

Private Native Forestry Review
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Submission to the Private Native Forestry Review - 31 January 2019

Ownership and management of a patch of native forest is both a pleasure and a responsibility which requires understanding, knowledge and experience to truly appreciate what a valuable asset a forest can be.

Far too often, I see privately owned forested land change hands every 5-10 years, with each succession of land managers exploiting the timber reserves before selling the land. As native timber resources become scarcer, forested land is seen as a valuable asset to those who understand the value of timber and operate timber businesses.

Sometimes a larger block of forested land is sold by elderly family farmers as they retire from the land and the mature stands of timber have been retained after minimal selective logging. A number of these forested land parcels have been snapped up by timber company interests, who exploit the timber resource to the full extent, but allow the residence and farm to become run down before selling the property.

This is a very profitable exercise in some cases, but also erodes the fabric of a rural community by creating an economic and social deficit in the community, degrading valuable ecosystems and local roads by hauling heavy loads. We often lose more than we gain. We lose valuable community members, who are not replaced when a timber company buys a forested farm and that land also loses its identity and connection to the local people.

Approval of a PVP and the right to log native forests on private land fails to take into account the intent of the landholder beyond their desire to legally cut and sell timber without overtly breaching PNF codes. The extent of the landholders links to the local community, the long term negative impacts of industrial logging to neighbouring residents or landscape values is often overlooked with approvals rarely denied. It is these cumulative impacts that must be addressed by the PNF codes to avoid ongoing erosion of the social fabric in rural communities whose resilience to change and landscape degradation also has social limits.

Sustainable management of private native forests requires a consistent approach by government regulators and well funded advisory bodies to deliver scientifically current and progressive services to both landholders and

timber industry contractors for a range of assessment and educational services that build trust and cohesion in rural communities.

Management of native forests for timber production is only one aspect of 'Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management'. The private native forestry sector includes many aspects important to the healthy ecological functioning of native forest ecosystems, including on-farm requirements for timber products and alternative forest products including: bee-keeping; bushfoods; cut flowers; grazing systems; wildlife conservation and care initiatives and eco-tourism ventures, including shared benefits to social infrastructure, road repair and safety, health and wellbeing.

As a long term resident and manager of a forested property in NE NSW I am disappointed and frustrated by the lack of initiative in government services to promote forest guardianship as an alternative to "logging as an extra income". The Terms of Reference for the PNF review perpetuates the erroneous concept of nature as a resource to be exploited for profit, when in fact the inherent value of native forests is embodied in the ecosystem services they provide to local community landscapes.

The value of ecosystem services to the broader community is immense and initiatives to encourage conservation and restoration of mixed species native forests and enhancement of riparian vegetation for long term catchment health must be a priority for this PNF review, especially in relation to climate breakdown and extreme weather events.

As the impacts of global warming increase our forests are at greater risk of being destroyed by catastrophic fires during droughts and extreme heatwaves, which are happening more frequently and for longer periods. The collapse of our forest ecosystems from uncontrollable bushfires and/or poorly regulated logging activities would herald disaster for our society.

Here in NE NSW, living on the Great Dividing Range between Nymboi-Binderay NP and Chaelundi NP our tall wet sclerophyll forests were once dominated by mature rainforest species, but successive logging events and removal of tall canopy eucalypts have changed the forest structure allowing faster growing eucalypt species to dominate, with the original drainage line vegetation degraded by canopy loss and loss of rainforest giants which originally provided exceptional fire barriers to slow and stop forest bushfires.

The current forestry industry methodology relies on these eucalypt dominated landscapes for ongoing timber demands. These methods have been

generally accepted as successful 'regeneration forestry techniques', but times are rapidly changing in a hothouse world and the forestry sector needs to come quickly to terms with its responsibility to protect intact mixed species wet forests for the safety of neighbouring residents in future catastrophic bushfire scenarios. Logged forests are drier and burn more intensely than intact, closed canopy forest environments.

In recent decades forestry reviews have espoused the importance of ESFM but failed to deliver meaningful change on the ground in the forests where it is most needed to protect threatened species and endangered ecological communities. Breaches of the PNF codes, failure to identify the presence of threatened species and failure to enforce penalties on poor logging practices has cemented these inadequate regulations into the business-as-usual methodology of timber industry contractors and traditional land managers.

I have had logging contractors operating on a neighbouring property, make a creek crossing on a Sunday, trespass, cut and steal my trees, then turn around and deny responsibility leaving me to claim compensation through a lengthy legal process with their insurer, which never accounted or valued my personal stress, local ecosystem degradation or loss from the future potential value of those trees were they allowed to grow old where I had intended they do so.

How can the PNF code allow this to happen? Surely a logging contractor must ensure they have correct GPS coordinates for the approved plan before they begin cutting trees that are not on the PVP?

The next generation of farmers and land owners need enlightened guidance and access to professionals who can educate and inform on best practice native forest management, conservation and restoration of intact forest ecosystems. Landscape forest management plans capable of providing resilience from fires, ensuring habitat connectivity and large enough areas of forest to allow for evolutionary processes for species adaptation to climate change.

Australia is now listed as a global deforestation hotspot, with land clearing and logging in Queensland and New South Wales recorded as one of the worst in any developed country on earth. If that does not ring alarm bells in industry and government sectors then I am probably wasting my time and effort to write this submission.

The undeniable truth within the native forest timber industry is that the sector is in decline. The public acceptance of native forest logging is at an all time

low, as well as log volumes being unavailable to meet demand. Smaller and smaller logs are cut from increasingly degraded native forests which now require care and attention to restore health to the over-logged forests and provide fire resilience, refuge and habitat for our wildlife.

Healthy forests create the rain that falls across our agricultural landscapes, where healthy riparian vegetation is needed to both filter and hold the water in the landscape where it can sustain the land through droughts and extreme weather, trees that shade waterways and provide refuge for native fish, birds and insects vital to healthy farming systems.

If the main concern of this PNF review is to secure timber volumes for the next decades, the plantation sector is the best way forward. NSW needs a plan for a responsible transition out of native forest logging. It is time to manage our native forests for the job they do best, protecting the soil from erosion, provision of habitat and refugia for wildlife and ensuring rainfall, water filtration and climate stability.

Restoration forestry is the most obvious pathway to maintain catchment health and increase carbon storage capacity of forests and forest soils in order to contribute to the urgent need to reduce carbon emissions and halt the worst impacts of global warming.

Global temperature increase is a looming crisis for humanity, species survival and life as we know it on this habitable planet. Mature forests are an irreplaceable piece of the carbon-water cycle and without large areas of intact old growth, rainforests and mature coastal forests, the balance of nature cannot be maintained.

The weakening of stream buffers to 5m wide strips of whatever vegetation still remains after decades of unsustainable logging and clearing is an absolute joke and ignores ESFM principles. Removing the necessity to survey for and protect threatened species is equally absurd as we witness the 50% decline of koalas in NSW in the decades since the “Rio Declaration” of 1992. ([http://www.unesco.org/education/nfsunesco/pdf/RIO E.PDF](http://www.unesco.org/education/nfsunesco/pdf/RIO_E.PDF)).

As a society we are consuming nature faster than it can grow back. It is now imperative to reverse this trend or perish as a species. Society’s expectation that money can buy our every desire is a delusion, just as growth economics fails to acknowledge that finite native timber resources will one day soon be unavailable - that’s if we are serious about successfully reversing species extinction rates.

I believe it is in the interests of society that governments and businesses stop feeding these deluded consumer expectations and put nature first, where it rightly deserves to be, in order that we can all survive and reverse the current trajectory into ecological collapse before it is far too late.

I am appalled by the weakening of NSW vegetation regulations and enraged by the NSW Coastal IFOA remake which ignores ESFM to prioritise timber volumes for an industry intent on its own demise. The signing off of RFA's - locking in another 20 years of industrial logging of public native forests which allows the timber industry to be exempt from national threatened species laws - gives no regard for the cumulative impacts to landscapes, or the devastating consequences to nature and the irreplaceable loss of biodiversity to future generations.

I do concede, some areas of private native forests would benefit from regenerative forestry techniques to restore depleted hardwood stands, but not at the expense of existing intact ecosystems, rainforests, threatened species, siltation of streams, soil erosion and biodiversity loss.

What remains of our mature and HCVOG forests and rainforests is essential to maintaining ecological integrity across the private native forest estate and should not be sacrificed to the industrial forestry model at the expense of the surrounding landscapes, rivers and rural communities who also want to survive impending climate breakdown, survive bushfires and live to see healthy koalas breeding again in local forest stands.

I think the Forest Industry Roadmap is a poor example of creative thinking and you mob need to go back to the drawing board, consult widely and get real about anthropogenic global warming and what your industry can do to help us reverse biodiversity loss and address the climate crisis, including protecting the resilience of rural communities. We must stop depleting the potential of native forests to provide up to 30% of the carbon emission sequestration needed to hold global temperatures to 1.5 C. It is time to allow our native forests grow old and nurture nature.

Encourage the industry to be creative about growing a future timber resource, to provide the demand for timber products and encourage private landholders on marginal land to co-invest in plantation timbers, conservation and stock shelter plantings, trees and river protection. There is so much degraded land in NSW that needs investment and restoration, a government backed financial incentive to reward landholders for improved carbon and biodiversity management would be welcomed in the bush.

There is huge potential in farm forestry/agroforestry investments to establish future timber needs, and restore degraded farmland, native forests and woodlands for the benefit of nature and everyone in the state.

Please strengthen private native forest protections to reflect the needs of nature and best practice ESFM. Strong enforcement of PNF codes will support the necessary future transition out of native forest logging and into native forest and land restoration for threatened species recovery and improved carbon mitigation efforts through better land management.

In conclusion I would like to endorse and support submissions made by the following groups:

NSW Environmental Defenders Office

North Coast Environment Council

North East Forest Alliance

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Meredith Stanton

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