

Submission
No 221

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

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Inquiry into the long term sustainability and future of the timber and forest products industry.

I submit:

- that the intrinsic values of native forest land and the ‘ecosystem services’ they provide for future human welfare in terms of biodiversity conservation, water catchment, carbon storage, and recreation are all compromised by ongoing industrial level logging for saw logs and/or woodchips, and that now is the time to adopt a clear exit plan;
- that this exit plan be developed and implemented in order to include transition to plantations, on already cleared areas;
- that new plantations (effectively long-rotation crops) should allow for mixed as well as monoculture species so as to cater for specialist needs like furniture, musical instruments and historic renovation;
- that the exit plan includes support for people and their communities in the move to new and different roles through the adjustment period; and
- that robust protocols addressing biodiversity conservation and sustainable land and water management should apply to private as well as public lands.

I make this brief submission as an individual and biologist who has been involved for many years in nature conservation activities.

I became actively involved in the debates over forest futures in the South East/Eden region of NSW in the late 1980s. This included appearing before the Resource Assessment Commissioner Stewart’s Inquiry. During the hearings I observed with fascination as the NSW Forestry Commissioner of the day was pressed on whether their forestry operations were sustainable – the best he could manage was to say they were working towards sustainability.

The National Forest Policy Statement (NFPS), led to the Regional Forest Agreement (RFA): Rolled out across NSW through protracted and often torrid negotiation. Sadly, in my view, decisions under the RFA were determined to be exempt from the provisions of the Environment Protection and Conservation of Biodiversity Act.

I bring to the Inquiry’s attention a Report to the Earth Foundation Australia, July 1992 entitled “World Heritage Values and their Protection in Far South East New South Wales” by Geoff Mosley & Alec Costin”. (copy can be provided if required)

Written during that early phase of debate about the future of forests in the region, it includes cogent argument for recognising the significance of this swathe of forested land. While some maps and information need to be up-dated the main thrust is still valid today.

Since that time there have been many instances where NSW forestry operations have failed to meet the intentions articulated in the NFPS. Subsequent on-ground protests by local communities bear witness to this concern. Recently instances of the NSW Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) investigations into failure to comply with agreed post bushfire protocols substantiate that there are solid grounds for concern (see for example the Guardian article of 17 February 2021 “Logging to resume in bushfire-affected forests on NSW south coast despite environmental warnings”).

Now, fifty years later, after periods of drought, catastrophic bushfire and increasing climate change, appraisal of the long term sustainability and future of the timber and forest products industry is timely and much needed.

The wealth of publications on forests – their values, management and future – from different perspectives are, I hope, being drawn on to provide objective parliamentary research paper to assist this current inquiry. The World Heritage Report referred to above provides one such perspective, while The Australia Institute Discussion Paper of March 2016 “Money does not grow on trees” challenges the financial viability of native forest logging. The recently published finding (Nature Research 6 November 2020) that there are 3 distinct species (not 1) of the Greater Glider demonstrates how much there is still to be learned about our diminishing native forest fauna.

Lessons should be learnt from overseas: for example in the UK where landed estates have maintained – over centuries – forests planted with a mix of species for specialised timber needs that also support a range of forest species and deliver recreational opportunities.

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