



Community Awareness and Knowledge on Forestry

(IFA Forest Policy Statement No. 5.4)

Key Statement

Current, accurate and accessible information is essential for the community to understand and support the social, economic and environmental outcomes from forest management practices on State and private land.

The Issue

Community awareness and interest in forestry has intensified in recent years as governments, interest groups, the community and forest managers have engaged in debate over forest land use and management practices. However, community awareness and knowledge of forest management practices is often hampered by lack of factual information. Community perceptions about forestry are often influenced by the negative portrayal of the short-term impacts of disturbances, such as timber harvesting, without a proper understanding of the dynamic nature of forests or the importance of the forest industries.

Background

Differing views on how, when and where forest management should occur have prevailed for almost as long as forests have existed. Forests have multiple uses and accordingly each user has particular views on how these forest values are managed and how other uses impact on the values of interest to them. The differing views about forests can be very emotive and at times in conflict with those of other forest users. It is therefore important that organisations, community and the general public have factual information about forest management available to educate and inform them.

Forest managers have typically not responded strongly to criticism of forest management practices because the conditions of their employment prevented that, and they have relied upon members of the public to source factual information through their own initiative. This has allowed misleading or incorrect information or an incorrect interpretation of information to prevail.

Initiatives to raise community awareness need to highlight both the long-term nature of forestry and the importance of the forest industries to supply the nation's demand for forest products. Short-term impacts from activities, such as timber harvesting, should be considered within the broader context of maintaining forest values across the forest estate and the implementation of scientific-based forest management practices.

Looking to the future, forest managers must build trust and foster effective relationships with the community at large to ensure that forest processes and practices are better understood and that the broad range of forest values and the dynamic nature of forest management are supported.

Policy

The Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA) advocates for enhanced government and industry initiatives to make factual information on the social, economic and environmental outcomes of forest management practices available to students, interested community groups, forest-industry focused entities and the community at large.

The IFA supports and encourages:

- Raising the awareness of the community of the full range of forest values and of the role and impacts of scientifically-based forest management, as practiced and advocated by professional forest managers;
- Engagement by professional foresters with community and environmental organizations as well as the media to enhance public understanding of sustainable forest management;

- Educational initiatives by forest management agencies for teachers and students that focus on enhancing understanding and knowledge of forest management and environmental protection;
- Developing and maintaining demonstration forests and interpretative forest drives to enable the public to view and understand active forest management; and
- Continued strengthening of the knowledge base upon which sustainable forest management is based through ongoing research as well as monitoring and evaluation.

The IFA will:

- Work with governments, interest groups and communities to increase knowledge of forest management;
- Provide independent, professional advice and information about forest management and its impacts;
- Encourage the forestry sector to promote positive messages about forestry science and practice;
- Promote understanding of forest management as a science profession which includes a wide-range of fields including timber production, water catchment management, and recreation management; and
- Engage with environment and community organizations through designated media liaison officers in each State Division.

Further Information

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