



Timber Production in Native Forests

(IFA Forestry Policy Statement No. 2.7)

Key Statement

Timber production in Australian native forests is a valid and legitimate long-term forest use, when managed using the principles of ecologically sustainable forest management to achieve the objectives of the forest owner and the community's expectation that all forest values will be maintained in perpetuity.

Issue

Timber production from Australian public native forests has declined over the past decade largely due to changing community expectations and the policies of the Commonwealth and State Governments. With ongoing transfers of public native forests to conservation reserves and the application of stringent regulations on timber harvesting within native forests available for timber production, an impression is created in the community that harvesting of timber from native forests is not a preferred use.

Background

Implementation of the 1992 National Forest Policy Statement through the development of Regional Forest Agreements, combined with ongoing community opposition to timber harvesting in public native forests has led to a series of changes that have impacted on timber production in native forests. There have been large transfers of timber production forest to conservation reserves, where no timber harvesting occurs, as well as significant reductions in allowable harvest levels and significant changes to the regulation of timber harvesting.

There is an overwhelming body of scientific evidence that Australian native forests can be harvested for timber production while maintaining ecological sustainability. Australian silviculture often mimics natural disturbance processes, such as wildfire or storm events, where regeneration follows the creation of openings in the forest. There is a long history of harvesting native forests in Australia with resultant regrowth.

Native forests often have complex ecological interactions of flora, fauna and soil. Forestry professionals with up-to-date knowledge and skills are capable of managing the harvesting of native forests to achieve stated objectives within the framework of ecological sustainability.

Australia has large areas of native forest, which can produce high quality hardwood timbers to meet domestic demand. Many of these products can not yet be produced in plantations. Failure to produce such timber products within Australia will lead to increased imports, often from developing countries whose forests are not managed to the same high standards as those in Australia, and a consequential imbalance in Australia's forest products trade.

Native hardwood forests produce very high value durable timbers for round and sawn products, including girders, poles and piles, which are used in high value infrastructure projects in roads, rail, wharves, powerlines and buildings. Such timbers are difficult to grow in plantations and substitutes of other building materials have been shown to be either inferior or higher cost. Native forest timbers are also used for furniture, flooring, exposed structural elements, panelling and

craft products. These timbers come from a wide range of native species, which have a variety of distinctive colours and grain. These timber products are uniquely Australian and provide a quality of life benefit to society.

Native forests also produce a wide range of other important timber products, including pulpwood for paper and panel boards and firewood. These products may have different uses and values, but they are produced as a part of the total allowable harvest.

Australian native forests cover a wide spectrum of climate and landform, with many forests providing a low yield of timber per hectare compared to plantations. Nevertheless, timber production from these native forests supports industries in remote rural communities where plantation forestry would not occur due to insufficient economic return or available cleared land.

Harvesting of native forests for timber production also provides road access for other compatible activities including recreation, ecotourism and the production of non-timber products such as honey.

Native forests are often subject to damage agencies such as insect, fungi, fire and extreme weather events which can be mitigated by harvesting activities to either prevent the damage occurring, or to salvage timber which would otherwise be wasted. Thinning of dense regrowth forests provides a source of timber while at the same time promoting healthy forests and minimising the risk of wildfire and insect attack.

Policy

The Institute of Foresters of Australia advocates that significant areas of public and private native forests continue to be managed for timber production while maintaining ecological sustainability and other forest values.

The IFA supports and encourages the:

- adoption and maintenance of standards for management for native forests which are based on scientific principles and research evidence, to achieve ecological sustainability;
- management of native forests to produce high value timber products that can not easily be produced in plantations;
- implementation of thinning programmes in regrowth forests as well as the utilisation of all timber products that are unsuitable for high value uses during harvesting operations; and
- maintenance of sufficient flexibility in the calculation of sustainable timber yields for native forests to accommodate changes to the knowledge of the ecology of such forests.

The IFA considers that:

- producing timber from native forests provides many benefits to all Australians; and
- forestry professionals have the skills to implement management strategies to meet forest owner's objectives and community expectations regarding production of wood products and maintenance of other forest values in native forests.

Further Information

Commonwealth of Australia (1992) National Forest Policy Statement

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