Public submission

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Topic 1 Sustainability of current and future forestry operations in NSW

Whether it be our productive public, or private owned, native or plantation forests, NSW has one of the most sustainable and highly regulated forest industries in the world.

AGSTA Farm Forests own and manage regrowth and plantation native forests in Northern NSW and South East Queensland. All are managed on a sustainable basis for long-rotation timber production while also providing the co-benefits of habitat and biodiversity.

We employ four full time staff and other contractors as needed for road maintenance, weed spraying (both drone and spray reel), preparation planting fertilizing and pruning, fencing. These contract crews would account for another ten or more people, but they don't work for us exclusively, its seasonal work as required.

Our forests are working forests, much of the area had been previously cleared for agriculture and has been re-established as productive forest either through managed natural regeneration or planting.

Ex pasture areas continue to support cattle production, both as an important part of our 'silvopastural' or sometimes referred to as agroforestry or farm forestry management system. Cattle provide important income for the farms along with help in controlling weeds and grass growth, which assist to reduce our fire/fuel load. AGSTA also utilizes 'cool burns' to maximize forest health and minimize the risk or impact of wildfire.

We have managed our private native forests for generations now, and our earliest plantation forests are now approaching first and second commercial thinning rotations.

This is an important part of forest management, reducing competition and stress on the best trees and allowing more light to reach the forest floor for better ground cover, soil health and erosion control.

Before any trees are removed from the stand, operational plans are produced. Trees are individually inspected and marked to ensure the best quality trees remain in the stand to grow on to produce large sawlogs for future high quality timber products.

Those trees that are removed in a thinning process are generally of the poorest form or quality, but are still able to be utilized for a range of products – small sawlogs, agricultural roundwood for fencing, or horticulture, power poles, firewood, and wood chips for a multitude of uses – either recycled back into our soils to add to organic matter and moisture retention, or sold into markets for landscaping, horticulture, power generation or exported for paper production – nothing is wasted.

When we first commenced planting, we followed what was being done by the larger plantation operations with blocks of largely single species eucalyptus planted in rip mounds across the contour.

Over the years we have trialed a range of different variables in ground preparations, species mixes and silvicultural management. We have never used any pesticides on our trees, preferring

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to rely on natural predators and find species and site combinations that are naturally resilient to pests and diseases.

Today we minimize ground and soil disturbance in our plantations, preferring to use either spot cultivation or planting directly into undisturbed soil using a wood chip mulch to aid in moisture retention and weed suppression.

We plant a wider species selection matched to site typically four or more species in an establishment area.

Our techniques and methods will continue to evolve as we learn more.

Topic 2 Environmental and cultural values of forests, including threatened species and Aboriginal cultural heritage values

Prior to commencing harvesting or other management interventions in a PNF area, or establishing a plantation, checks on Aboriginal and other cultural heritage values along with any special environmental considerations are made.

In the case of PNF operations an application must be placed with Local Land Services Farm Forestry division. They then provide maps noting any special features such as drainage lines, gullies and streams, old growth, rainforest, any threatened species, or cultural heritage records.

The Landholder must sign off on these plans then a PNF Plan is approved and issued by LLS.

Within 30 days prior to the commencement of operations a Commencement Notification must be submitted to LLS. LLS will then provide updated information relating to threatened plants, animals and ecological communities. All of this must be taken into account with relevant buffers and no go zones within the Forest Management Plan (FMP).

All operations must then be undertaken in accordance with the FMP and the PNF Code of Practice and compliance is monitored and enforced by the EPA.

Plantations in NSW must be established and managed in accordance with the Plantation and Reafforestation (Code) Regulation 2001.

All new plantations over 30 hectares must be authorized by NSW DPI Plantations prior to establishment.

The Act and Code have environmental standards that prevent soil erosion and land degradation and protect biodiversity and cultural values. The act also provides for certainty of harvest of your plantation once the Plantation Authorisation is achieved.

Compliance with the Act and Code is monitored and enforced by NSW DPI Plantations.

Topic 3 Demand for timber products, particularly as relates to NSW housing construction, mining, transport and retail

We have found a ready market for the full range of our higher end products, we are harvesting six different products from our hardwood thinning operations, tree farming is an expensive exercise and you have to chase the highest value products from each tree that you possibly can to cover your costs. It's the lower grade logs that we struggle to find viable markets for.

Topic 4 The future of softwood and hardwood plantations and the continuation of Private Native Forestry in helping meet timber supply needs

Sawmills and pole producers are always chasing logs these days, so our hardwood plantations and PNF operations will be able to help with that. We also produce our own split firewood and agricultural roundwood.

Topic 5 The role of State Forests in maximising the delivery of a range of environmental, economic and social outcomes and options for diverse management, including Aboriginal forest management models

It's important to us that State Forests continue to provide timber to industry, otherwise there won't be a local industry and then there's no local processors to purchase our timber, then the whole value chain potentially collapses. We are so fortunate on the North Coast to have such a diversity of hardwood processors which means for a grower you have markets for all your different sizes, species and grades of logs. I've visited farm foresters in Victoria, who no longer have much of an industry around them, they're now looking at a stranded asset with huge freight costs to transport their logs. Some of their products now have no viable market.

The missing link we still have on the North Coast is that there still isn't enough value in the early thinning markets and without that its pretty hard to make plantations work, there's so many possibilities with biochar, bioenergy, wood vinegar, and more, but there's not the confidence there to invest, too many unknowns with EPA waste and emission regulations.

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Topic 6. Opportunities to realise carbon and biodiversity benefits and support carbon and biodiversity benefits, and mitigate and adapt to climate change risks, including the greenhouse gas emission impacts of different uses of forests and assessment of climate change risk to forests

It would be nice to get some recognition in the form of carbon credits for the work we've done and continue to do sequestering carbon. We've been told that we don't qualify for carbon credits because our plantations already exist, even though they are continuing to absorb CO2, and We've been hearing about biodiversity credits as long as we can remember, 'We've pretty well tuned out to that discussion.