



Management of Private Native Forests

(IFA Forestry Policy Statement No. 2.2)

The Issue

Many of Australia's private native forests are not well managed. In most States and Territories there is a lack of government policy and institutional support for the management of private forests and the marketing of wood from private forests is generally poorly coordinated. The potential environmental and economic contribution from private forests is also poorly recognised by landowners and the community, which contributes to the continuing conversion of private forests to other land uses.

Background

Private native forests (including woodlands) are those in freehold ownership and those in public ownership but privately managed through leasehold arrangements. There are approximately 108 million hectares of native forest in Australia held under either freehold (42 million hectares) or leasehold tenure (66 million hectares). They represent 68% of Australia's forests and include the full range of forests and woodland ecosystems.

Private native forests are owned by a large number of landowners, with varying sizes of ownership. They are used for a variety of purposes including sawn timber, veneer, speciality timbers, posts and poles, woodchips, firewood, and provide a range of non-wood values such as apiary, grazing, water production, soil protection, salinity mitigation, landscape, biodiversity conservation and recreation.

Australia's timber industry has a heavy reliance upon private forests especially in Northern NSW, Southeast Queensland and Tasmania, where 45-75% of the total sawlog production is from private forests. Australia's privately owned woodland forests are also important sources of firewood and other forest produce.

Tasmania has comprehensive and effective institutional, regulatory and extension arrangements to support for the long-term sustainable management of private forests. Arrangements in other States and Territories are less comprehensive.

Most privately owned forests have a long history of human intervention, hence undisturbed forest and old growth forest are uncommon on private land. However, private native forests have important conservation significance as many forest and woodland ecosystems are poorly represented on public land. Private forests increasingly are being recognised for their water production, biodiversity, carbon sequestration, salinity mitigation and landscape values (environmental services).

The wide range of conservation and public good benefits from private forests are not well understood by the community and there are limited market mechanisms to allow economic valuation of these environmental services. Consequently, private native forests have been converted to other land uses, including agriculture and urban development. In the absence of incentives or environmental services markets to promote sustainable forest and woodland management there will continue to be strong drivers to clear forests for agriculture.

Key aspects of sustainable forest management of private native forests

Effective policy, legislative and institutional framework to encourage retention and sustainable management, including right to harvest arrangements and Codes of Forest Practices;

Valuation of environmental services or incentives to encourage native forest retention and sustainable management through stewardship arrangements;

Accurate inventories of the extent, distribution, types, uses and values;

Provision of competent forest management extension advisory services and forest management services from qualified professionals to private landholders;

Promotion of markets, access to market information and encouragement of investment infrastructure;

Development of property management plans that incorporate the forested land component and specify requirements for its sustainable management;

Promotion of private native forest management as a sustainable and profitable land management system;

Management and economic measures that protect high conservation value forest;

Policy

The Institute of Foresters of Australia considers that private native forests provide important multiple benefits to the community and that improved institutional support is generally needed to facilitate sustainable management of these forests.

The Institute of Foresters of Australia supports:

- Sustainable management of private native forests to provide renewable timber resources and to maintain environmental and conservation values;
- Development of an appropriate policy, legislative and institutional framework conducive to profitable and sustainable management of private native forests for production, environmental and conservation values;
- Recognition of the important stewardship role of private forest owners and the need for appropriate incentives and environmental service payments to encourage sustainable management of private forests;
- Application of appropriate management plans and Codes of Practices for timber harvesting to protect the many values of private forests;
- Regular inventories of privately managed forests to monitor their composition, extent and condition.

Further Information

National Forest Inventory (1998) Australia's State of the Forest Report 1998. Bureau of Rural Sciences, Canberra.

Parsons, M. (1999). Native Forests on Farms. Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation. Canberra, ACT.

Ryan M.F., Spencer R.D., Keenan R. (2002), Private Native Forests in Australia, What did we learn from the Regional Forest Agreements Program? *Australian Forestry Vol 65 No 2*.

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