

**SUBMISSION No. 98**  
**Inquiry into the Australian forestry industry**

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**25 March 2011**

**To: The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture,  
Resources, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Subject: Current and future prospects of the Australian forestry industry**

**Historical perspective:**

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, timber harvesting has been carried out in native forest areas of the Australian continent, at an ever-increasing pace commensurate with Australian and global human population growth, and increasing mechanization.

The resource has always been limited, but the rate of logging has been driven by economic goals rather than concepts of sustainability. It is well known and documented that Australia is intrinsically under-supplied in total area of closed forest ecosystems (originally approximately 8%, of which more than 60% was cleared by the end of the twentieth century). It has mainly been the tall Eucalypt forests of this category that were most attractive to the timber industry, and this continues to be the case today.

The process and methodology changed radically in the 1960s and '70s when experiments first began with clearfelling, whereby the underlying objectives shifted to woodchip production with sawn timber being relegated to second place. This change fuelled a great increase in rates of logging (notably in SE NSW and East Gippsland, Victoria, and Tasmania), where the effects of large areas cleared from previously selectively logged forests became the focus of adversarial attention from conservation minded people and organisations.

**Environmental Impacts of Forestry**

The logging of native forests for commercial gain has reached the stage of threatening the future environment of the Australian continent in a number of important ways:

- 1 – It is now clearly demonstrated that clearing vegetation increases local and regional temperatures, thus contributing directly to climate change (9). Forestry conducted on the basis of clearfelling, likewise causes local and regional climate change.
- 2 – Forestry that is based on clearfelling in native forest regions, adversely effects water yield from catchments (10).
- 3 – Clearfelling of native forests effectively eliminates all biota from the clearfelled site and thus severely effects local (and potentially regional) biodiversity of ecosystems (5).

4 – Forests that are clearfelled grow back in dense, flammable regeneration (often monocultures) that are more prone to wildfire ignition and propagation (3).

5 – There is a massive loss of stored carbon associated with logging operations, and when the forest is mature (or old growth) there is no prospect of replacing the carbon that is lost within a lesser time frame than it required for the forest to reach maturity (centuries) (7, 8).

### **The Central Highlands of Victoria**

As an example of an area that could be declared a 'bioregion,' the Central Highlands of Victoria was hard hit by the Black Saturday and subsequent fires of February 2009, leaving relatively small areas of unburned forest to continue growing toward mature ecosystems. These precious remnants of the original forest are vital refuges for native animals fortunate enough to have survived the fires. Some of these are highly threatened species such as Leadbeater's Possum, Spotted-tailed Quoll, Greater Glider, Sooty Owl and Powerful Owl, to say nothing of the many less exotic native creatures, and the important vegetation communities that are represented. Obviously the responsible decision would have been to protect these refuge areas, and give nature a chance to recover, rather than log them to support State Government Corporation VicForests economic objectives - by selling the woodchips to Japan.

The Central Highlands has been logged to excess for many years, and this action has radically changed the environment from a natural mixed age/species forest system, to a monoculture of regrowth saplings. This young regrowth forest, being practically devoid of tree hollows and the natural complexity of understorey vegetation, is effectively sterile, when compared to an ecologically mature forest system that provides appropriate breeding and refuge habitat for the complex of fauna that is naturally found in this region (2).

Excessive logging at the expense of the natural ecosystem values of the central highlands, has altered the vegetated character of the region (progressively removing the oldest and largest trees), contributing to climatic change and the susceptibility to increasing risk of catastrophic bushfires of the nature of the Black Saturday events. Scientists have reached the conclusion that the value of these forests lies more in their ability to store huge amounts of carbon, than in the timber yield that is inefficiently derived from current logging practices (8). It is also clear from the increasing wealth of scientific data, that forests modulate the local and regional climate (3), and that older, more mature forest ecosystems are superior to the young (regrowth after logging) as temperature and climate modulators. Local climate is a component of regional climate, just as surely as regional climate is a component of global climate. Consequently protecting the forested environment is a positive contribution to solving global climate problems.

### **Economic Impacts**

Economic analysis of forestry in native forests in particular regions has identified the truth of serious financial losses, that have needed Government (public) money (subsidy) to enable the industry to survive. Quote "the exploitation of the public wealth of the Victorian native forests for the private benefit of a few logging companies" Dr Andrew

K. Dragun, 1995 (12), and “VicForests Has Credit Extended” The Age 2011 (11).  
Similar analysis was applicable to NSW and Tasmanian forestry.

### **Burning of forests for ‘green energy’**

It was the discovery that burning black coal was a means of generating greater heat than by burning of wood (about 400 years ago) that provided the inspiration for the industrial revolution (13). To be considering burning forests today (even by processing the wood into pallets - which has its own carbon accounting toll) would be laughable if it was not for the seriousness with which it is being discussed by desperate industry advocates. In general, the burning practices associated with clearfelling are seriously negative global warming impacts (4).

### **Plantations**

This is the way forward for forestry, and if carefully planned and implemented, will have many positive benefits for the environment (6).

### **National and regional parks as the alternative to forestry**

This is clearly the way to permanently protect greater areas of native forests, and thus secure the environment and climate for a safer future. Many large areas of native forest that are classified as State (or commercial ) Forest should now be reclassified to give permanent reserve or national Park status. This would protect biodiversity, climate, and provide a stronger base for future environmental tourism.

### **Compiled by:**

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