

Submission  
No 226

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

**Organisation:** Forest Ecology Alliance (FEA)

**Date Received:** 15 June 2021

---

14 June 2021

The Hon Mark Banasiak  
Inquiry Chair  
Portfolio Committee No. 4 Industry NSW Legislative Council

Dear Mr Banasiak,

Forest Ecology Alliance (FEA) Members wish to thank the Committee for their vital Inquiry into the Long-Term Sustainability and Future of the Timber and Forest Products Industry.

FEA is a group of volunteer ecologists, citizen scientists and concerned local residents. We survey and/or campaign to protect native forests of the Mid North Coast of NSW, including Newry State Forest, Little Newry State Forest, Nambucca State Forest, Pine Creek State Forest and Oakes State Forest. We conduct regular community events, such as market information stalls, street vigils and forest-based recreational activities, to encourage appreciation and conservation of forests.

FEA members are aware that the Committee has recently received many submissions from expert environmentalists. Informed individuals and groups have discussed valid, substantiated concerns for escalating biodiversity loss and the urgent need for forest protection in similar inquiries and public forums for decades. FEA wish to respect the work of such experts by expressing our profound disappointment that their combined voices have yet to be heard.

FEA members prioritise practical on ground survey work in an effort to conserve remaining forests. We appreciate the work of academics, scientists and other conservation groups, many of whom have submitted to this inquiry. In particular, FEA members wish to fully endorse the contents of the extensive submission sent by Chris Gambian on behalf of the Nature Conservation Council (NCC).

We would also like to submit a 36-page document, *Forest Ecology Alliance (FEA) Citizen Science Report: Newry State Forest 2020-2021*. We believe that the contents of this report directly relate to the Terms of Reference outlined by the Committee of the Inquiry into the Long-Term Sustainability and Future of the Timber and Forest Products. We understand that an attachment cannot be published online with this cover letter, so we would ask that the Committee be provided with a copy of the attached document. We also wish to notify members of the public who may read this cover letter that we would be pleased to forward a copy of this document if requested via our email address.

Personal statements from two FEA members, Mary-Lou Lewis and John Sigurd are attached to the cover letter as Addendums 1 and 2.

Other FEA members wish to highlight the following points not included in our attached report *Forest Ecology Alliance (FEA) Citizen Science Report: Newry State Forest 2020-2021*:

1. Despite multiple polite attempts to communicate with Forestry Corporation of NSW, we have found that misinformation, obfuscation and redirection appear to be standard procedure when dealing with inquiries from members of the public. Forestry Corporation of NSW therefore lacks transparency and accountability. We submit that legislated exemptions and their current rights to manage public forests should be immediately reassessed.
2. Forestry Corporation of NSW ecology studies and other on ground assessments such as slope measures and old growth mapping are often piecemeal, unreliable and unavailable for public perusal in a timely manner.
3. Forestry Corporation of NSW is not adequately required to survey or protect threatened species. Funding allocation for species protection should be a top priority. For example, independent Koala surveys should be conducted prior to all logging operations. In our region, other species also require urgent research and monitoring, such as Glossy black cockatoos, Yellow-bellied glider, Native guava and Scrub turpentine.
4. In recent years an over reliance on citizen scientists and concerned community members to identify species at risk has emerged. Most citizen scientists are elderly retirees who find it difficult to explore difficult terrains and carry the onus of responsibility to monitor and record threatened species. FEA wish to express that the current lack of government funded and resourced research programs intended to protect threatened species is an untenable situation.
5. Modern machinery enables harvest access in steep slopes and gullies. Intensive logging destroys much, if not all, of the surrounding mid and understorey, ignoring the delicate balance required to support biodiversity, waterways and old growth trees. Intensive and selective logging jeopardise the health of surrounding unlogged forests. Open canopies lead to rapid weed or vine invasion and the overpopulation of invasive bird species such as Bell miner.
6. FEA often locate trees up to 8 metre in circumference in forests scheduled for logging. Though these old growth trees are unlikely to be felled by Forestry, transgressions can and do occur. Best practice would be to leave a mix of species in steep slope upper catchment areas as mother source for seed diversity and future recruitment. For example, noted age of tallowwood are estimated to be 30-50 years old in Newry Sate Forest, but parent trees need to be 90-120 years. Such trees can and must be supported by healthy surrounding mid and understorey. Tall trees capture the most carbon, and therefore the longer we leave trees to grow the more environmentally and economically beneficial they are.
7. Current forest demolition harvesting methodologies are a key contributor to a reduced catchment water holding capacity. Such methods create a changed ecosystem environment that has a reduced capacity to buffer flooding events by way of soil surface compaction

reducing rainfall soil penetration and absorption.

Bare ground surfaces left after clear-felling, are more susceptible to sedimental erosion and create drier, warmer soil surfaces. These bare earth practices reduce forest surface organic matter and detritus. This natural process is necessary to create humus in order to increase soil water holding capacity and moisture retention, thus contributing significantly to slowing extreme rainfall events by water surface absorption. This catchment function both cools ground surfaces over the hotter season and redistributes moisture in a slow -release timeline that contributes to ecosystem drought resilience.

8. Climate change will continue to increase the frequency of more extreme flooding events. Nature-based solutions for flood risk management are possible. (Milly et al, 2002) in *A Review into the Implementation of Nature- Based Solutions for Flood Risk Management* Dr. Michael Kirby, 2021. FEA call for an increase in riparian buffer zones to a minimum of 30 metres either side, widening to 50m as per the protocols. See *Fix the Cause to Solve the Problem*, posted by Susie Russell 98SC on 21 August 2018.
9. Changes in the frequency and mechanisation of current forest harvesting methods are creating compacted soil surfaces, increasing the velocity and rate of rainfall runoff events. This, combined with shorter forestry harvesting cycles, contributes to nitrogen drawn down of soils, further reducing fertility, soil biodiversity and resilience. Native hardwood replanted forests will have a reduced evapotranspiration capacity and will draw more water out of the catchment system as they will be in a rapid growth flush cycle. Removal via the current forestry methods is therefore a contradiction of the term catchment, in that managing landscapes in this fashion will lead to reduced buffering capabilities of forests to cope with extreme rainfall events and create increased impact costs to all downstream users.
10. Good forestry management in the past involved true selective logging. The current definition of selective logging is twice as intensive as in the past. Deforestation of NSW has been relentless for decades and all remaining intact forests are now in need of immediate preservation.
11. Current Forestry contracts were negotiated well before recent bushfires and floods devastated much of the state. FEA call for our immediate termination of these contracts. It is simply unsustainable to continue to source timber from native forests. The citizens of NSW have neither benefitted from the insurmountable debts associated with Forestry contracts or from habitat destruction due to deforestation. Policy to cease native forest logging and instead to prioritise forest protection would ensure duty of care for NSW residents who are entitled to clean air, water supply and a healthy biodiverse environment.
12. Private Native Forestry (PNF) Codes of Practice are highly inadequate and problematic. In our region there has been a sudden increase in private land clearing. Changes to wildlife and vegetation protection laws, expanded housing development zones, highway construction and large-scale monoculture agriculture such as blueberry farms have all contributed to this increase.

In addition, increased widescale private landholder logging can be directly associated with the fact that Forestry Corporation of NSW have rapidly escalated their harvest operations.

Local sawmill operators now seek out timber wherever possible, as so few unburnt forests were left standing after the catastrophic fires of 2019-2020.

PNF standards are outdated. For example, critically endangered species such as *Rhodamnia rubescens* (Scrub Turpentine) are not even listed. Fauna and flora checks pre harvest are solely the responsibility of the private landholder or contractor. There are fewer checks and balances than exist for Forestry operations. FEA are increasingly receiving calls from distressed members of the public who report serious environmental breaches. A PNF site is inspected only after a complaint is lodged with the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA), and by then it is often too late. With few effective PNF guidelines and procedures to enforce environmental standards, FEA are watching local wildlife and flora face extinction at an alarming rate.

13. FEA members communicate with many members of our local community. We wish to report widespread concern for the forests of our region. Residents note unrelenting harvest operations and loaded logging trucks on our roads. We have also noted a devastating impact on mental health and well-being. Reputable studies have established that eco-anxiety and eco-grief severely impact on many members of our community, especially young people.

A move towards government assurance of forest future-proofing would likely have positive repercussions throughout our society. Now is the time to acknowledge that the long-term social benefits of forest and environmental preservation far outweigh short-term economic gains of native forest harvesting.

14. FEA actively organise encourage forest education but we also like to promote recreational engagement with forests. Members of our community relate that they experience health benefits such as fitness, stress release and a sense of strong connection to the wonders of nature. We also like to arrange opportunities for “forest bathing” or meditative sensory immersion in a natural space, a widely researched health practice promoted especially in Japan.

Since the recent global pandemic, we have noted a major increase in the number of people who seek out forest walks and other activities such as camping, bicycle or horse riding and birdwatching. State Forests, if reserved, are healthy environments where social distancing is easily possible and extraordinarily beneficial.

15. The economic gains and employment opportunities associated with eco-tourism are far more advantageous to the region both short and long term than logging can ever be.

FEA wish to endorse The Great Koala National Park proposal in our region. This proposal aims to add several state forests to existing national parks or reserves so that native forest habitats can thrive. It is important that any eco-tourism ventures should be sustainable, monitored well and subject to environmental protection guidelines.

Forestry Corporation of NSW has been operating at enormous loss for years and is heavily subsidised by taxpayers. It is common sense to immediately cease logging operations and instead direct the same taxpayer money into establishing and maintaining forest reserves.

FEA fully support immediate transition for Forestry workers to sustainable industries and practices such as plantation timber, fire management, eco-tourism and alternative timber production.

**NSW native forests provide clean air, fresh water, healthy biodiversity, precious habitat and ongoing opportunities for recreational enjoyment and employment. It is therefore not viable or sustainable for Forestry Corporation of NSW to continue their environmentally and socially detrimental harvest operations.**

FEA Members thank you again for your interest in forest management and we would be pleased to be able to provide further feedback if required.

Yours sincerely,

Deanna Markovina

On behalf of and in consultation with FEA Members

### **Addendum 1: Submission from FEA Member Mary- Lou Lewis**

After moving to the mid North Coast following a long career of Bushland Management in the city, I was appalled to witness the condition of my new surroundings. A lover of nature and all things beautiful I walked through our local State Forests to learn about new species in this environment (only in my spare time as I am farming for the flower market). To my horror the forest was practically a monoculture of Blackbutt Trees *Eucalyptus pilularis*. As we citizen scientists, ecologists, botanists and David Attenborough fans know species diversity is the root to a healthy environment. The forests around where I live are void of both diversity of flora and fauna directly related to how the forest is managed by Forestry.

Farming practices are increasingly moving towards regenerative farming, drawing on nature to keep plants healthy, this practice includes attracting and utilising birds and insects for pollination and pest control. The condition of bushland is lacking insects as their host plants for breeding are not there the insectivorous birds are also missing. I feel (without strong scientific data but through experience and observation) the current practice of logging OUR state native forests is one contributing factor to the lack of birds and insects.

The recent fires decimating our environment have been studied by fire behaviour experts and contributed their evidence and expertise to the inquiry which highlight the complexities of bushland makes a different lower intensity fire than a monoculture forest. (see NEFA submission to NSW bushfire inquiry April 2020).

We need diversity of plant species for fire safety, farming practices, plant enthusiasts, bird watches and recreation enjoyers of fresh forest air.

Please consider re-thinking the current Forestry Corporation methods of management serving so few and ruining a great resource.

### **Addendum 2: Submission from FEA Member John Sigurd**

Hemp can supply all paper and cardboard needs at many times the rate per hectare of any forest products. Many studies prove this.

Steel, treated pine and ply bamboo can replace native timber in building.

All biomass plants should only be allowed to source material they have contracted to grow from the start, definitely no old forests should be allowed.

Electricity companies are complaining about home solar panels oversupplying the grid. There is no need for biomass plants which fraudulently claim renewable incentives to make money. Again, hemp can replace timber if they do want to burn more than the sugar cane residue that the Broadwater plant was commissioned for.