

Public submission

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Dr Israel Vaughn

ACT, [REDACTED]

Dear Independent Forestry Panel Secretariat

I write to you with a submission into the sustainability of current and future forestry operations in NSW.

I want to see an end to harmful logging which is greatly contributing to the extinction risk to our unique Australian flora and fauna. Once extinct, it's gone forever. Logging can be transitioned into a sustainable and economically viable industry in Australia, where the needs of the environment are balanced with the industry needs. The environment is a public good and must be properly protected.

I live in and work in the ACT and often spend time in NSW. I came to Australia from the USA in 2016, and understood and have learned that many Australians care very much about the unique Australian environmental and ecological habitat.

I work in the area of optical imaging, astronomy, and space sciences. In 2019 I began using an incredible Australian resource, the Geosciences Australia Datacube. I began looking at the datacube with a curiosity about wild places in Australia, as I have been long interested in the outdoors and outdoor activities. I was surprised by the amount of land clearing and lack of unharmed bushland in a country the size of Australia with only ~27 million human inhabitants. I looked specifically at a number of areas in Queensland, where large amounts of illegal land clearing appeared to have been undertaken. I was disappointed in my new government and new home, that better care wasn't being implemented for such a rich and diverse ecosystem.

Subsequently Covid-19 happened and I didn't pay much attention for a few years to this particular issue until I was invited to run the Tallaganda 30 x 30 run organised by Run for the Forests. I understood that Queensland was particularly egregious with land clearing and environmental damage, and thought that NSW had a more sustainable model in place. NSW Forestry states that they engage in "sustainable and selective" harvesting practices. When I went to Tallaganda prior to the 30 x 30 run I witnessed sections of forest that looked like the below.



As a person not an expert in ecology this did not feel sustainable to me. I am, however, scientifically trained. I decided to review some of the available material on this issue. I found some journalism which implied that the NSW forestry corporation appeared to be acting in poor faith [1], and not as a responsible steward of these unique forests. A dead, endangered, greater glider was found in August of 2023, and then it was revealed that the forestry corporation was spotting this endangered species den trees during the day. This is a nocturnal animal. The NSW environmental regulator then found 20 den trees in the area designated to be logged. The greater glider is at risk of extinction. The image below shows a Tallaganda logged area. It's stripped bare, this is not what sustainability looks like. A court has issued a scathing judgement for the NSW Forestry Corporation, finding it had [2] "a pattern" of illegally damaging the environment and had refused to accept the "true extent of the harm that it has caused". Clearly the current culture within the forestry corporation is untenable.



Satellite image of a Tallaganda logging compartment captured on 6th September 2023. Image from the Digital Earth Australia Surface Reflectance database (Landsat and Sentinel-2).

The science on this issue is clear [2]. After the 2019 bushfires, greater gliders and other vulnerable and endangered species are at extreme risk, including extinction risks. Logging is a significant contributor to this extinction risk.

The NSW forestry corporation is taxpayer supported, and it operated at a loss of \$15 million in 2022-2023 [4]. The corporation primarily produces low quality wood products, including pulp-wood, firewood, and paper products [5]. The forestry corporation has a culture where they believe that the rules do not apply to them [2]. Why would the government continue to allow this entity to operate when they are significantly contributing to environmental harm and extinction risks and are not responsible stewards? The consensus among the scientists studying the ecology of Australia generally and of NSW in particular is that native forest logging must stop, we've already done too much damage to Australian eco systems. Even our iconic Koala is now facing climbing extinction risks.

On the evidence, it is not in the public interest to continue to allow logging in NSW its current form and implementation.

Sincerely,

Dr Israel Vaughn

References

[1] Michael Slezak, *Environment watchdog made 'backroom deal' with state-run logging group putting endangered marsupial at risk, advocates claim*
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-05-27/epa-decision-stop-work-order-lapses-logging-tallaganda-forest/103876050>

[2] *Forestry Corporation of NSW has 'a pattern' of illegally damaging the environment, scathing judgment finds*
<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/article/2024/jul/31/forestry-corporation-of-nsw-has-a-pattern-of-illegally-damaging-the-environment-scathing-judgment-finds>

[3] Ashman, Kita, and Michelle Ward. *Extinction risk for Australia's iconic glider*. Science 378.6620 (2022): 608-608.

[4] Stef Loader, *2022-2023 Forestry Corporation Annual Report*
<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/tp/files/187259/Forestry%20Corporation%20Annual%20Report%202023.pdf>

[5] Forestry Corporation of NSW (2022) Tallaganda SF Cpts 2447A to 2450A Harvesting & Rooding Plan Public Version 2. Available at:
<https://planportal.fcnsw.net/plan/13df2e3c-1b9e-42d2-8b2a-146cbe7ca7a7>