our native forests and paying to drive species to extinction.

Unbelievably FCNSW has gone in the opposite direction and adopted more intensive logging, even allowing logging closer to environmentally sensitive water catchments, putting even more pressure on our wildlife and environment.

The plantation industry in NSW employs 11,600 people with only 800 people currently employed in native forestry. Yet currently low value products like wood chips are exported and high value products like engineered timber are imported. This also makes no economic sense and a plantation-based industry with more processing in Australia could greatly increase regional forestry jobs.

Ending native forest logging does not mean a deficit in jobs but the opportunity for jobs in rural tourism, in conservation and recreation and also in carbon storage. Increasing tourism in regions with state forests is a huge economic opportunity for rural areas. A recent study by the University of Newcastle found that turning state forests on the north coast of NSW into a Great Koala National Park would create nearly 10,000 full time jobs and increase total economic output for the region by \$1.18 billion over 15 years.

From a financial and an environmental standpoint our public native forests are worth more standing. It's time to put an end to destructive logging of state forests and of all native forests and transition to a sustainable, plantation-based timber industry. Destroying these forests also releases carbon that has been stored for the lifetime of each tree so this is only contributing to the climate

crisis. As our forests age they are also storing more carbon, so our forests are undertaking this important service for the planet free of charge. Our native forests are a crucial carbon sink which must be preserved and protected to reduce the impacts of climate change.

The NSW Government must adopt a moral compass and accept the science and protect our native forests for the people of NSW, for our wildlife, for the existence of koalas in the wild in NSW, for our planet, for the NSW economy and for the creation of a 100% sustainable plantation-based timber and forest products industry. And instead create new sustainable jobs that enhance our quality of life and our environment and open up tourism opportunities based on promoting and protecting our unique wildlife instead of driving it and life as we know it to extinction.

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