

Public submission

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I am a concerned citizen deeply passionate about preserving Australia's unique ecosystems and biodiversity. My commitment to this cause has driven me to advocate for an end to native forest logging, with a clear call for timber to be sourced exclusively from sustainable plantations.

I am particularly disheartened by the Minns government's election promise to legislate and protect the Great National Koala Park while knowing that it is still slated for industrial logging at an alarming rate—one in every 26 hectares. This contradiction highlights a troubling disconnect between political rhetoric and on-the-ground realities.

The accelerating extinction crisis in Australia, and particularly in New South Wales, weighs heavily on my heart. Despite the government's claims of a "Nature Positive" approach, the alarming truth is that more than 1,918 Australian species are currently listed as endangered or threatened, with expectations for this number to rise in the coming years. Habitat destruction and degradation remain the foremost drivers of this crisis. Over the past five years, the rates of habitat and forest clearing have reached unprecedented levels, with New South Wales and Queensland leading the charge in this destruction.

As Minister for the Environment, Penny Sharpe, aptly stated, "We cannot ignore the truth: biodiversity in NSW is in crisis." She emphasized the necessity of ensuring that "Our goal must be to leave nature better off than we have found it" (NSW Government Statement, July 17, 2024). The NSW State of the Environment Report (2022) echoes this sentiment, highlighting "increasing clearing of native vegetation, poor health of river systems, and increasing threats to animal populations on land and water" (NSW EPA, 2022).

It is time for meaningful action, not just promises. We must prioritize the protection of our precious ecosystems and commit to sustainable forestry practices that safeguard our biodiversity for future generations.

Sustainability of Current and Future Forestry Operations in NSW

Minister for the Environment, Penny Sharpe, has emphasized that biodiversity in New South Wales is in serious trouble, stating, "We cannot overlook this reality." She reiterated a commitment to ensuring that "Our objective should be to enhance nature, leaving it in a better state than we found it" (NSW Government Statement, July 17, 2024).

The **NSW State of the Environment Report (2022)** highlighted critical challenges, including the increasing loss of native vegetation, deteriorating river health, and escalating threats to both terrestrial and aquatic animal populations (NSW EPA, 2022).

Native Forest Logging and Biodiversity Concerns

Logging of native forests is taking place in ecologically significant areas, such as the Bulga State Forest, which is home to many threatened species that survived the devastating 2019-2020 wildfires. These species, including various territorial animals and birds, face heightened risks during spring—a crucial time for reproduction. Habitat destruction not only displaces these creatures but also leads to intensified competition and stress, ultimately contributing to local extinctions and further endangering an already vulnerable biodiversity. Such biodiverse remnants are becoming increasingly scarce.

The intricate web of biodiversity cannot be replicated through plantation-style forestry, and our understanding of what is lost in these logging activities is still incomplete.

Research indicates that logged areas are more susceptible to severe bushfires. A study by Lindenmeyer, Yebra, and Cary (2023) found that logging significantly increased the likelihood of high-intensity fires during the Australian bushfires of 2019-2020 (Nature Ecology & Evolution, 6:533-535).

Economic Viability of Native Forestry Logging

The sustainability of native forestry operations is questionable, as they rely heavily on taxpayer funding. According to the Nature Conservation Council, the Forestry Corporation of NSW has received approximately \$246.9 million in grants since the 2019-2020 fiscal year. Additionally, the hardwood division, responsible for native forest logging, was allocated over \$9.7 million in bushfire recovery aid and another \$10 million for flood relief. Despite this financial support, the division incurred a loss of \$28.2 million during this time. A report from the Sydney Morning Herald (March 15, 2022) indicated that the state-owned Forestry Corporation faced a \$20 million loss in one year, resulting in a cost of \$441 per hectare to taxpayers for logging crucial native forests. The financial burden of damaging over 13,500 hectares of diverse species—including red gum, ironbark, and cypress—was estimated at \$6 million, with recovery costs from the Black Summer bushfires reaching \$14 million.

Further analysis by Frontiers Economics (May 30, 2023) revealed that the native forest logging operations of the Forestry Corporation of NSW do not provide adequate financial returns for taxpayers, with some sections of the hardwood division unlikely to cover their operational costs. The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal of NSW has also documented these losses, suggesting that preserving native forests as standing resources may yield greater value.

Currently, the hardwood division supports approximately 1,070 jobs across NSW, encompassing employees of the Forestry Corporation, contractors, and mill workers.

Environmental and Cultural Significance of Forests

Australia's rich biodiversity is a shared heritage, drawing global attention and support, as evidenced by the substantial donations received after the Black Summer fires. The surge of community protests, involving individuals risking their safety and legal standing, reflects a deep-seated commitment to protecting these natural treasures. The ongoing Global Nature Positive Summit in Sydney further underscores the importance of biodiversity.

Access to undisturbed old-growth forests, abundant in flora and fauna, can have therapeutic benefits. Conversely, logging activities lead to ecological degradation, inflicting emotional distress on affected communities.

Native forests play a crucial role in the survival of threatened species such as koalas, greater gliders, and brush-tailed phascogales, among others. Moreover, these forests hold significant cultural value for Indigenous communities.

It is worth noting the inconsistency in societal perceptions: damaging heritage buildings is deemed criminal vandalism, yet the destruction of native forests—along with its far-reaching impacts—occurs legally, while those protesting such actions often face criminal charges.

Demand for Timber Products in Various Industries

Notably, 90% of sawn timber in Australia is sourced from plantations, as highlighted in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Forestry's 2023 report on the state of forests in the country.