

Submission
No 188

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

Organisation: Hunter Environment Lobby Inc.

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Hunter Environment Lobby Inc.

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Future of the Timber Industry Upper House Inquiry

Hunter Environment Lobby Inc. (HEL) is a regional community-based environmental organization that has been active for over 20 years on the issues of cumulative impacts of environmental degradation involving species and habitat loss, climate change and effects on ground water and rivers.

In some areas of the Hunter River catchment native forest logging is impacting on the local environment and community and this is of extreme concern to members of HEL

We believe with logging of native forests there is an increased fire risk as well as a reduced carbon storage, not to mention the damage to water resources which can be a serious hazard for waters being used for Town Water Supply, like many in the Hunter.

We see that undermining eco-tourism opportunities and harming biodiversity is a major reason why we should look seriously at this issue. Suggestions for what a sustainable future for this industry should look like include:

- An end to public native forest logging.
- Immediate expansion of the plantation estate, with a goal of a 100% plantation-based timber industry.
- Government transition plans for communities impacted by transition out of native forest logging.
- Transfer of the most ecologically significant state forests into the national parks estate.

The timber industry needs to modernise and move to a sustainable future while meeting the needs of communities and industry. Our Hunter regions have unemployment at the moment which could benefit from a sustainable forestry industry, with no native forest logging.

There are many State forests in the Hunter region which would better service the community as protected reserves. We know that ending native forest logging, and expanding the conservation estate, could benefit our local environment, community and economy.

We can see, for example, that increased local amenity from recreational green spaces, more tourism dollars and less logging trucks on the roads would benefit communities from as far afield as The Watagans, the Barrington Tops, the Mt Royal area through to Myall Lakes.

Ending native forest logging will protect ecosystems and threatened species, which are under immense pressure after the bushfires. We can see that the rules that regulate Forestry Corporation NSW's (FCNSW) logging operations, the Coastal Integrated Forestry Operations Approvals (CIFOAs), were not developed to account for the scale or severity of the fires experienced during the Black Summer bushfires. This is a serious omission.

We note that The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) developed amended rules for logging to provide additional protections immediately following the fires, but FCNSW has abandoned these additional protections and returned to logging under the previous rules (CIFOAs). This will spell disaster for our forests and wildlife.

The patches of unburnt or lightly burnt forests that are threatened by logging are critical, often tiny, refuges for wildlife. An EPA review released in September 2020 found: "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."

It is a fact that 1.8 million hectares of habitat and feed trees were destroyed during the fires. The forest which remains must be protected. Native forest logging makes no economic sense. The native forestry (hardwood) division of FCNSW is loss-making. 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 \$100 million, or 25 per cent, from next financial year, with predicted losses of about \$15 million a year from 2022 to 2024. FCNSW is a government owned corporation, so the NSW Government is ultimately liable for keeping it afloat. This means taxpayers are subsidising the destruction of our native forests and paying to drive species to extinction. This is absurd.

To stay viable, FCNSW has adopted more intensive logging, encroaching even closer to sensitive areas such as waterways. This puts more pressure on our environment than ever. Ending native forest logging does not mean job losses. Forestry industry job losses are avoidable.

Right now we export low value products like wood chips, and import high value products like engineered timber. A plantation based industry with more processing in Australia could greatly increase regional forestry jobs. The plantation industry in NSW employs 11,600 people. Only 800 people are currently employed in native forestry.

There are also jobs in managing forests for tourism, recreation, and carbon storage. Increasing tourism in regions with state forests is a huge economic opportunity. 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. Many other great opportunities exist across the state to transform state forests into tourist attractions.

This could include the creation and maintenance of new walking tracks, horse-riding trails, boardwalks, lookouts, campgrounds with amenities and scenic driving routes, bringing in revenue for forest management and local communities. Camping venues have never been more popular especially since the Covic-19 outbreak – people can not find camping grounds often in peak times.

Our forests are a crucial carbon sink – they must be protected to reduce climate pollution. As forests age, they store more and more carbon in their roots and trunks. Unlogged forests continue to do this work for free. Destroying forests releases carbon that has been stored over the lifetime of the tree, contributing to climate change.

Our public native forests are worth more standing. It's time to put an end to destructive logging of state forests and transition to a sustainable, plantation-based timber industry.

Yours in trust,

Jan Davis
President Hunter Environment Lobby Inc.