



To: The Secretary,
Committee on Agriculture, Resources, Fisheries & Forestry

24th March 2011

From: Mike Thompson, Facilitator, Nature.Net Pty Ltd

Subject: **Submission to Inquiry into the Australian Forest Industry**

Thank you for this timely opportunity to comment on this key concern for Australians.

1. Terms of Reference

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The ToR for this Inquiry reflect historically narrow 20th Century native forest logging industry interests and agencies, ignoring Australia's much broader national interest. Within those unworthy constraints we have attempted to provide constructive input.

2. Summary

Jobs, biodiversity, water and carbon in Australia's native forests all need protection. March 21st was World Forestry Day. But much more important than Australia's unsustainable Native Forest Industry, 2011 is *International Year of **Forests***, aiming to protect and sustainably manage forests which created and maintain our precarious atmosphere. Climate action must first conserve Australia's native forest carbon sinks.

Today over 80% of logs from State Forests are trucked directly to Woodchip Mills. Plantations provide more jobs and supply all the wood we need. Slow growing carbon gets credit, but fast vast carbon pollution from native forest logging is not measured. Australia's Climate Action Plans (2010-2030) can fund this cost-effective opportunity.

3. 13-Aug 2011 Canberra Forest Forum

Evidence-based presentations from leading scientists, economists, and other experts on subjects referenced in this brief submission, will be discussed at ANU at Australia's **National Forest Forum** being convened on behalf of Australia's environment groups. The 2010 event in Batemans Bay was rated highly valuable by 150 attendees. Tasmania will be one case study in 2011. Speakers include Michael Spencer of FSC Australia talking on FSC definitions of 'Social Licence' and 'High Conservation Forests'. Professor Brendan Mackey will address Forest Carbon Accounting & Forest Ecosystem Services as per ref. www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/nature/ccandger.pdf Registrations of interest for 2011 can be addressed to Forest.Forum@nature.net.au

4. Forest Biodiversity

Protection for 'Native Vegetation' is hypocritically defined to exclude 'Native Forests'. In the 1990s Industry lobbying prevented Australia's Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act from protecting Australia's unique biodiversity-rich native forests being logged under now discredited Regional Forest Agreements. In 2010 the Government's own independent Hawke Report recommended fixing this RFA problem. Again native forest logging interests prevailed to avoid accountability.

Tree hollows only begin to appear in gums over 100 years old. State Forests destroy over 70% of hollows in high conservation value native forest areas now being logged. Australia's unique eucalypt ecosystems and hollows-dependent species are also worth millions of dollars to future generation's jobs in international nature-based tourism. Koala, Devils and other species are also being pushed toward regional extinction. RFA-damaged regions need EPBC and funded jobs for conservation and restoration. Forests remain inexcusably divorced from Australia's Biodiversity Strategy (2010-2030).

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5. Forest Carbon & Climate Action

Stopping the logging of native forests is Australia's most cost effective Climate Action. Australia's hardwood eucalypt forests have the highest carbon density in the world.

Fast vast carbon pollution from native forest logging is not measured today because State Forest Agencies only get paid for logs. 50% carbon pollution not their problem? State Forest Agencies cost millions of dollars each year to generate carbon pollution. Now they want *credit* for plantation growth but refuse to count logging carbon *debts*. Australia's dishonest 'forest fiddle' is shrouded in words like "*our native forest carbon is stable when averaged through time, with any losses due to logging compensated by uptake in areas recovering from previous logging. Our logging is carbon neutral*".

Why not simply stop logging-pollution losses, and credit old regrowth carbon uptake? How much better does that look on Australia's Carbon Emissions Graph up to 2020? Industry 'carbon neutral spin' in native forests ignores their 100-year recovery scale. Fast vast carbon pollution from native forest logging is not offset by slow re-growth.

Biomass burners fed from native forests will never survive full carbon accounting. This is why WWF Australia opposed a proposal by Nippon Paper's Eden Woodchip Mill.

Australia has a special 21st Century responsibility because few other rich developed countries have unique natural native forests still standing. Leave the carbon standing!

Australia's hypocrisy in funding forest conservation in Indonesia and other under-developed countries, whilst still allowing our own State Forests to continue *Forest Degradation* cannot continue without shame and international embarrassment. (REDD stands for *Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation*.)

Can Australian Governments continue logging when carbon pollution facts are known? Could continued logging of Australia's native forests under RFAs become the Gillard Government's equivalent of the Howard Government's AWB 'Kick-back' scandal?

Australians are morally obliged to stop carbon pollution wherever we can, irrespective of whether or not it is yet measured in national or international carbon programs. The Productivity Commission advice today is the Government's Carbon Farming Initiative and Coalition Land-Use Carbon 'Action' Incentives need to honestly reflect this reality.

Native forest carbon pollution can be calculated from truck weighbridges, contracts, and wood-chip tonnes derived from over 80% of logs. Soil carbon is hard to monitor. It would be another shameful Act if Australia's easier native-forest-carbon savings were illogically leap-frogged by problematic, worthy, politically expedient soil carbon. (Refer sequence implicit in IPPCC Land Use, Land Use Change & Forestry [LULUCF]) Labor's CFI and Liberal 'Direct Action' must also address native forest degradation. Premiers responsible for forests in TAS, VIC & NSW also have an historic opportunity!
'More trees, better soil' is another evasive, glib, and inadequate response.

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6. Community Licence

'Social Licence' is a term favoured by Industry and the Forest Stewardship Council. Gunns led the way out of native forest logging in Tasmania, acknowledging Industry had lost public support. 'Social Licence' begins locally but also includes city-dwellers. State Forests are public lands and all Australians have a stake in forest ecosystems. 80% of logging for woodchips remains 'out of sight, out of mind' in cities like Sydney and Melbourne - unlike in Tasmania. Increasing awareness leads to political leverage.

7. Conservation Value

Conserving and rehabilitating Australia's precious and unique native forests is an invaluable contribution to future generations of Australians and to our Planet Earth.

8. Dollars & Sense

State Forest Agencies are losing millions of public dollars converting Australia's old native forests into woodchips and perpetually young uniform-age industrial forests. What is the value of the environmental assets State Forests are losing on our behalf? Ecosystems service losses of water quality and quality are added to biodiversity loss. Loss of future nature-based tourism cost? Carbon price will cost the carbon pollution?

9. Fire & Water

Logging cycles are drying out our native forests and making them more fire prone, according to Professor David Lindenmeyer, ANU's renowned forest scientist. We can all see and experience moist old-growth native forest ecosystems drying out after logging. Wet Sclerophyll Forests are being converted to Dry Sclerophyll Forests. Forests recovering from logging are thirsty deprivors of catchment water for decades. Water pollution in rivers and streams begins with irretrievable siltation after logging. Bitter irony confronts Australia as we contribute to climate change heat-waves by logging forests which dry-out and offer little defence against catastrophic bushfires.

10. Jobs

'Facts on the table' is the first step in planning an exit from native forest logging. Start by analysing ABS Statistics in Local Government Areas affected by native forest logging. In one recent example in NSW, 1200 jobs were claimed to be threatened if they stopped logging River Red Gums. Investigation by the Natural Resources Commission estimated 120. We cannot allow logging vested interests to derail intelligent decisions. Jobs are created in plantations, forest restoration, broadband, tourism & renewables.

11. Law & Order

Breaches of native forest logging 'codes of practice', without adequate EPBC or other environmental controls, have become endemic. Old-growth trees are illegally logged. One court found illegal logging of an Aboriginal Place. Native Forest Certification by overseas 'standards' face legal challenge. Avoidable carbon pollution goes unchecked. Forest activists see 'Sea Shepherd' as law-enforcement analogous to action in forests.

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