

Submission  
No 192

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

**Organisation:** Githabul Elders

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## **SUBMISSSION – Rob and Gloria Williams – Githabul Elders**

### **Githabul Elders submission to the inquiry into the long-term sustainability and future of the timber and forest products industry**

#### **The Githabul Story**

Our ancestors have lived in and around the woorbirr (forests) of the ranges straddling the NSW-Queensland border since time immemorial. In the 1840s we felt the brunt of European invasion and the waves of pastoralists, gold diggers and timber cutters who wanted to steal and destroy Githabul land. These forests used to stretch all the way to the borragorr (ocean). When they came through and logged the jail (trees) so big that twenty men could stand around it – it left a scar.

Our Elders would take us out to the bush to show us how to care for Country and hunt and gather in the right way without damaging the trees and landscapes. They taught us the ancient buudjerums (stories) and our Lore.

Fast forward to 2007 our native title rights were recognised over nine national parks and 13 State Forests – 11 years after we lodged our claim.

In the years that followed we watched the continued destruction of the lands we had just been given back. The logging was causing irreparable harm to our animals, our plants and our ancient buudjerums (stories).

After decades of watching the impacts of this logging – we knew we had to take action. We would visit a recently logged forest and you couldn't even hear a bird sing.

In May 2016 our tribe set up camp at Donaldson State Forest to prevent any further logging by Forestry Corporation. When we met with Forestry that day we wanted to show them why the forest shouldn't be logged. My brother picked up an axe to dig for Juubal (wichetty grubs) to show the importance of bush tucker but before he could, a Gnamarl (goanna) appeared from behind a tree.

This historic action led to the cessation of all logging in the 29,700ha of State Forests on our country. It is our wish that this logging stops all over NSW.

In August 2018 we signed a Memorandum of Understanding with NSW conservation groups to work together to get the care and management of these State Forests back into our hands, and undertake rehabilitation of extensive logging dieback areas.

In the last few years we have been involved in a number of projects of cultural burning and bush regeneration that offer large potential in the future of forest management.

#### **The importance of Country**

The importance of Country all comes down to Lore. This is passed down from ancestors.

Through our ancient buudjerums (stories) is our Lore. They carry the message of the ancestors and their place laying in the landscapes. Everything holds Lore – animals, insects, jali(trees), worrbal (forests). According to our buudjerums the forests stretched right to the ocean – visible from space. It is clear now how much of these forests have been lost already. Until we as the human species fall back in love with Mother Earth – if we don't love it we won't look after it properly. If we don't love Country, we won't make it.

### **Why we must stop logging**

It is important to understand and acknowledge that the health of the Githabul people in general is directly related to the health of the surrounding Country and vice versa. It's essential that we keep our trees – they're very significant and sacred to our people. They're important for our ancient buudjerums (stories), for bush tucker and for our Lore. If these forests are lost then we cannot hand down our buudjerums from generation to generation.

Put simply: logging breaks Lore and has a negative spiritual effect on the Githabul People.

This philosophy underpins our wish to see an end to logging in NSW and immediately arrest what is seen as a decline in the health of the forest and waterways over many decades now.

Such is our connection to country that we all suffer – along with the plants and animals. We have a direct responsibility to maintain the natural balance between all interrelated species including ourselves as was done for millennia and before the colonial invasion.

### **A plan for the future**

Moving past logging will allow all forest stakeholders to focus on sustainable forest management and a long term rehabilitation plan for us to walk on and care for Country again. Innovative new ranger programs have the potential to get people united and share the roles and responsibilities of restoring Country. This would allow all of us to enjoy the beauty of country.

There are Githabul rangers already playing a role in restoring Country. They have the resources but are limited by rules and regulations based on misunderstanding from Forestry and National Parks. We must start discussing how these rules and can get in the way of cultural burning, bush regeneration and other spiritual practices that are essential in the management of these forests.

If native forest logging ends – we have a big opportunity to regenerate the bush and let these trees grow up to be grandfather and grandmother trees. This will allow for proper ceremony done the proper way together. This will allow for cultural burning, ceremony and coming together. Then the next steps will be putting the love back on it and regenerating these places.

Beyond native forest logging lies the chance for everyone to come to the table with the same goal in mind – intact cultural heritage, strong communities, bush regeneration programs and thriving native forests.

This new approach to forest management is just waiting to be spread far and wide to create a lasting natural estate for all future generations.

We submit that we wish to deliver evidence to the Committee in person.

Rob and Gloria Williams